

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

SECTION: CHARTER SCHOOLS

TITLE: NEW CHARTER SCHOOL
APPLICATIONS

ADOPTED: APRIL 24, 2014

REVISED:

402. NEW CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

1. Purpose

Consistent with the SRC's commitment to acting as a high-quality authorizer of high-performing charter schools, the SRC adopts this policy to ensure that the charter school application process will be transparent, merit-based, comprehensive, and equitable and considerate of the SRC's responsibility to allocate limited resources to all public schools in Philadelphia, both District schools and charter schools.

This policy on new charter school applications shall apply to individuals and nonsectarian non-profit organizations applying for a new, separate charter to be granted to a Pennsylvania non-profit corporation. Existing Philadelphia charter schools requesting approval for increases in enrollment, grade reconfigurations, additional campuses or locations and other modifications to an existing charter outside of the renewal process must apply for such changes under Policy 406 – Charter Modifications. Applicants requesting approval to operate a new Renaissance charter school must apply for a charter under Policy 407 - Renaissance Charter Schools.

2. Applicant Eligibility

Individuals and nonsectarian non-profit organizations meeting the requirements of law shall be eligible to apply to establish a charter school through the public request for proposal process outlined below. The SRC welcomes proposals from teachers, administrators, community leaders, local and national education management organizations, current school leadership teams, and non-profit organizations from Philadelphia and across the country that demonstrate the capacity to run high-quality new charter schools.

3. Overview of Application Process

During years in which the SRC determines by resolution that applications are accepted, the District shall issue procedures describing the application requirements and evaluation process to be followed in reviewing each type of new charter school application. The procedures, the application, and a description of the application process shall be published and available on the District web site.

The SRC annually shall determine if applications for new charter schools shall be accepted. Consistent with its mission to allocate limited financial resources to all public schools in Philadelphia, the SRC shall consider the financial impact of any application to create a new charter school. The SRC may establish a preference for applicants proposing new charter schools that have a limited financial impact on the District through the applicant's proposed use of District resources, proposed recruitment of students from a District-defined catchment area, or other proposed cost-savings to the District. In years in which applications are being accepted, the SRC shall set the timeline for the application process. All timelines and application materials will be made available to the public on the District website no later than two months before the application submission deadline.

The CSO shall conduct a thorough review of each application using a rigorous evaluation process including, but not limited to:

- 1) Review of Letter of Intent submission;
- 2) Evaluation of submitted application by District and CSO staff members, as determined by the CSO;
- 3) In-person capacity interview; and
- 4) Site visits to schools currently operated by applicants (replicators only).

All submitted applications shall be posted on the District website within seven days of submission. The CSO will redact confidential information before posting applications on the CSO website.

The CSO will ensure that the application review and decision-making processes are free of conflicts of interest, and shall require full disclosure of any known conflict of interest between reviewers or SRC members and applicants.

4. Application Content

The CSO may issue a competitive public request for proposals from individuals or organizations interested in the creation of a new charter school. The application will require applicants to provide strong and detailed evidence of the success of the proposed school's educational, operational, and financial programs. The applicant

also must provide strong and detailed evidence of the applicant’s capacity to design and lead a school that will meet the high standards set by the District’s performance framework.

Operators of existing charter schools will be required to provide strong and detailed evidence of their capacity to operate new schools and also of the strong academic, operational, and financial performance of their existing schools.

The application will require detailed information about the following elements of the proposed school design:

- 1) Mission & Vision;
- 2) Educational Program – including measureable academic goals and benchmarks;
- 3) Organizational Plan;
- 4) Financial Plan; and
- 5) Stakeholder Engagement Plan.

