State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Deborah A. Gist
Commissioner

Enclosure 4f2
January 5, 2015

January 12, 2015

TO: Members of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education

FROM: Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner

RE: **Highlander Charter School – Charter Amendment**

Highlander Charter School (Highlander) is an independent charter public school based upon the values of accessibility, empowerment, and excellence. The school opened in 2000 and currently enrolls 392 students in pre-kindergarten through grade ten. Highlander is authorized to serve up to grade twelve. Approximately seventy-eight (78) percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, eleven (11) percent are students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and thirteen (13) percent are English language learners (ELLs). Highlander enrolls students statewide, with seventy (70) percent of students residing in Providence. In 2014, Highlander was identified as a typical school through Rhode Island's school classification system.

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Amendment Request

Highlander Charter School has requested an amendment to its charter to increase the school's enrollment beginning in the 2015-16 school year. Highlander is currently authorized to serve 499 students in pre-kindergarten through grade twelve. Highlander requests to serve an additional 133 students in grades 7-12 and in pre-kindergarten, for a total maximum enrollment of 632.

In accordance with C-2-1 (a) of the Board of Regents Regulations Governing Rhode Island Public Charter Schools, such major changes in the school's operations require the action of the Board of Education.

Highlander Charter School has achieved sustained high academic performance, demonstrated additional demand for the school, and provided a viable operational plan.

RECOMMENDATION: THAT, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to approve the Highlander Charter School amendment permitting the school to enroll an additional 133 students in grades 7-12 and in prekindergarten.

RI Charter Public School Amendment Request:
Highlander Charter School

Enrolling Communities: Statewide	**Grade Level:** pre-K to 12
Location of School: Providence (K-6); Warren (7-12)	**Charter Type:** Independent
Current Approval: 499 students **Proposed Increase:** 133 students	**Maximum if amended:** 632 students

Mission

Using innovative education practices as a catalyst for social change, Highlander Charter School ensures that all children have the opportunity and support necessary to meet their full potential.

School Overview

Highlander Charter School (Highlander) is an independent charter public school based upon the values of accessibility, empowerment, and excellence. The school opened in 2000 and was most recently renewed in Spring 2013. In November 2012, Highlander received Board of Regents' approval to expand from a K-8 program to a pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade (preK-12) program. Highlander currently enrolls students in pre-kindergarten through tenth grade, growing one grade per year toward full implementation.

Highlander is authorized to enroll students statewide. Approximately 70% of Highlander students are from Providence, 10% are from Cranston, and the remaining 20% are from eleven other cities and towns. Approximately 78% of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, 75% are Latino or African American, 11% are students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and 13% are English language learners (ELLs).

Highlights of the Highlander program include:

- A focus on common core standards with small classes, an expanded learning day, and individualized learning plans for each student
- Intensive literacy and math interventions
- An after-school program that in past years has enrolled 89% of students
- Wraparound services with student and family supports
- Partnerships with school districts to provide literacy supports
- Leader in statewide initiatives to implement blended learning/ virtual education programs

Amendment Request

Pursuant to Regulation C-2-1(a) of the *RI Board of Regents Regulations Governing Charter Schools*, Highlander Charter School requests permission from the Board of Education to amend its charter to allow an increase in maximum enrollment.

The school proposes to increase its middle school cohort size from 36 students to 60 students beginning in Fall 2015, and then increase each grade cohort size to 60 in each subsequent year from grade 7 through grade 12. The increase would be fully implemented over a six-year period. Additionally, Highlander requests to increase pre-kindergarten enrollment from twelve (12) students to twenty-four (24), beginning in 2015.

The maximum proposed enrollment is six hundred thirty-two (632) students including pre-K students. This is a proposed increase of one hundred thirty-three (133) students beyond current approval.

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Evaluation Procedures

For charter schools seeking amendments that increase maximum enrollment, RIDE's Office of Charter Schools looks to answer three key questions:

- Does the charter public school have a track record of sustained high performance?
- Is there sufficient demand for the school?
- Has the school developed an operational plan that will enable it to expand with fidelity?

To evaluate academic performance, RIDE conducts a comprehensive review of available evidence, including RIDE school classifications, NECAP proficiency, growth rates, graduation rates (for high schools), and results from recent charter renewal decisions.

To evaluate demand, RIDE examines lottery data over multiple years to assess whether the school has sufficient demand to meet proposed enrollment targets.

To evaluate a school's operational plan, RIDE reviews board meeting minutes, school materials (including staffing plans and budgets), and other strategic planning documents. The purpose of the review is to understand how the school will be able to carry out its enrollment increase.

Commissioner's Recommendation

The Commissioner recommends approval of Highlander Charter School's amendment request. The decision is based on evidence of sustained high academic performance, demand for the school, and a sound operational plan for managing its enrollment increase.

Sustained high academic performance:

School classification: In 2012, Highlander was classified as a Leading school. In 2013 and 2014, Highlander was classified as a typical school.

Proficiency: Most recent NECAP data indicate that 67% of Highlander students are proficient in reading and 42% are proficient in math.

Growth: The Rhode Island Growth Model enables a measure of how well students perform compared against other students who performed similarly in prior years. A school with a median Student Growth Percentile (SGP) between 40 and 60 is achieving a typical or expected amount of growth. Highlander has a median Student Growth Percentile (SGP) of 57 in reading and a median SGP of 58 in math. These growth scores are within the bounds of typical growth for Rhode Island schools.

Renewal: The school's charter was renewed in 2013, with no outstanding conditions.

Demand: Highlander Charter School is substantially oversubscribed. In the March 2014 enrollment lottery, Highlander had received one thousand eight hundred seventy-seven (1877) applications for forty-three (43) available seats, or roughly 44 applicants for each available seat.

Operational Plan: The Highlander amendment request is for increased enrollment in an authorized school, and does not amend its authorized grade span. The governance structure, educational program, and operational procedures at Highlander would remain the same. Highlander represents that its existing facilities will sustain the additional enrollment in grades 7-12 and in pre-K.

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