

III.A.

Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

To Be Proposed:
August 21, 2024

Resolved, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the July 1, 2024, charter amendment proposal of Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication to the extent such proposal seeks a modification of its grade configuration to add Grade 4 in the 2024-25 school year and Grade 5 in the 2025-26 school year and increase its enrollment cap by 52 for a maximum approved enrollment of 328 for the 2024-25 school year, and directs the Commissioner of Education to take the necessary action.

Approved by a vote of _____, this twenty first day of August, Two Thousand Twenty-Four.

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, Commissioner of Education

Date: August 21, 2024

Subject: Consideration for Approval of Material Change to Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC), New London

Executive Summary

Introduction

Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC) charter was approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) and opened in 1997. ISAAC has completed its twenty-seventh year in operation. The school is a state charter school with an approved maximum enrollment of 276 students in Grades 6-8. ISAAC's charter was renewed and approved by the SBE on June 5, 2024, for a three-year period.

The material change request from ISAAC, dated July 1, 2024, requests that the SBE approve the following amendments to its charter:

- Modify the charter school's grade configuration, adding Grade 4 in the 2024-2025 school year and Grade 5 in the 2025-2026 school year.
- Increase the charter school's approved maximum enrollment by 52 seats, from 276 seats to 328 seats in the 2024-2025 school year.

The material change request from ISAAC is attached hereto as Attachment A. Also included is the Table of ISAAC's 5-Year Projected Enrollment, attached hereto as Attachment B.

Under the material change request, ISAAC will reconfigure to a Grade 4-8 model, beginning with the introduction of Grade 4 in the 2024-2025 school year and Grade 5 in the 2025-2026 school year. ISAAC also seeks to increase the charter school's approved maximum enrollment by 52 seats for a total approved maximum enrollment of 328 in the 2024-2025 school year. As explained in the material change request, the additional 52 seats were allocated to ISAAC by the Connecticut General Assembly during the 2024 legislative session through the passage of Public Act 24-81. Any prior material change request made by ISAAC to add new grades and additional seats was intended for the 2025-2026 school year, not for the 2024-2025 school year. As noted, however, the present material change request encompasses both the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 school years.

The charter school’s material change request indicates that the ISAAC Board of Directors approved the request to expand the charter school’s range of grade levels at its meeting in September 2023. The material change request goes on to explain that the addition of Grades 4 and 5 will help ISAAC address the charter school’s continued academic achievement gap and grade-level readiness of ISAAC students. Moreover, the addition of the two lower grades will allow ISAAC to provide the necessary interventions earlier to help prepare students to be at or above grade level prior to matriculating to high school. The additional grades will also create a traditional middle school model of Grades 4-8, providing a pathway for graduating third graders that is responsive to the expressed needs of current families, the community, and state legislators. The material change request also indicates ISAAC has begun the process of writing curriculum for the additional grades; the curriculum is aligned to the state standards and vertically aligned to the charter school’s existing Grades 6-8 curricula. Furthermore, the request outlines ISAAC’s plan to address the necessary scheduling and space required to meet the educational needs of the fourth graders in the 2024-2025 school year and the fifth graders in the 2025-2026 school year.

[Table 1. ISAAC’s 5-Year Projected Enrollment](#) illustrates projected student enrollment by grade level over the next five school years:

ISAAC’s 5-Year Projected Enrollment							
Grades		4	5	6	7	8	Total
School Year	2024-25	32	N/A	98	99	99	328
	2025-26	32	32	82	91	91	328
	2026-27	32	32	91	83	90	328
	2027-28	32	32	91	90	83	328
	2028-29	32	32	88	88	88	328

Table 1. ISAAC’s 5-Year Projected Enrollment

Background/Process

Connecticut law requires a charter school governing council that “plans to make a material change in the school’s operations” to 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.

In accordance with Section (§) 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.), the SBE must review the charter school’s material change request, solicit comments from the board of education in which the charter school is located, and vote on the request within 60 days of receipt. On July 1, 2024, ISAAC presented its material change for SBE review. On July 16, 2024, on behalf of the SBE, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) solicited comments from the host district regarding ISAAC’s material change request. No written response was received from the solicitation.

Recommendation with Conditions

The CSDE recommends that the SBE, pursuant to C.G.S. § 10-66ss, approve ISAAC's material change request to modify the charter school's grade configuration, adding Grade 4 in the 2024-2025 school year and Grade 5 in the 2025-2026 school year and increasing the charter school's approved maximum enrollment by 52 seats, from 276 seats to 328 seats in the 2024-2025 school year.

