



INFRASTRUCTURE PRACTICE

ALERT

PHILADELPHIA CHARTERS HAVE ONE-TIME OPPORTUNITY TO INCREASE ENROLLMENT CAPS

By Alan F. Wohlstetter

The School Reform Commission has granted Philadelphia charter schools an opportunity to apply for increases in the charter enrollment cap by March 8. The process reflects the District's efforts to expand high-performing schools by providing a clear process for charter schools to request the right to serve additional students or add new grades.

Charter schools eligible to apply include those renewing their charter or in the third year of their charter. And there is a one-time grace period to consider cap increases requested during the 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 renewal cycles. An applying school must demonstrate student achievement of at least School Improvement I, attaining academic targets at least three of the previous five years. The academic targets can be either the Charter School Annual Performance Report Card or the School Performance Index.

The first step of the two-step application process requires the applying charter school to file a one-page Modification Letter of Intent by March 8, 2010. The second step is to complete a Charter Agreement Modification Request Form by April 5, 2010. The Request Form must address the following areas:

- Prior Academic Performance
- Five-Year Academic Plan

- Facilities Plan demonstrating how the additional students or grades would be accommodated
- Governance and Management, including the recruitment, training and retention of additional staff required
- Five-Year Financial Plan
- Student Recruitment/Enrollment/Retention Plan
- Community and Parental Support and Engagement
- Equity and Access Plan ensuring equitable access for all Philadelphia families

The charter school must also demonstrate its "Strategic Alignment with the School District," which can be shown by:

- Meeting needs of the student population not currently well-served by the district;
- Assisting in relieving overcrowding;
- Operating a unique or innovative academic program; and
- Maintaining academic programs that produce high levels of student achievement.

The 8-12 week evaluation period starts with consideration by an evaluation team that includes representatives from the District Charter School Office, the District and the charter school community. The

evaluation team will make recommendations to the School Reform Commission, which must approve any requests.

Education reformers envisioned that charter schools would be laboratories of change, developing innovative practices that could be replicated to improve public education. This new District initiative is an effort to learn the lessons from this educational experiment and capitalize on its successes. With this action, the District is

demonstrating its commitment to build on what is working and to take advantage of the innovative programs provided by successful charters over the past decade.

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