

III.B.

Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

TO BE PROPOSED:

August 4, 2021

RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, and subject to the Acting Commissioner's August 4, 2021, memorandum to the Board, "Material Change to Stamford Charter School for Excellence," approves the charter amendment proposal of Stamford Charter School for Excellence (SCSE) to add Grades 7-8 over the two-year period between 2021-22 and 2022-23 and to increase enrollment capacity to 504 in 2021-22 and 560 in 2022-23, and directs the Acting Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Approved by a vote of _____, this fourth day of August, Two Thousand Twenty-One.

Signed: _____
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Secretary
State Board of Education

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford**

TO: State Board of Education
FROM: Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Acting Commissioner of Education
DATE: August 4, 2021
SUBJECT: Stamford Charter School for Excellence

Executive Summary

Introduction/History

Stamford Charter School for Excellence (“SCSE” or “the School”) opened in the fall of 2015 and has completed its sixth year in operation. The School is a state charter school serving a maximum enrollment of 392 students with an approved charter for Grades PreK-6. The School’s charter was renewed and approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) on February 6, 2020, for a five year period from July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2025. The school has been recognized as a School of Distinction per the Connecticut Next Generation Accountability 2017-18 for high student performance and as a School of Distinction per the Connecticut Next Generation Accountability 2018-19 for high growth for all students and high needs students in English Language Arts.

In early July 2020, SCSE submitted a charter amendment proposal that requested the SBE to consider the following:

- expanding grade configuration to add Grades 6-8 over a three-year period, with Grade 6 added in 2020-21, Grade 7 in 2021-22, and Grade 8 in 2022-23;
- increasing enrollment to 560 seats; and
- acquiring an additional school building.

While SCSE’s proposal sought to increase enrollment to 560 students by 2022-23, their request to expand seats beyond the maximum approved enrollment cap of 392 was not financially viable at the time. To remain within the enrollment cap of 392 and provide a pathway for the 2020 graduating fifth graders, SCSE proposed to fill 56 seats in Grade 6 and forgo serving PreK in 2020-21. Due to the enrollment cap and fiscal constraints in place on July 14, 2020, the SBE approved the July 2020, charter amendment proposal to add Grade 6 in 2020-21 with a maximum approved enrollment cap of 392 and to acquire an additional building.

The biennial state budget for fiscal years 2022 and 2023 financially supports SCSE’s enrollment expansion to 504 seats in 2021-22 and 560 seats in 2022-23. On July 15, 2021, SCSE submitted a charter amendment proposal requesting the SBE to consider the following:

- expanding grade configuration to add Grades 7-8, with Grade 7 added in 2021-22, and Grade 8 in 2022-23; and
- increasing enrollment capacity, to 504 seats in 2021-22, and 560 seats in 2022-23.

SCSE’s charter amendment proposal is included as Attachment A.

Background/Process

Connecticut law requires that a charter school governing council that “plans to make a material change in the school’s operations” submit such request to amend its charter to the SBE. The law defines “material change” to be “a change that fundamentally alters a charter school’s mission, organizational structure or educational program,” including, among other things, changing a school’s grade configuration; opening an additional school building; or increasing or decreasing the total student enrollment capacity by 20 percent or more (Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-66ss(a)).

In accordance with C.G.S. Section 10-66ss, the SBE must review the charter school’s amendment proposal, solicit comments from the board of education in which the charter school is located, and vote on the proposal within 60 days of receipt. On July 21, 2021, Dr. Tamu Lucero, Superintendent of Stamford Public Schools, responded to the request on behalf of the Stamford Board of Education indicating their understanding of the scope of the material change.

Recommendation

On the basis of Stamford Charter School for Excellence demonstrated record of success and the financial support afforded in the biennial state budget for fiscal years 2022 and 2023, the Connecticut State Department of Education recommends approving SCSE’s charter amendment request to add Grades 7-8 over the two-year period between 2021-22 and 2022-23 and to increase enrollment capacity to 504 in 2021-22 and 560 in 2022-23, as depicted in [Table 1 \(Appendix\)](#).