Prepared by: Robert E. Kelly, Charter School Program Manager
Turnaround Office

Reviewed by: Melissa Jenkins, Ed.D.
Chief Turnaround Officer

Approved by: Charles E. Hewes, Ed.D.
Deputy Commissioner for Academic & Innovation



Attachment A

Dr. Nicholas J. Spera, *Executive Director*

William J. Linski, *Principal*

Tanya N. Collins, *Associate Principal*

Amy J. Geary, *Director of Special Education*

July 1, 2024

Dear Commissioner Russell-Tucker,

It is with deep admiration and gratitude that I begin this letter requesting a material change in ISAAC's charter for the addition of grades 4 and 5 for the 2024-2025 school year. Today, in conversations with your office and Chief Academic Officer, Irene Parisi, it was evident that under your leadership, CSDE was committed to working towards a possible solution that supports the 32 families who have remained committed to joining ISAAC with their 4th graders for the 2024-2025 school year.

The official purpose of this letter is to officially inform the CSDE that ISAAC will be using all of the approved 52 seats that were included in the passing of Public Act 24-81. In addition, we are officially requesting a material change for additional grades so that ISAAC would be approved for grades 4 through 8 for the 2024-2025 school year. We ask that this request be brought to the State Board of Education for consideration at its next meeting on August 21, 2024. Our request for the expansion of grades 4 and 5 comes to CSDE and the SBE as it was the catalyst that led our legislators to propose and pass the expansion of ISAAC's additional 52 seats. The legislators used the March 2024 document that was submitted to CSDE for the expansion of grades when determining the rationale for the 52 additional seats. Although we desire to use these additional 52 seats towards the grade 4 and 5 expansion plans for years to come, ISAAC would be able to add the approved 52 seats to the current configuration of grades 6, 7, and 8 if forced to do so. Again, we hope to use these seats towards the expansion of grades 4 through 8 beginning for the 2024-2025 school year.

As discussed today with Ms. Parisi, we understand that the next State Board of Education meeting/retreat has been moved to August 21, 2024, which was our scheduled first day of school for students. However, to accommodate our request for additional grades along with the 32 committed 4th grade families who are hoping for approval of this potential SBE action item, we will be taking the necessary steps to move the first day of school to support the timing of this possible approval of the additional grades in collaboration with the CEA and our Board of Directors. We appreciate the effort and willingness to add this proposed material change for the addition of grades 4 and 5 to the SBE agenda. Moreover, we appreciate you letting us know the possibility of this happening before this Friday, July 5, 2024, so that we can remain transparent with our 32 fourth-grade families who are hopeful that the State Board of Education will allow their students to attend ISAAC this coming school year.

In hopes that the ISAAC grade expansion approval is possible for the 2024-2025 school year, we are resubmitting written text to meet the required requested information from the June 26, 2024 letter. Much of the text in the requested information below is similar to the information that had been shared with CSDE at our Charter Renewal Visit in October 2023, the March 28, 2024 email requesting a material change for the grade expansion of the 4th and 5th grades, and the May 29, 2024 conversation and email with CSDE for which we discussed the awarding of seats and the notification that we were applying for the CSP Expansion Grant for grades 4 and 5.

Below are the requested details and rationale for how ISAAC will be accommodating the material change for additional grades according to the following two categories:

1. PHYSICAL SPACE ACCOMMODATION FOR GRADE EXPANSION, and
2. MEETING THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF ADDITIONAL STUDENTS AND GRADES.

PHYSICAL SPACE ACCOMMODATION FOR GRADE EXPANSION

In anticipation of the 32 accepted 4th grade students coming to ISAAC next school year, we are mid-way into our internal construction projects that allow for two additional 4th grade classrooms. This includes the creation of multiple offices and learning areas that were built along with several moves within the building to accommodate the new 4th grade classrooms. In addition, a new master schedule was built and adjusted to allow the 4th graders to have specials in Physical Education twice a week along with art, dance/theater, and music once a week. In addition, areas for lunch and recess were rearranged to allow for designated eating areas along with an unoccupied gymnasium space during the day for supervised recess. With the anticipation of an added 5th grade for the 2025-2026 school year, the ISAAC Board of Directors has taken steps to plan for the construction of three additional classrooms that will house most of the 4th and 5th grade students. This project will be funded by securing a 3rd mortgage loan from the same bank we used for the most recent addition. ISAAC will budget the use of the additional funds from the approved 52 seats to pay for the additional mortgage costs for several years to come. The current anticipated date for completion of these additional classrooms for the 5th grade is the summer of 2025. We are confident that the established spaces for the current students and the requested 4th grade students are optimal for teaching and learning and appropriate for 4th graders and staff for the 2024-2025 school year.

