

Proposed Amended Public Charter School Application– Staff Recommendation



[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.”

Public charter school 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 decide whether the application satisfies its criteria. A decision by the Board that an application satisfies its criteria does not guarantee that the local school board will approve a request for a charter.

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. It is important to note that a local school board intending to open a new charter school or convert an existing charter school must 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.

Since the Commonwealth last utilized the Charter School Standing Committee (CSSC) and the Board of Education last reviewed the Charter School Evaluation Criteria and Application in 2016, there have been three gubernatorial administrations, multiple state superintendents, and multiple governing boards.

The proposed revisions to the public Charter School Application include several changes that reflect changes in technology, create strong alignment to the *Code of Virginia*, and reflect best practices from state authorizers’ operating high-quality charter school portfolios on what they look for in public charter school applications and how they evaluate them.

The staff recommendations for improving the 2016 public Charter School Application Process document are as follows:

1. The application maintains all the required application components outlined below. Still, it regroups them under the key review responsibilities of the Board, which are also outlined in the *Code of Virginia*: feasibility, curriculum, financial soundness, and other Board priorities. All the Roman numeral 2016 Board-approved criteria elements are also captured but with greater depth and clarity on how to meet the criteria outlined in the *Code of Virginia*.
 - a. Staff studied best practices from the leading state charter school authorizers and the questions and documentation required by those states operating high-quality public charter school portfolios.
 - b. In addition, staff heard from applicants and potential charter school applicants about wanting an application and evaluation process that would help them submit the highest-quality application and materials to their local governing board, which is responsible for approving and authorizing public charter schools in Virginia.
 - c. The additional documentation to demonstrate the completeness of the criteria mirrors the 2024 proposed public Charter School Application Evaluation Metric, ensuring applicants will receive more thoughtful comments, as required by the *Code of Virginia*.

- d. It also leads to greater transparency regarding the expectations of the CSSC member reviewers and Board of Education regarding the threshold to satisfy the Board criteria, as opposed to the current Application and Evaluation metric.
2. Page 2 updates the application instructions to align with the proposed 2024 amendments to the public Charter School Process document and moves over key components formerly in the 2016 public Charter School Process overview, including the website accessibility standards.
3. Part C was added to include the Assurances previously captured in the 2016 public Charter School Process document to be part of the application since it is a list of commitments the applicant must adhere to if approved to operate a public charter school.
4. A few modifications are made to the contact information collected to remove references to fax machines and specific individuals, increase user accessibility, and remove extraneous information. The application also now requires a second point of contact to ensure timely engagement by VDOE and the CSSC with the charter school applicant.
5. The proposed application process is accompanied by an enhanced VDOE charter school website that nicely compliments these new upgrades. The new site will outline new 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. Applicants will also be able to access support and technical expertise from staff with contact information that stays timely and up to date on the website rather than a Board document that is not regularly updated.

If approved by the Board of Education on July 25, the new approved public Charter School Application would be immediately posted to the VDOE website and utilized for future application submissions.