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Enclosure 7d  
February 23, 2015

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**TO:** Members of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education

**FROM:** Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner 

**RE:** **Beacon Charter School for the Arts - Charter Amendment**

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Beacon Charter School for the Arts (Beacon) is an independent charter public school in Woonsocket. The school opened in 2003 and currently enrolls a statewide population of 225 students in grades nine through twelve. Forty-six (46) percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and sixteen (16) percent are students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The school does not have a measurable population of English language learners (ELLs). In 2014, Beacon was identified as a commended school through Rhode Island's school classification system.

#### Amendment Request

Beacon Charter School for the Arts has requested an amendment to its charter to increase the school's enrollment and expand to serve middle school grades beginning in the 2015-16 school year. Beacon Charter School for the Arts currently enrolls 225 students in grades nine through twelve, and has requested to serve an additional 174 students, as well as expand to serve grades six through eight, for a total of 399 students in grades six through twelve.

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

Beacon Charter School for the Arts 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 Beacon Charter School for the Arts amendment, permitting the school to expand to serve grades six through eight, and enroll an additional 174 students across grades six through twelve.**

# RI Charter Public School Amendment Request: **Beacon Charter School for the Arts**

**Enrolling Communities:** Statewide

**Grade Level:** 9-12

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**Location of School:** Woonsocket

**Charter Type:** Independent

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**Current Approval:** 225 students   **Proposed Increase:** 174 students   **Maximum if amended:** 399 students

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## **Mission**

*Beacon Charter School for the Arts develops artistic thinkers by nurturing self-expression while preparing our graduates with the academic skills necessary for sustained postsecondary success.*

*Founders Academy, an integral part of the Beacon School, provides an academically rigorous curriculum promoting a strong foundation in the areas of math, reading, and writing, while introducing students to each of Beacon's rich arts programs.*

## **School Overview**

Beacon Charter High School for the Arts (Beacon) is an independent charter public school located in Woonsocket, serving students in grades 9-12. The school opened in 2003 and was most recently renewed in Spring 2012.

Beacon enrolls students statewide. About 35% of students reside in Woonsocket, 15% reside in Cumberland, and the remaining 50% reside in sixteen (16) additional cities and towns throughout the state. Approximately 46% of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, 21% are Latino or African American, and 16% are students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Beacon does not currently have a measurable population of English language learners (ELLs).

About Beacon Charter School:

- In 2014, classified as a "commended" school through the RIDE classification system
- Utilizes a core curriculum built utilizing Wiggins and McTighe's Understanding by Design (UbD) model
- Offers intensive arts programs in culinary arts, theatre arts, or visual arts

About Founders Academy:

- Beacon proposes to expand programming to create a middle school called Founder's Academy. Founders Academy would utilize a co-teaching model in all core content classrooms. The school would provide a wide variety of arts programming, which will inform students' preferences (or "majors") for arts pathways once attending Beacon Charter High School.

## **Amendment Request**

Pursuant to Regulation C-2-1(a) of the *RI Board of Regents Regulations Governing Charter Schools*, Beacon requests permission from the Board of Education to amend its charter to serve middle school grades and increase maximum enrollment.

Beacon requests to expand by forty-five (45) students in grade 6 beginning in Fall 2015. Over a six-year period, Beacon plans to expand to serve three hundred ninety-nine (399) students in grades 6-12. This maximum enrollment request of 399 increases maximum enrollment by one hundred seventy-four (174) students beyond current approval.

## 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 expansion plan.

## Commissioner's Recommendation

The Commissioner recommends approval of Beacon's amendment request. The decision is based on evidence of sustained high academic performance, demand for the school, and a sound operational plan for expansion.

### Sustained high academic performance:

*School classification:* In 2012, Beacon was classified as a "commended" school. In 2013, Beacon was classified as "leading." In 2014, Beacon was again classified as "commended."

*Proficiency:* Most recent NECAP data indicates that 96% of Beacon students are proficient in reading and 25% are proficient in math.

*Graduation:* In 2013, the four-year graduation rate at Beacon was 95%.

*Renewal:* The school's charter was renewed in 2012, with no outstanding conditions.

**Demand:** Beacon is oversubscribed. In the March 2014 enrollment lottery, Beacon had received 274 applications for 47 spots, or six applicants for every available seat. In addition, Beacon Charter School has provided survey and anecdotal data indicating that there is substantial community demand for a middle school program based upon the model and values of the high school.

**Operational Plan:** The Beacon amendment request is for expansion to serve middle school grades, and to increase maximum enrollment. RIDE has completed a thorough review of Beacon's strategic plan for serving middle school grades. The governing board of Beacon Charter School will oversee both the proposed middle school and the existing high school. The school has developed a comprehensive academic program to support middle school students, and indicates that it can maintain strong results at the high school level while expanding to middle school grades. Staffing increases and budget commitments have been deemed adequate to sustain operations across the two schools. Beacon has shared detailed operational plans for acquiring a facility to serve the middle school grades.