MEETING THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF ADDITIONAL STUDENTS AND GRADES

The ISAAC Board of Directors approved the request to expand the school's range of grade levels at its September 2023 meeting. The proposal comes from the continued academic achievement gap issues that present itself in regards to grade level readiness of students who attend ISAAC. The recent data coming from the OLSTAT School Readiness Testing, shows that 35% of the students entering ISAAC are in the lower 10% of students in their grade level nationwide and 75% are at least two grade levels below their peers nationwide. Moreover, according to AIMSWeb data, only 7% of incoming students are achieving goal or above in mathematics and 15% in ELA respectively as compared to their peers nationwide. By receiving a group of incoming students earlier to provide the necessary interventions will improve these students' data results immensely. Furthermore, as one of the few if not the only charter school with a grade configuration of 6 through 8, the additional grades will create a traditional middle school model of grades 4 through 8 that will provide the community with an option to attend a middle school following grade 3. In addition, this additional time will help prepare students to be at or above grade level before entering high school. ISAAC has received support for the expansion of ISAAC from our current families, the community, and our state legislators.

ISAAC has already begun the process of writing a curriculum for 4th and 5th grade in all four core areas that are aligned to state common core standards and are vertically aligned to the existing 6-8 curricula at ISAAC. Moreover, the 4th and 5th grade curriculum from Region 18 along with sample curricula from CSDE is being used as a guide for this task. Our classroom physical learning environments will be similar to the design of the current 6th grade science classroom of our recent Teacher of the Year who was also the Teacher of the Year as a 4th grade teacher at Lyme-Old Lyme Public Schools. This physical learning environment provides students in class sizes of 16 an opportunity to learn and explore through a variety of different workspace environments. In 2025-2026, the addition of grades 4 and 5 classrooms will be built in a separate

section of the existing school building. The expansion will mimic the recent expansion design that was completed in August 2023. Beginning next school year with 4th grade and then the year after, students in grades 4 and 5 will move each block in the school building. Beginning next year for 4th grade, students will rotate for mathematics, ELA (Reading), Humanities (Writing), and Science. Each morning students will be engaged in a social-emotional activity that will follow the already used CASEL standards at ISAAC. The programming and curriculum will ensure that the focus on grade level standards is met according to the Common Core and for success in achievement on the spring SBAC. Partnerships with Mystic Aquarium and the Nature's Center will provide students with a fun science-themed program within the science curriculum. The staff for this expansion will ultimately consist of 5 additional certified teachers: grades 4 & 5 mathematics, two (2) grades 4 & 5 ELA, grades 4 & 5 Humanities, grades 4 & 5 science, and a special education teacher. For next year, both 4th grade teachers with multiple years of similar experience in elementary classrooms at Bridgeport Public Schools and Montville Public Schools have been hired for the 2024-2025 school year. For each grade, class sizes will be only 16 students to allow for optimal support and tiered instruction. In addition, students will go to daily electives that include the following courses: theater/dance, art, music, and PE (twice). School-wide high-leverage practices adopted from research from the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Learning will be implemented and embedded in the delivery of instruction and tasks. Students requiring special education support will have their needs met according to their IEPs from a certified special education teacher. In addition, if students require additional specialized services, these needs will be met in collaboration with the sending school district. The master schedule has been adjusted to accommodate the availability of a special educator in anticipation of the approval for 4th grade students. For students needing Bilingual or English Language services, ISAAC's Bilingual Coordinator has designated time scheduled for push-in support for all 4th grade students who need this specialized support. Students in need of academic and/or behavioral interventions will be supported through the SRBI process in collaboration with the SRBI Coordinator. The availability of a licensed clinical social worker and a school counselor will be available ready to support the social-emotional needs of the students. In 2025-2026, the new school construction addition will be built in a separate section of the existing school building to house the 4th and 5th grade classrooms. The expansion will mimic the recent expansion design that was completed in August 2023.

If you have any questions that may support the ultimate goal of adding ISAAC's material change for additional grades to the SBE August Agenda, please contact me directly as soon as possible. Time is of the essence for our families waiting and hoping that the State Board of Education approves our request for an expansion of grades 4 and 5 at ISAAC. I again thank you for your partnership and willingness to make this happen.

Sincerely,



Dr. Nicholas J. Spera
Executive Director

CC: *Dr. Charles E. Hewes, Deputy Commissioner of Academics and Innovation*
Laura Stefon, Chief of Staff and Legislative Liaison
Irene E. Parisi, Chief Academic Officer
Richard F. Muckle, Chairperson of the ISAAC Board of Directors
Attorney Jessica Ritter, Board Attorney from Shipman and Goodwin

We believe that Effort Creates Ability and All Students Can Succeed

ISAAC 5-YEAR PROJECTED ENROLLMENT

GRADE YEAR	PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	TOTAL
YEAR 1 '24-'25						32	X	98	99	99					328
YEAR 2 '25-'26						32	32	82	91	91					328
YEAR 3 '26-'27						32	32	91	83	90					328
YEAR 4 '27-'28						32	32	91	90	83					328
YEAR 5 '28-'29						32	32	88	88	88					328