

Commission's Sponsorship Program

Organizations, community members, educators and parents interested in operating a charter public school apply to the Commission for approval to open a free, public school in a specific school district. The following outlines the steps in our sponsorship program.

Step 1: Letter of Intent

Applicants submit a Letter of Intent and Prospectus to the Commission to begin their review process. The Letter of Intent indicates whether the proposed school is based on a new or existing design, the school district location, the number of students they plan to serve in the first year and when they have full enrollment, grades served and the anticipated opening date. If the school meets the standards set in the Prospectus, they are invited to apply. The Commission staff meets with the applicant to establish the timeline for subsequent submissions. Applicants are referred to the Missouri Charter Public School Association to take advantage of optional supports and services offered to potential schools throughout their development.

Step 2: Application and Request for Proposals

Petitioners submit an application that details the education, organization, governance and business plans of the school. The Commission currently uses the Missouri Model Application⁴, developed in conjunction with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). Applicants must provide evidence of capacity of their founding group to govern and manage a public school. A successful application provides data on prior school success or evidence as to why the innovative approach has a likelihood of success. The application must also demonstrate that there is sufficient demand to support this type of school in the community they wish to locate.



⁴ MCPSC is working with MCPSA to revise this application. Scheduled release is May 2016.

The Commission will accept applications throughout the year. Applications are generated through an open Request for Proposals (RFP) issued by the Commission. We actively invite high performing models and networks to open schools in Missouri. The Commission works closely with the Missouri Charter Public School Association, the statewide member and charter sector support organization, as well as other state and national partnering organizations to identify potential applicants. The Commission also encourages existing performing charter public schools in Missouri to open other schools or scale to serve children throughout their K-12 educational experience. The Commission will accept applications from existing charter public schools seeking renewal.

Communities may wish to generate their own RFP and community engagement process to develop or identify a charter public school that meets their particular needs. The Commission may choose to issue a RFP to encourage applications for specific communities or for specific types of schools.

The Commission has a particular interest in applications for turnaround schools and models that focus on high need populations. We seek applications from proven teams willing to replace failing schools. We are eager to read application with well researched models that address students in high-poverty/high-crime communities, students who are over-age/under-credit, or children engaged with the justice system.

Step 3: Application Evaluation

Once submitted, applications are subject to rigorous evaluation by staff and teams of trained reviewers. We begin by engaging and training local citizens, educators, civic and business leaders as application review teams. They will be joined by specific content experts, as needed. The team will use their individual and collective knowledge, their understanding of the local context and the Commission's application rubric⁵ when reviewing the application.

Demonstrated methods to drive high academic outcomes are the most important component of a quality application, but it is not the only one. A clear mission, an articulate educational philosophy, with an aligned organizational culture and school climate are equally important to the success of a school. Financial statements, organization plans and systems are scrutinized to assure that the petitioners have

⁵ The Commission will continue to use the Model Rubric until the new application is competed.

considered the myriad of details required to start and maintain a high performing organization.

Beyond a solid plan, the application must show the capacity of the board to govern, the skills of the school leadership to drive results and reveal the group's ability to attract the necessary talent to meet needs of the children they plan to serve.

The Commission provides feedback to petitioners within 90 days of submission. Applicants will be given an opportunity to supply missing data or materials and respond to any open questions remaining. The intent is to facilitate a strong submission of an application that is in compliance with state statute and the standards of the Commission. This will accelerate the approval by the State Board of Education, if approved by the Commission.

Applicants are provided the opportunity to revise their application, provide additional data or materials or withdraw for future improvement and resubmission. Applicants may go through the review cycle more than once.⁶ Applicants that have not provided sufficient documentation or do not meet the standards or statutes may be referred to the Commission with a request to deny.

Step 4: Public Hearing

Applications meeting the Commission's standards as outlined in our rubric are granted a public hearing. The Commission requires a hearing as part of the sponsorship review process to offer the public an opportunity to provide support, objections or questions to the Commission concerning pending applications.

To maximize community participation, hearings are scheduled in the evening or on Saturdays and take place in the school district the charter intends to serve. Notice of the hearing is published on the Commission's website. The notice is also distributed widely to local media and through social media. Charter public school applications and supporting documents are made available to the public on the Commission's website and citizens are encouraged to submit written comment, as well.

Members of the Commission open the hearing by inviting the application to make a 15-minute presentation about their potential school. Citizens are invited to provide 2-3 minute testimony in support or opposition. Questions asked by attendees will not be

⁶ Insert policy on number of times

addressed in this setting, but recorded for written responses to be posted on the Commission's website.

Step 5: Applicant Interview

Following a public hearing and prior to a staff recommendation to the Commission, applicants are required to participate in public interview. Reviewers, contract services, Commission members and Commission staff are possible members of the interview team. The applicant team must include the charter public school governing board chair and school leader (if identified). The applicant team may also consist of board members, any identified staff, and representatives of the CMO, when applicable. The Commission reserves the right to indicate the number of members on an applicant's team as well as the length of the interview.

The purpose of the interview is to further determine the capacity of the governing group and founding staff, their understanding of their roles and their knowledge of their model. Interviews are public and highly structured, with specific questions relating to the application, the backgrounds of the petitioners and the needs of the community. This interview takes place following the public hearing so that comments and questions presented by the public may be addressed during the interview.

