

Absolute Priority 1: Periodic Review and Evaluation

Florida fully meets Absolute Priority 1. The following summary provides evidence of state statutes, regulations, or policies that demonstrate Florida's compliance with this Absolute Priority.

Florida law requires that each public chartering agency (authorizer) annually evaluate the progress and performance of each charter school it authorizes. Section 1002.33(9)(k), Florida Statutes (F.S.) requires each charter school governing board to "report its progress annually to its sponsor¹." This annual report must include demographic information, student performance data, and financial accountability information. More specifically, the annual accountability report must provide an explanation of the charter school's progress toward its performance goals and an explanation of any differences between expected performance and actual performance.

The annual accountability report must be forwarded to the Florida Department of Education (Department) upon the authorizer's review. The Department ensures that an annual accountability report is completed by each school and reviewed by the authorizer.

Florida law provides authorizers explicit authority to terminate or non-renew a charter contract if the school is not meeting or exceeding the student academic achievement goals in the charter contract. Below is an excerpt from Section 1002.33(8), F.S., (emphasis added).

(a) **The sponsor shall make student academic achievement for all students the most important factor when determining whether to renew or terminate**

¹ Florida statute consistently refers to charter school authorizers as "sponsors."

the charter. *The sponsor may also choose not to renew or may terminate the charter for any of the following grounds:*

- 1. Failure to participate in the state’s education accountability system created in s. 1008.31, as required in this section, or **failure to meet the requirements for student performance stated in the charter.***
- 2. Failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management.*
- 3. Violation of law.*
- 4. Other good cause shown.*

Additionally, Florida law provides that a charter contract may be renewed only if a program review, by the authorizer, demonstrates that the charter school has met the terms of its contract, including the student performance objectives (Section 1002.33(7)(b)1., F.S.).

Initial charter contracts may not exceed five years, with some exceptions. Charter schools may be eligible for a longer-term contract, at the discretion of the authorizer, if a longer-term contract is necessary to access long-term financial resources for school construction.

Additionally, high-performing charter schools are eligible for longer-term renewal contracts.

However, “such long-term charters remain subject to the annual review and may be terminated during the term of the charter” if the school fails to demonstrate satisfactory student achievement, sound financial performance, or compliance with the law or charter (Section 1002.33(7)(a)12., F.S.)

Absolute Priority 2: Charter School Oversight

Florida fully meets Absolute Priority 2. The following summary provides evidence of state statutes, regulations or policies that demonstrate Florida's compliance with this Absolute Priority.

Florida law requires each public charter school to operate under a legally binding contract which must describe the rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorizer. Section 1002.33(7), F.S., provides that the charter contract must be signed by the governing board of the charter school and the authorizer, following a public hearing to ensure community input.

Additionally, Section 1002.33(7), F.S., requires the charter contract to address the major issues involving the operation of the charter, including but not limited to the following: School mission; students to be served; focus of curriculum; instructional methods to be used; baseline student achievement (how it will be determined); financial and administrative management; risk management procedures; facilities to be used; qualifications of staff; governance structure; and implementation timetable.

Florida law (Section 218.39, F.S.) requires each charter school in the state to have "an annual financial audit of its accounts and records completed within 9 months after the end of its fiscal year by an independent certified public accountant", and that the charter school provide a copy of the audit to the authorizer, state auditor general, and the Department. Charter schools must also post a copy of the audit on their website.

Florida law (Section 1002.33(8)(a), F.S.) also requires that authorizers "make student academic achievement for all students the most important factor when determining whether to renew or terminate the charter." The statute requires that every charter school contract "provide for the cancellation of the charter if insufficient progress has been made in attaining the student

achievement objectives of the charter and that it is unlikely that such objectives can be achieved before the expiration of the charter.” (Section 1002.33(7), F.S.)

Competitive Preference Priority 1: High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes

While Florida’s constitution does not permit a statewide charter school authorizer, Florida law invests a great deal of responsibility and authority in the Department of Education to ensure the existence of high-quality authorizing. As such, Florida fully meets the criteria for Competitive Preference Priority 1.