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Reviewed by: Lisa Lamenzo, Division Director
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Approved by: Desi D. Nesmith, Deputy Commissioner of Academics and
Innovation

Appendix

Table 1: Stamford Charter School for Excellence Enrollment Aspirations

GRADE	2020-21 Actual Enrollment	2021-22 Enrollment Aspiration	2022-23 Enrollment Aspiration
Pre-Kindergarten		56	56
Kindergarten	56	56	56
Grade 1	56	56	56
Grade 2	56	56	56
Grade 3	56	56	56
Grade 4	56	56	56
Grade 5	56	56	56
Grade 6	56	56	56
Grade 7		56	56
Grade 8			56
Total Enrollment	392	504	560

Stamford Charter School for Excellence

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**Stamford Excellence Enrollment Request**

As indicated in our initial charter approval letter, renewal application, and extensive correspondence with Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Stamford Charter School for Excellence (Stamford Excellence) intended to expand to a Pre-K through 8th grade model upon renewal. It is vital that our scholars continue to benefit from the Excellence program so they are equipped with the tools they need to compete for seats in prominent high schools, colleges, and chosen careers. As with our elementary school model, Stamford Excellence will continue to emulate the National Blue Ribbon award-winning design of the Bronx Charter School for Excellence, which has propelled scholars to admission into some of the most competitive high schools and colleges, including MIT, Brown, Penn's Wharton School of Business, Penn State, and UNC-Chapel Hill. Barring COVID-19 restrictions, adding grades 6-8 signals a shift from self-contained instruction to departmentalized instruction. Stamford Excellence would also employ additional strategies that have proven successful, which include high school preparation and placement programs, STEAM initiatives, alumni support, and various co-curricular and after-school activities.

Stamford Excellence proposed to increase enrollment incrementally, adding one grade level each year. Each grade level would be composed of approximately 56 students, with two classes of 28 scholars per grade, bringing our total PK-8 enrollment to full capacity of 560 scholars by school year 2022-23. Last year in July of 2020, the State Board of Education restricted enrollment to 392 seats citing insufficient state funding. In order to uphold our commitment to our existing families, Stamford Excellence enacted a sliding enrollment configuration with CSDE and Board approval, such that scholars in grades PK-5 served in 2019-20 would be offered seats in grades K-6 in 2020-21. Later in November 2020 at the State Board of Education meeting, the CFO of the Office of Finance and Internal Operations reported a surplus in state funding and reviewed options for reallocation. In accordance, the Board voted to reallocate a portion of the surplus funding to match Stamford Excellence's seat expansion. With the closing of the only other charter middle school in Stamford, we believe this may also help to alleviate some of the district's overcrowding, while continuing to provide families with a high-quality middle school option.

During our first charter term, Stamford Excellence made tremendous strides to provide our families and community with a solid educational foundation. Within five years, Stamford Excellence became one of the highest performing schools in the state and earned designation as a School of Distinction for each year scholars were eligible for state exams. Of additional note, during his senate hearing, the U.S. Secretary of Education, Dr. Miguel Cardona, cited Stamford Excellence as an exemplar of a high performing charter school. Our proposal to expand to a middle school model will allow us to continue our work in providing historically underserved families with an option to advance student achievement. By providing a high-quality middle school option, we improve the prospects for children as we place them on the pathway to attend selective and prominent high schools and colleges. This is particularly significant for families who have historically not attained an education beyond 12th grade. Over time, it is these crucial progressions that allow families and entire communities to advance beyond educational disadvantage and socio-economic isolation.

Year/Grade	PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL
2019-20	56	56	56	56	56	56	56				
2020-21		56	56	56	56	56	56	56			
2021-22	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56		504
2022-23	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	560

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