



NJDOE News

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Commissioner Librera Approves Applications for Charter Schools In Camden and Essex Counties; Announces Renewals for Three Charter Schools

Commissioner of Education William L. Librera has announced his approval of three new charter schools. The Commissioner approved the applications of the D.U.E. (Distinctions in Urban Education) Season Charter School and the Freedom Academy Charter School, both serving students from Camden; and the Right Path Charter School, serving students from Irvington, Essex County.

Commissioner Librera also recently renewed for five years the charters of the following three charter schools: Galloway Community Charter School in Atlantic County; the Queen City Academy Charter School in Union County; and the Newark Charter School in Essex County.

New Jersey's 48 operating charter schools currently enroll nearly 14,000 students in grades pre-kindergarten through 12. Five new charter schools are scheduled to open in September 2004: Great Falls Charter School, Paterson; Jersey Shore Charter School (serving students from Eatontown, Oceanport and West Long Branch); the Ridge and Valley Charter School (serving students from Blairstown, Frelinghuysen, Hardwick, Knowlton, and North Warren Regional); the Freedom Academy Charter School, Camden; and the Right Path Charter School, Irvington. Freedom Academy and Right Path were approved in the current round of charter school applications; Great Falls, Jersey Shore and Ridge and Valley charter schools had been previously approved and had opted to take a planning year. The D.U.E. Season Charter School will take a planning year before opening in September 2005.

"The Charter Schools initiative in New Jersey represents an exciting opportunity for parents, teachers and other committed citizens to use their collective creativity in designing new and innovative ways of helping children to reach high levels of academic achievement," said Commissioner Librera.

"I commend these schools for submitting strong applications that demonstrate their commitment to quality in serving the needs of our young people," said Dr. Librera. "We wish the successful applicants well as they work to transform their proposals into new schools."

The three applications approved were among nine applications received by the Department of Education in July in the latest round of the charter school selection process. Three applications were disqualified because their applications were incomplete. The remaining six were subject to an extensive review. Each application consists of a detailed fiscal plan and a program plan, as well as information about the founding members of the school.

The D.U.E. Season Charter School in Camden City is scheduled to open in September 2005 with a maximum enrollment of 215 students in grades 1,2 and 5, with a four-year projected enrollment of 500 students in grades K-8. The mission of D.U.E. Charter School is to provide a distinguished education for urban students in a supportive and protective learning environment.

The Freedom Academy Charter School, also in Camden, is scheduled to open in September 2004 with a maximum of 80 fifth grade students. The school projects a maximum four-year enrollment of 320 students in grades 5 to 8. Freedom Academy is affiliated with the KIPP Foundation, a national, non-profit organization that recruits, trains, and supports outstanding educators to open and run high-performing college-preparatory schools in educationally underserved communities. The school will have a longer school day and school year and will include Saturday programs.

The Right Path Charter School in Irvington, Essex County, is scheduled to open in September 2004 with a maximum of 180 students in grades K-2. The school projects a projected maximum enrollment of 240 students in grades K-3. Right Path is the first charter application to be approved for Irvington. The school will feature small class sizes and will address the individual learning needs and styles of each student.

Unsuccessful applicants are invited to reapply in the next round of the selection process. New applications will be available in April 2004 and must be submitted to the Department of Education by July 15. Unsuccessful applicants may request a meeting with staff from the Office of Innovative Programs and Schools to discuss the application prior to re-applying.

Charter schools were established under a state law enacted in 1996 to expand public school choice and encourage school reform. A charter school is a type of public school that is given greater flexibility in curriculum and instruction. The law establishes charter schools as laboratories of educational innovation where new practices can be developed and implemented in schools throughout New Jersey.

CHARTERS RENEWED

Commissioner Librera recently announced his approval of renewed charters for the Galloway Community Charter School in Atlantic County, the Queen City Academy Charter School in Union County, and the Newark Charter School in Essex County.

"The successful applicants should be congratulated for their impressive applications and their continued commitment to strong academic progress and student success," said Commissioner Librera. "These schools, having completed the department's rigorous renewal review, are deserving of having their charters renewed.

"All of the approved schools share the common traits of excellent administration, solid board involvement and parent participation in ensuring a high level of quality opportunities for children," Dr. Librera said.

The Galloway Community Charter School will expand to a K-8 school with a maximum enrollment of 405 students. The school previously served students in grades K-6. The mission of the Galloway Community Charter School is to create a child-centered environment that promotes independent and cooperative learning based on inquiry and exploration.

The Queen City Academy Charter School was granted its request to expand its student population from 177 to 234. The school follows the vision of Maria Montessori that a school should truly be a "House for Children" and embraces Montessori methods of nurturing the whole child in a loving family atmosphere. The school provides a curriculum designed to spark the imagination and motivate children.

The Newark Charter School's renewal was based on the school's "ongoing examination of its results to guide improvements." The school focuses on four crucial areas of student achievement: literacy development; problem solving; community service and career development; and high academic achievement with a commitment to a rigorous core curriculum.

State law allows initial charters to be granted for four years. Two intensive monitoring reviews are conducted during the first contract period: a program review in year two of the charter and a second review during year four in which the Commissioner is charged with determining whether the initial four-year charter should be renewed for another five years. The year four review requires a formal application by the school that details its accomplishments during the first three years of operation. It also provides for an intensive review of the school's educational and fiscal activities, including day-long site visits conducted by Department of Education staff from central, regional and county offices.

For more information about New Jersey's charter schools, contact the Department of Education's Public Information Office at 609-292-1126.