



Christie Administration Expands High Quality Educational Options with Approval of Four Additional New Charter Schools Scheduled to Open in 2012

Newly approved schools will join 21 other approved charter schools currently preparing to open; additional charter schools to be approved in the fall expedited round, and 3200 new seats from expansion of existing high-quality charter schools in September 2012

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Contact: Justin Barra
Allison Kobus
609-292-1126

Trenton, NJ – Continuing the Christie Administration’s commitment to expanding the number of high-quality charter schools in New Jersey, the Department of Education today announced the selection of four new charter schools, scheduled to open in September 2012. This selection brings the total number of charter schools approved in 2011 to 27, the largest number approved in any one year since the charter law was passed in New Jersey. With one more selection round in the fall, there are currently 25 approved charters eligible to open in September 2012, pending approval during a readiness review in July. In addition, there will be 3200 new charter seats in September 2012 from the expansion of existing charter schools.

“Charter schools serve a critical need in New Jersey not only by providing high-quality options for students where they otherwise do not exist, but also by serving as laboratories of innovation,” said Acting Commissioner Chris Cerf. “As we look to 2012, we are confident that these four schools, along with those currently preparing to open in 2012 and a projected large applicant pool for the fall expedited round, will help to expand the options for students and ensure that all students in New Jersey, regardless of zip code, are on track to graduate from high school ready for college and career.”

This year, the Charter Schools Office continued to improve the application evaluation to align with national best practices identified by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). This included setting clear benchmarks around predictors of school success including a research-based academic program with a proven history, experienced school operators, high expectations for all students, a well-rounded board of trustees, and a strong capacity to implement program elements. These components, along with a number of others, were reviewed through a several stage process including an intensive interview with the evaluation committee. NACSA also provided the Department with national charter experts to serve on the review committees in line with NACSA best practices. In order to ensure that each approved charter application has the components in place to serve students in September, the Department will continue to conduct a “readiness review” to ensure that they have the necessary academic and operational components in place before allowing a school to open.

“The most important bar that any applicant must clear is demonstrating that the school has a very high likelihood of providing an excellent education to its students,” said Acting Commissioner Cerf. “Through our rigorous review process, we became confident that these four schools will offer students a great education on day one of the school year. The Department will work with applicants who were not approved in this round but demonstrated potential to continue to develop their application for consideration in future rounds. It has been our experience that with additional guidance and time to plan, applicants who were not approved have been able to resubmit successful applications.”

Governor Christie has called on legislators to pass his proposed reforms to the New Jersey charter law to strengthen and expand high quality charter schools in New Jersey by improving the authorizing and application process, encouraging more charter school applicants, creating greater flexibility with administration and finances, and allowing districts to convert failing public schools into charters. This much needed legislation will encourage proven successful charter school operators to expand in New Jersey and replicate their demonstrated success here and around the country.

The Department has expanded its strategies for growing the state’s charter sector and increasing the number of high-quality seats available to students. One shift in focus includes expanding efforts to attract high-quality charter applicants. The Department’s Charter Schools Office has invested in recruiting high-performing charter operators from across the country to expand into New Jersey, encouraging charter operators in New Jersey with a strong track record to grow, and conducting a needs analysis to identify other areas of the state where charter schools could offer choice in underserved communities.

This year the Department also approved the expansion of several of the state’s highest performing charter schools. TEAM Academy, a network of KIPP schools in Newark, will add a new elementary school campus, ultimately serving 500 additional students. North Star Academy, also in Newark, will continue to grow current

schools and plans to add a new elementary and middle school campus, ultimately serving 590 new students.

The Department has also taken steps to increase its accountability systems for charter schools to ensure both the quality of the school and equality of access for all students to the school. This accountability system includes a more robust and quantitative renewal process, the introduction of performance contracts for each school, and more frequent evaluations during a school's five year charter term.

On the whole, charter schools in New Jersey are achieving at high levels. In a presentation to the State Board of Education earlier this year, the Department shared results from the 2009-10 school year which showed not only that charter schools are outperforming districts in the aggregate in cities like Newark, Camden, and Jersey City, but that charter schools in those districts are performing higher when students are broken out by grade level and both socioeconomic status and race. Preliminary results from the 2010-11 school year show continued growth in student achievement for charter schools overall.

A list of approved schools is below. The deadline for the fall application round is October 17, 2011, and approvals will be announced by January 17, 2012.

Name	Districts	Grades served (at scale)	Enrollment (at scale)
Beloved Community Charter School	Jersey City	K-5	720
Knowledge A to Z Charter School	Camden	K-4	400
Regis Academy Charter School	Cherry Hill, Lawnside, Somerdale, Voorhees Township	K-7	450
Trenton Scholars Charter School	Trenton	K-6	567