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State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations  
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Enclosure 2c2  
September 22, 2014

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

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

**RE:** **Blackstone Academy – Request for Charter Amendment**

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Blackstone Academy Charter School (BACS) is an independent charter public school focused on community involvement and improvement. The school opened in 2002 and currently enrolls 165 students in grades nine through twelve. All students reside in Central Falls or Pawtucket. Eighty-three percent (83%) of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, 17% are students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and 2% are English language learners (ELLs). BACS was identified as a commended school through Rhode Island's school classification system.

#### Amendment Request

Blackstone Academy Charter School (BACS) requested an amendment to its charter to increase the school's enrollment and to expand its enrolling communities effective July 2015.

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.

Blackstone Academy Charter School has achieved sustained high academic performance, presented demand for an enrollment increase, and provided a viable operational plan.

**RECOMMENDATION: THAT, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to approve the Blackstone Academy Charter School amendment permitting the school to enroll up to 350 students from Central Falls, Pawtucket and Providence.**

# RI Charter Public School Amendment Request: **Blackstone Academy**

**Enrolling Communities:** Pawtucket, Central Falls

**Grade Level:** 9-12

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**Location of School:** Pawtucket, RI

**Charter Type:** Independent

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## **Mission**

*The mission of Blackstone Academy Charter School (BACS) is to build a strong community of learners and leaders. Our small educational environment helps foster independent inquiry, teamwork, and communication. Our students develop the skills to solve problems and use their voices in ways that lead to success in the academic, social, and professional arenas. They demonstrate their achievements through a process of discovery, presentation, and reflection. Community involvement and community improvement are key themes at BACS. In addition to classes, our portfolio system structures the progression of their learning by having students study themselves and their relationships to others, move forward with an exploration of the local community, and ultimately integrate an understanding of the wider world as students become responsible, motivated, life-long learners.*

## **School Overview**

Blackstone Academy Charter School (BACS) is an independent charter public school focused on community involvement and improvement. The school opened in 2002 and currently enrolls 165 students in grades nine through twelve. All students reside in Central Falls or Pawtucket. Eighty-three percent (83%) of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, 17% are students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and 2% are English language learners (ELLs).

Highlights of the BACS program include:

- Socio-emotional learning program;
- Commitment to differentiation and student engagement;
- Community Improvement Projects as a graduation requirement
- Collaborations with school districts, district teachers, and community organizations;
- SPIRIT Educational program, a summer and Saturday enrichment program, which is open to charter public and traditional public middle and high school students.

## **Amendment Request**

Pursuant to Regulation C-2-1(a) of the *RI Board of Regents Regulations Governing Charter Schools*, Blackstone Academy requests permission from the Board of Education to amend its charter to:

- allow an increase in maximum enrollment;
- expand its enrolling communities to include Providence in addition to Pawtucket and Central Falls.

The school proposes to enroll 90 additional students beginning in Fall 2015, for a total of 255. Then, BACS proposes to add an additional 95 students over the subsequent two years. The maximum proposed enrollment is three hundred and fifty (350) students, or a maximum enrollment increase of one hundred eighty-five (185) students.

The school wishes to expand enrollment to include Providence to provide wider access to the BACS program and to minimize the impact of any future enrollment shifts on any single school district.

## 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 Blackstone Academy's amendment request to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. 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:** Blackstone Academy is only one of six schools in the state to receive a *commended* classification for three consecutive years.

At the high school level across the state, 72% of low income students are proficient in reading and just 20% are proficient in math. At Blackstone Academy, 91% of low income students are proficient in reading; 37% of low income students are proficient in math, placing them above state averages in both subjects.

Graduation rates at Blackstone Academy are above state averages for the last three consecutive years. According to data provided by the school, 85% of Blackstone Academy graduates are accepted into competitive institutions of higher education.

The school's charter was renewed for a full five-year term in 2012.

**Demand:** Over the past three years, Blackstone Academy Charter School has been oversubscribed. In 2013, BACS received approximately three hundred (300) applications for forty-five (45) available seats, an oversubscription rate of nearly 7 to 1.

**Operational Plan:** The BACS amendment request is for additional enrollment in an existing school. The governance structure, educational program, and operational procedures at BACS would remain the same. BACS anticipates that its existing facility will be able to support the enrollment increase.