Step 6: Commission Decision

Commission staff will provide in writing to the Commissioners a recommendation whether the application should be approved or denied. This recommendation is based on the application, revisions, information gathered through the hearing and at the interview. High quality applicants will be recommended for sponsorships for five years. Approved applicants will receive a letter of sponsorship from the Commission to be included in their submission to the State Board of Education. Application that did not meet state statute or Commission standards will be recommended for denial. Denied applicants may appeal to the State Board of Education.⁷

Sponsored charter public schools are required to have a legal charter agreement that details specific areas of compliance and clearly articulates measurable goals (referred to as the performance contract.) The Commission will work with applicants to negotiate the performance contract aligned to the application, state statute and

⁷ As outlined in Missouri Revised Statutes 160.405.2.(4)

Commission policy. This contract is signed following approval by the State Board of Education.

Step 7: State Board of Education Approval

The final application and agreements, with a sponsorship letter from the Commission are submitted to the MOSBOE for approval, as outlined in Missouri's Revised State Statutes. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has 60 days to review the application on behalf of the State Board of Education and may offer recommended changes to assure alignment with statute and regulations. Applicants are not required to accept Department recommendations outside of statutory or regulatory requirements.

Applications meeting the statutory and regulatory requirements are placed on an upcoming MOSBOE meeting agenda, with a recommendation by the Department. The MOSBOE may vote to deny a charter public school only if the application fails to meet state statute or comply with department regulations.⁸

Step 8: Monitoring and Oversight

Once approved by the State Board of Education, charter public school applicants immediately move from a concept to the "pre-opening" phase. Typically, the board moves from founders to governance, establishing policies, hiring staff and acquiring a permanent location (if not already accomplished.) Student and teacher recruitment quickly follows and if the school is not working with a CMO, it will begin developing curriculum, personnel policies and business systems.

The Commission provides oversight of the charter public school for the duration of the contract. The Commission staff establishes the monitoring plan, submission calendar and creates baseline benchmark documents, matching statutes and the charter agreement. The compliance tracking system is populated with the charter agreement provision, with clear deliverables and due dates.

Throughout the term of the contact, Commission staff examines data and documents on the education, operation and governance of the school and matches the performance of the school to the agreement and goals. The Commission staff report to the Commission any compliance, performance or statute violations.

⁸ RSMo 160.405.3

The Commission, along with MCPSA are “on call” to assist the school with specific supports and resources, connections to the various individuals within MODESE, clarifications on rules and regulations, and addressing any barriers the school faces.

Starting seven months prior to opening, there will be an initial pre-opening meeting with the governing board chair, school leader, any staff the school leader wishes to bring and a representative from the CMO (if applicable). The purpose of this meeting is to walk through the pre-opening plans, establish regular check-in calls and gain clarity on roles, reporting and the conditions necessary to open on time.

Sixty days before opening, a conference call is held to review the progress toward opening school and addressing any concerns. The call will include Commission staff, board members, school leadership, staff (they wish to include) and appropriate representatives from the CMO. Thirty days out, Commission staff will visit the school and meet with the governing board chair, school leader, staff responsible for financial management, operations manager, CMO for a tour and discussion on the school's compliance with all pre-opening requirements. If necessary, a final review of any outstanding documents and requirements will be made one week prior to opening. The Commission reserves the right to hold additional calls/meetings regarding pre-opening, reporting and compliance if deemed necessary.

After opening, a site visit is conducted, and dates for future site visits are scheduled. Monthly, Commission staff review the compliance tracking system and provides feedback to the school when necessary. On time and completeness reports are provided to the Commission at their regular meetings. Annual reports are produced by the sponsor and by the school, and are distributed to Commissioners, board members, staff and parents, and made available to the public on both the Commission and school's websites.

The Commission requires an annual site visit to each sponsored charter public school to assure compliance and hear from board members, staff, students and parents about the condition of the school. Site visit teams are constructed based on the knowledge, skill and expertise necessary to review a school's particular mission, grade configuration and target population. The review teams are assigned to the school during pre-opening (if possible) and stay with the school during the life of the charter agreement with changes to review team members only as necessary. This provides consistency in the review for the school and allows the team to see changes over time.

Charter public school governing boards receive an annual report on compliance from Commission staff. This report matches the performance of the school to the charter agreement. Draft reports are made available to school staff and board for response,

clarification or correction. Final reports are public documents and made available for review on the Commission's website. Any discrepancies or areas of non-compliance must be addressed by the school within the timeline stated.

At the beginning of the fourth (4th) year of the charter agreement, the Commission will contract with an independent⁹ and experienced charter public school review group to provide a comprehensive review in preparation for the Commission's decision to renew. The 4th year review will include an in-depth site visit, financial and operational review, board performance, academic results and parent/student/teacher satisfaction. The review will compare the conditions of the current operations and performance to the provisions of the charter, charter agreement and performance contract.

Step 9: Renewal

If the school is performing and compliant with the provisions of its agreement, laws and regulations, the school will be recommended to the Commission for renewal of the charter agreement for an additional 5 years. If the children are not served well by this school, the Commission can mandate intervention or recommended for closure. If during the term of the charter a school materially breaches their charter agreement or if there is a concern for the safety of the children, the Commission can move to closure prior to the end of the agreement.¹⁰

Dissemination and Advocacy of Best and Promising Practices

The Commission is committed to sharing best and promising practices, as well as lesson learned generated at the school level and in the authorizing process. This program will be led by the Communication Assistant. In lieu of staff, the Executive Director will manage daily communications, generate the foundation of the Commission's communication efforts and work with MCPSA to develop a dissemination strategy.

The Commission's website is located at <https://mcpssc.mo.gov/>. Social media connections can be found through Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/MoCPSC?_rdr=p) and Twitter (@MoCPSC.) The Commission's brand management can be found in Appendix E.

⁹ Different from the annual site visit review teams

¹⁰ Missouri State Statute 106.405.8