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Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign  
75 Pleasant Street  
Malden, MA 02148-4906

Dear Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign,

The 9th grade G.P.A. serves as a crystal ball. The average American intuitively knows the stakes of this “make-or-break” year because we have all experienced the transition to high school. The 9th grade transcript is the first permanent record of a student’s academic performance, and it opens or closes many doors thereafter. AP track or remedial classes? Top or bottom half of colleges? Special internship or study hall? Walk across the stage or watch from the bleachers? Choose wisely. Students with a 9th grade first semester G.P.A. of 2.0 must average a 3.1 in every following semester to graduate with a 3.0.

Though Massachusetts 8<sup>th</sup> graders are among the best educated in America according to PISA results in 2015 and 2018, only about 50% of students entered high school “Meeting Expectations” in ELA and Math on the Next Generation MCAS before the COVID-19 pandemic. If we assume that scoring below this level means that students are missing basic skills in ELA and math critical to high school success, we can predict that mastering 80% of instructed content in Algebra I and 9<sup>th</sup> grade English to secure a 3.0 average in those classes will be a tall order for half of Massachusetts 9<sup>th</sup> graders. How can high schools attain their objectives if half of incoming students do not possess 9<sup>th</sup>-grade ready skills in reading, writing, and math? 9<sup>th</sup> grade success also requires that middle schools prepare students to manage larger homework loads and make better choices about using free time after school, which is not a sure thing. There is no one to hold your hand through high school, and this is just one of the culture-shocks that the typical 9<sup>th</sup> grader experiences in semester one.

The power of the G.P.A. highlights the reality that high schools are designed for a different purpose than the K-8 span. K-8 schools are designed to maximize individual student achievement in relation to one set of standards, at any cost. There is almost always only one course track built on grade level knowledge and skills. The K-8 challenge is to help all kinds of students meet those standards, and making persistent progress requires all kinds of supplemental programs, co-teachers, specialists, IEPs, and accommodations. High schools are not designed to equalize academic results among students according to one set of standards. The presence of leveled academic course tracks gives away this key difference. High schools sort students into tracks based on their skills and interests. Ideally, these tracks lead each student to a productive future career, one they start soon after receiving their diploma or graduating from college. So, how do we improve high school results if the high school itself is not designed to help students jump from lower to higher academic tracks? We must improve the capability of MA 8<sup>th</sup> graders so that grade-level and advanced academic course tracks are more broadly accessible in 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Currently, no more than half of incoming 9th graders in Massachusetts are prepared to earn a 3.0 GPA with grade level content. If 70 to 80% of students were prepared, the impact on their lives and the schools they attend would be transformative. Apollo Education Group (AEG) proposes to support this transformation. AEG is the non-profit charter management organization that intends to

operate a one-year acceleration academy called Apollo Charter School for a region's far-behind 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Apollo will be a regional, commonwealth charter school designed to improve rather than replace district schools. Apollo works with district partners and families in a geographic region to conduct a lottery for rising 8<sup>th</sup> grade students across a number of middle schools who have never scored "Meeting Expectations" on ELA or Math MCAS after 4<sup>th</sup> grade. This includes students who struggle with schools' behavioral expectations, who have persistently failed to master content or build independent work habits, underserved English language learners, and special education students. Apollo uses proven acceleration practices to close academic and executive skills gaps for these students in one school year. Then, Apollo sends the students back to their district high schools ready to excel in grade-level and advanced course tracks. Another benefit of Apollo's model is that partner middle schools are able to make faster progress with large populations of "cusp" and proficient students who stay in the district for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. Together, Apollo and its partner middle schools dramatically raise achievement levels and high-school readiness for rising 9<sup>th</sup> graders in a geographic region. Apollo catches up the far-behind students and the district nudges those on the cusp of proficiency over the finish line while maintaining high achievement levels for its top students.

The Apollo school model blends proven methods used by Massachusetts's top-performing charter schools serving high-need populations and also uses new practices tested in Apollo's recent pilot programs. Apollo tested its ELA curriculum and instruction methods with the lowest performing readers in Roxbury Prep's 8<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2021 school year and spent the 2022 post-pandemic year implementing its math program for 8<sup>th</sup> graders in Southbridge, MA. The model is built on three elements: 1) "cool to be smart" student culture, 2) multi-level curriculum that prepares far-behind students to succeed with 8<sup>th</sup> grade-level work while simultaneously building prerequisite skills and knowledge, and 3) frequent assessments and targeted feedback in large and small group classes. Apollo Charter School will also utilize a cohort model where three core teachers work with a total of 50-58 students so that mentorship and academic interventions can be more easily individualized.

Apollo Charter School hopes to launch by serving 8<sup>th</sup> grade families in one district and will then grow into a regional model over its first three years of operation. AEG is exploring two geographies for launch in fall 2023: Lawrence and Chelsea. Our initial enrollment projections in both geographies have the school growing from about 150 students in year one to about 500 in year three. We have just begun the process of contacting school and community leaders in these areas, but the results profile of mostly lower-performing middle schools and one large high school that is either low performing or stagnant fits both locations. If Apollo launches in Lawrence, we would grow to serve Haverhill and Methuen 8<sup>th</sup> graders by fall 2025. In Chelsea, we would expand to also serve Everett and possibly Revere public schools depending on seat availability. The applicant group for Apollo Charter School includes Jamie Morrison, a co-founder, former principal, and CAO at the UP Education Network, and, more recently, the Assistant Superintendent of Roxbury Prep Charter schools and founder of the Apollo Education Group. Scott McCue, founder and former Head of School at Boston Prep Charter School, serves as a co-applicant and board chair for AEG. Apollo will also be seeking to hire a co-founder, and the short list of candidates have all been highly successful charter school leaders in Massachusetts. Both launch plans would require AEG to establish proven provider status using the achievement results of the founding group. Over the summer, we will be meeting with school and community leaders in the Lawrence and Chelsea region with the hope of recruiting superintendents, families, and key community leaders to join the application. Community interest will be a major factor in choosing a launch region.