Applicants will also be required to provide evidence of capacity to found and lead a high--performing school, including professional biographies, resumes, and references for all anticipated school design team members, leadership team members, and Board of Trustees members. Applicants shall also provide an enrollment plan and five-year projection, a proposed grade configuration, and the neighborhood in which the school believes it will locate, and the applicant’s capacity to operate a charter school using a District-defined catchment area,

Each year, the SRC may define one or more “Competitive Preferences” – communities, student populations, or charter school programs that represent a high priority for the District’s charter school expansion. If so identified, “Competitive Preference” areas will be detailed in the application. Applications that successfully demonstrate how their proposed program will bring a high-quality education option to a “Competitive Preference” area or group, and meet all other application standards, will have the highest priority in the application evaluation process.

5. Application Evaluation

The CSO shall convene highly competent review teams with relevant educational, organizational (governance and management), financial, and legal expertise, as well as a thorough understanding of the essential principles of charter school autonomy and accountability. The CSO may engage internal or external evaluators to participate in the review teams. The CSO shall ensure that no conflicts of interest exist between review teams and applicants.

The CSO will provide training to review team members to ensure consistent evaluation standards and practices, observance of essential protocols, and fair treatment of applicants at each stage of the process.

The members of the review teams will rate each section of the applications on a scale using the following standards:

- 1) Exceeds Standard
- 2) Meets Standard
- 3) Partially Meets Standard
- 4) Far Below Standard

The CSO shall review all application ratings. Applications that receive an initial “Meets Standard” or “Exceeds Standard” rating for all sections shall be invited to present information at a capacity interview with the review team and a public hearing. The CSO will recommend that the SRC deny all other applications.

Applications that successfully address a “Competitive Preference” will receive priority consideration for approval in the event that the SRC can only open a limited number of schools.

6. Public Hearings

The CSO shall hold public hearings on all applications rated “Meets Standard” or “Exceeds Standard” in all categories at which time the CSO and the review team may present conclusions from the applications and capacity interviews and ask questions of the applicants and the public may provide comments. Comments from the public hearing will be forwarded to the SRC with the application and review team evaluation.

7. SRC Decision to Grant or Deny an Application

Prior to the public hearing, the CSO, with input from the District’s CFO or his/her designee, shall prepare a written report analyzing the financial impact of each application to the SRC in each of the next five years. The report shall include a determination of whether the goals underlying the application could be achieved at mitigated cost by pursuing an alternative approach or approaches. The CFO report shall be made available to the SRC and the public prior to the public hearing. The CSO, with input from the Superintendent or his/her designee, shall conduct an academic impact report analyzing the enrollment and academic consequences of the application in each of the next five years. The CSO’s report shall be made available to the SRC and the public prior to the public hearing.

After the public hearing, the CSO will prepare a final report reviewing each application. The CSO only may recommend approval for applications that receive a final rating of “Meets Standard” or “Exceeds Standard” in each category. The CSO shall submit recommendations on charter school applications to the SRC no later than sixty (60) days after the date of public hearings. The SRC may accept, reject or modify CSO’s recommendation.

The SRC shall consider the CSO recommendations and shall vote to approve or deny each charter application by a majority vote at a public meeting. The SRC may, in its discretion, grant initial charters for three-year to five-year periods.

An application shall be approved only for a school organized as a public, nonprofit corporation.

Applicants may not appeal the SRC’s decision to deny an application to the Pennsylvania State Charter Appeal Board or to court.

If the SRC grants a charter to an applicant, the charter schools may defer opening for one (1) year after the date set forth in the SRC resolution granting the charter application. The request to defer must be in writing and must be received by the CSO by April 1 of the calendar year in which the school was scheduled to open. If a charter school requests to defer opening by one year, the ending date of the charter term automatically will be extended by one (1) year. No SRC resolution will be required to defer the opening date of the charter by one (1) year. If a charter school does not open after being deferred for one (1) year, SRC approval of the charter will be automatically rescinded.

8. School Advisory Council or Parent Advisory Group

Every charter school approved through this policy shall create a School Advisory Council (“SAC”) or other parent advisory group. The SAC or parent advisory group shall be a representative body consisting of parents, community members and/or stakeholders and shall be formed to support the school.