

# Cover Page: Amended Public Charter School Application Process



[Section 22.1-212.5](#) defines a public charter school as “a public, nonreligious, or non-home-based alternative school located within a public school division. A public charter school may be created as a new public school or through the conversion of all or part of an existing public school; however, no public charter school shall be established through the conversion of a private school or a nonpublic home-based educational program. A charter school for at-risk pupils may be established as a residential school.”

[Section 22.1-212.9.H](#) requires all applications for public charter schools to be submitted to the Virginia Board of Education (Board) for review prior to the submission of the application to the local school board. Charter school applications must address a list of elements required by [Section 22.1-212.8](#). **The Board is required to review, comment, and make a determination as to whether the application satisfies the criteria developed by the Board.**

- However, charter school applications initiated by one or more local school boards are **not** subject to review by the Board of Education. The division would submit a charter school application for each of the new or conversion schools to its local school board for approval.
- A local school board intending to open a new charter school or convert an existing charter school is still required to adhere to [Article 1.2](#) and must address all application elements required in the charter school law, including the provisions specifically for conversions of existing public schools.

Applications must adhere to the format prescribed by the Board and address the application elements stated in [Section 22.1-212.8](#). The Board is required to render a decision on whether the application satisfies its criteria. A decision by the Board that an application meets its approval criteria does not guarantee that the local school board will approve a request for a charter.

Virginia currently has seven public charter schools, all of which were approved by their local governing boards between 2002 and 2015. The last charter school model to open was in 2016 in Loudoun County Public Schools. There have been three gubernatorial administrations, multiple state superintendents, and multiple governing boards since the Commonwealth last utilized the Charter School Standing Committee (CSSC) and since the Board of Education last reviewed the Charter School Evaluation Criteria. Moreover, there has been a rapidly changing technological landscape with more efficient and transparent ways to operate and learn from other states on best practices.

The proposed revisions to the public Charter School Application Process encapsulate these changes in technology, better align and reflect what is outlined in the *Code of Virginia*, account for an additional eight years of lessons learned when it comes to reviewing, commenting, and supporting new charter school applicants as well as using committees of technical experts with charter school expertise, and reflect best practices from state authorizers’ operating high-quality charter school portfolios on what they look for in the evaluation process.

The staff recommendations for improving the 2018 Charter School Application Process document are as follows:

1. Removes the Table of Contents (pg. 2) due to the consolidation of materials.
2. Removes the Virginia Board of Education Responsibilities (pg. 3), which will now appear in a clear handout and PDF on an enhanced VDOE public charter school website.
3. Section II: General Instructions staff recommends consolidating the section on page 4 as the 2018 Website Accessibility Standards are now common practice and are available on the VDOE website and in past presentations to the Board of Education. This also pertains to the application and applicant more

than the technical review process by the CSSC and Board so it has been moved to the proposed 2024 public Charter School Application.

4. Eliminates the charter school application process timeline noted on page 4, as this will vary by applicant. An 18-month review process is exceedingly long for thorough, high-quality applicants, especially given that the Board of Education's duties are only to "review, comment, and decide whether the application satisfies the criteria." Other applicants may need additional support and technical assistance. The process document and proposed amended application make clear to applicants that they should backward plan from when they would like to open their public charter school to account for the local governing board approval process, as well as when they should submit their proposed charter school application.
5. In Part A, the submission process beginning on page 4 has been updated based on best practices learned from the College Partnership Lab School process. Rather than mandate hard copies delivered to the Department of Education P.O. Box, electronic copies are now permitted and encouraged to account for modern technology. A new e-mail has been set up for all public charter school applications to be submitted, along with proper alerts so that regardless of VDOE staff turnover, the Department will always be able to provide a timely response to applicants to confirm receipt and begin the process for review.
6. Unlike other Board standing committees with regular meeting schedules, the CSSC exists to provide technical expertise and feedback to public charter school applicants on behalf of the Board. Since it meets on an ad hoc basis contingent on applications to review, the timing for the chair being notified and the CSSC's first substantive review meeting being scheduled have been more clearly identified under Part A.
7. The role of the CSSC has been clarified on pages 2 and 3 to better align with the Board of Education's responsibilities as outlined in the *Code of Virginia* to review and provide comments to public charter school applicants and to ensure the applicant has a better understanding of the timing for each phase of review.
8. On page 8, because the "Second Meeting with Charter School Committee" does not apply to all public Charter School Applicants, it has been moved down in the process document to clarify the order of operations for review. This second meeting is for applicants who need substantive modifications or technical support on their application to satisfy the Board's evaluation criteria.
9. Page 4 provides greater clarity on the role of the local school division evaluation. In Virginia, local school divisions approve and authorize public charter schools.
10. Page 10 the technical assistance paragraph has been removed as the listed director no longer works for the Department. VDOE is in the process of overhauling the public charter school webpage to make it more user-friendly for applicants to navigate the process and get support. For example, should the Board of Education approve the proposed changes to the application and evaluation metric on July 25, materials will promptly be updated on the VDOE website. VDOE will also start hosting office hours for applicants to troubleshoot questions about the process or application questions for individual technical assistance needs. Those office hours and other ways to get support will be clearly displayed on the website, along with additional resources, where helpful. Materials and training for local school divisions on what a public charter school is and best practices for evaluating a charter school applicant will also be made available since the last governing board to review and approve a public charter school was eight years ago.
11. The website's contact information for staff will also be enhanced, making it clear to applicants who to contact with questions. It is struck from page 11 of the process document to ensure the accuracy of the proper VDOE staff leads.
12. The application and evaluation criteria have been updated to reflect Section III on pages 11-14 in the proposed documents for the Board of Education on July 25 and are no longer necessary to include in the Public Charter School Application Process documentation.
13. The Assurances outlined on pages 15-17 have been moved to the back of the amended proposed public Charter School Application. It is critical that the applicant knows what they are committing to if approved.
14. Section IV, which outlines Virginia's charter school laws (pp. 18-30), has been removed and will appear in a new handout for applicants on the VDOE public charter school webpage. While important, this

information is not required for the public Charter School Application Process documentation and should be its own resource to review ahead of completing and submitting the application.

In addition to this amended process documentation and VDOE's improved website, staff are committed to supporting new and existing public schools and designing additional wraparound services for public charter school applicants to create high-quality models that will best serve the Commonwealth's students and families.