Sincerely,

Jamie Morrison

**COMMONWEALTH AND HORACE MANN CHARTER APPLICANT  
INFORMATION SHEET**

**Name of Proposed Charter School:** Apollo Charter School (regional)

**School Address (if known):** N/A

**School Location (City/Town REQUIRED):** Either Chelsea or Lawrence (still exploring location)

**Primary Contact Person:** Jamie Morrison

**Role or relationship of contact person to proposal:** Leader of proposal

**Address [Street, City/Town, State, and Zip Code]:** [REDACTED] Medford, MA

**Daytime Tel:** [REDACTED] **Secondary Tel:** N/A

**Email:** [jamie.morrison@8thgradeacceleration.org](mailto:jamie.morrison@8thgradeacceleration.org)

1. The proposed school will open in the fall of school year:  2023-2024  2024-2025

School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment
First Year	8 <sup>th</sup> (serving one district)	150
Second Year	8 <sup>th</sup> (serving two districts)	300
Third Year	8 <sup>th</sup> (serving two/three districts)	500
Fourth Year	same	same
Fifth Year	same	same
<i>Add additional rows as needed to show planned growth to reach full proposed grade span and maximum enrollment.</i>		

2. **Grade span at full enrollment:** 8<sup>th</sup> grade

3. **Total student enrollment when fully expanded:** 500

4. **Age at entry for kindergarten, if applicable:** N/A

5. If applicable, the proposed Horace Mann charter school is: N/A  New or  Conversion

6. If applicable, the proposed type of Horace Mann<sup>1</sup> charter school is: N/A

Horace Mann I    Horace Mann II    Horace Mann III

**Questions #7-10 are for applications for a Commonwealth charter school ONLY.**

7. Will this proposed Commonwealth school be a **regional charter school**?  Yes    No

**If yes, list the school districts (including regional school districts) in the proposed region.** Please only list districts that are included in *District Information on Enrollment Projections for New Applications and Expansion Amendments* at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/new/?section=app>. (Use additional rows if necessary.)

Note that Apollo is still evaluating two regions for launch. The organization expects to make a final decision in July after speaking with stakeholders in each set of communities.

Option 1	Option 2
Chelsea (Y1)	Lawrence (Y1)
Everett (Y2)	Methuen (Y2)
Revere (Y3 pending seat availability)	Haverhill (Y3)
Serving these three districts in Y3 and beyond	Serving these three districts in Y3 and beyond

**If no, please specify the district’s population as reported in the most recent United States census estimate for the community the school intends to serve: \_\_\_\_\_.**  
*The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education shall not approve a new Commonwealth charter school in any community with a population of less than 30,000 as determined by the most recent United States census estimate [available at <http://www.census.gov/>], unless it is a regional charter school. (MGL c. 71 § 89(i)(1).*

**8. For all proposed Commonwealth charter schools, list the districts that are contiguous with the proposed school’s district or region.** Please only list districts that are included in *District Information on Enrollment Projections for New Applications and Expansion Amendments* at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/new/?section=app>. (Use additional rows if necessary.)

Option 1 Chelsea, Everett, Revere	Option 2 Lawrence, Methuen, Haverhill
Malden	Dracut
Somerville	Pelham
Charlestown	Salem
East Boston	Andover
Medford	North Andover
	West Newbury
	Groveland

9. Will the proposed Commonwealth charter school serve a district where overall student performance on MCAS is in the lowest 10 percent, as designated in *District Information on Enrollment Projections for New Applications and Expansion Amendments* or in **any updated analysis** performed by the Department?  Yes    No

<sup>1</sup> The revision of M.G.L. c. 71, § 89 in 2010 created three types of Horace Mann charter schools, each with a particular set of requirements. For a description of Horace Mann II Charter Schools, see the Questions and Answers document at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/about.html>.

10. Will the proposed Commonwealth charter school serve a district or districts in which the 9 percent net school spending cap is, or could be, exceeded by applications during the upcoming cycle?  Yes  No

11. Have members of the applicant group previously submitted an initial application or final application that did not result in a charter?  Yes  No

If yes, is the present submission related in content to the previous application?  Yes  No

If yes, please indicate the name of the previous proposal and the year submitted.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

12. Is the applicant group currently the board of trustees of an existing charter school?  Yes  No

If answered YES, please explain why the group is not using the charter application designed for use by a current board of trustees.

13. Do members of the applicant group currently operate or are they employed by a private or parochial school?  Yes  No

If yes, please indicate the person's name, the school name and school location, and dates of employment or affiliation.

14. Are any members of the applicant group present or past members of a charter school board of trustees, school committee, or other type of public governing body?  Yes  No

If yes, please indicate the person's name; the charter school name and school location, or school committee district; and dates of membership.

Scott McCue UP Academy Charter School of Boston South Boston 2011-2014	