

## How to Start a Charter Public School

Charter public schools are started by community people, just like you. They include parents, teachers, community leaders and others who are concerned about excellence in public education for children.

To start a charter public school, the founding group must apply for a charter by submitting an application to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education that explains their plans for the school and their qualifications to create and manage a school.

Applicants must submit a prospectus by an August deadline to be eligible for an invitation from the Commissioner of Education to submit a final application in November. If approved in February, the charter is granted to the proposed school's board of trustees. A founding group cannot receive a charter without a board of trustees.

The number of charters granted each year is limited by the number available. Not more than 120 charter schools – 48 Horace Mann charter public schools and 72 Commonwealth charter public schools – may operate in Massachusetts at one time. However, the Legislature approved changes in the law in 2009 that allows for the creation of “charter networks” in low-performing districts. These new schools would be operated by “proven providers” - charter operators with a track record of success - and would be exempt from the statewide cap. Additionally:

- Only one regional Commonwealth charter school application can be approved per year for districts where the overall Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) was in the top 10 percent in the preceding year.
- The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education may only approve a Commonwealth charter in any community with a population of less than 30,000 if it is a regional charter school.
- At least three charters that are approved each year must be for charter schools in districts where overall student performance on the MCAS is at or below the statewide average in the preceding year.
- In addition to the statewide cap, there are also limits on the growth of charter public schools in individual districts. By law the total amount of funds that can be reallocated to charters cannot exceed 9 percent of a district's net school spending. However, in low-performing districts the cap is gradually being raised to 18%, but only existing charter operators with a proven track record of success can apply for new charters in those districts.

Applications for charters are judged on the materials they include, interviews with the Charter School Office staff, public comment received about the proposal and comments made at public hearings. Applications that miss the August deadline and those that do not meet the submission requirements will be rejected. There is no appeal for denial.

Founding groups that are awarded charters typically open their schools the fall of the year after the charter is awarded.