Overview: Florida law provides for a multi-step process for the creation of a new charter school. This process includes the following steps:

- Application submission
- Application review
- Authorizer staff recommendation
- Authorizer decision
 - If application is denied, developer may appeal to the State Board of Education
 - If application is approved, contract negotiations begin
- Contract negotiation
- Contract execution
- Pre-opening review
- School opening

Criteria for Evaluating Charter Applications: Section 1002.33(6), F.S., requires charter developers to prepare and submit a charter school application using the model charter school

application (Appendix A) developed by the Department. Upon receipt of a charter application, the authorizer must use the model evaluation instrument (Appendix B) developed by the Department. The model application and model evaluation instrument, which are adopted as State Board of Education rules, establish clear, rigorous, and comprehensive criteria for preparing and evaluating charter school applications.

In 2009, the Florida Legislature directed the Department of Education to develop a statewide model charter school application and evaluation instrument to be used by all charter applicants and authorizers. The department, in collaboration with authorizers, operators and national experts, created and adopted the model charter school application in 2010. Over the next five years, the department made revisions and upgrades to the model application consistent with changes in law and policy.

In 2015, the department partnered with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to conduct a thorough review and revision of the model charter school application and evaluation instrument. Over the course of 12 months, with significant stakeholder input and several public workshops, the Department and NACSA developed a revised model charter school application that is comprehensive and rigorous and ensures that authorizers have the information they need to fully evaluate an applicant's vision, plan and capacity to open and operate a high-quality charter school.

The model charter school application is divided into three primary sections: educational plan, organizational plan, and business plan. Each of these sections is further divided into subsections, and each subsection includes specific questions and evaluation criteria. Across the three primary sections, applicants must respond to approximately 110 questions which are evaluated against 85 specific criteria.

The model application also includes separate sections for applicants who are replicating an existing school and applicants who propose to use a management company. Applicants who will utilize the services of a management company must explain and describe how and why they selected the management company, the company's background and leadership team, the track record of student achievement and financial performance of each of the schools the management company serves, the legal relationship between the nonprofit governing board of the school and the company and the organizational structure of the management company. Additionally, the school must describe the payment schedule, including all fees, bonuses, early termination penalties and any other compensation to be paid to the management company.

Additionally, all applicants must complete and submit an Applicant History Worksheet, which includes a complete listing of all charter schools the applicant or proposed management company currently or previously operated and includes five years of academic and financial performance data.

The model application requires the applicant to provide a timetable for the school's start-up, including all key activities necessary for the successful launch of the school. This includes activities such as securing a facility, recruiting and hiring staff, training governing board members, recruiting students, finalizing transportation contracts and food plans, and more.

The Department was also directed, by the Legislature, to develop a standard charter contract, which must be used as the basis for contract negotiations for all charter schools. The standard contract (Appendix D), provides a list of pre-opening documents that must be provided by the school to the authorizer. These documents include the school's policies and procedures manual, all required facility inspection reports, complete list of all staff, documentation of background screening of all staff, student code of conduct, transportation contracts, crisis

response plan, and more. The standard contract also provides that the school cannot open if it fails to provide all of the required pre-opening documents. This final review ensures that the school is fully prepared to open its doors and serve students.

Differential Review of Charter Petitions

Florida law (Section 1002.33(6), F.S.) requires all charter applicants to disclose, as part of their charter application, a complete list of all charter schools that applicant currently or previously operated. An applicant who proposes to contract with a management company must also provide a list of charter schools the management company currently or previously operated. The law also requires that authorizers consider that information in deciding whether to approve or deny the application.

The model charter school application takes that requirement one step further, requiring the applicant to provide five years of academic and financial performance data for each school currently or previously operated (Applicant History Worksheet - Appendix C). The purpose of these requirements is to ensure that authorizers can assess the applicants past success in operating a high-quality charter school.

The model application also includes a separate section for applicants who are proposing to replicate an existing school. The replication section of the model application asks the applicant to provide evidence that the existing design has been effective and explain whether the proposed replication will require the applicant to acquire and allocate additional resources to ensure a successful replication. The application also asks the applicant to discuss the key components or non-negotiable elements of the educational program that made the school design successful. This section provides additional support for comprehensive, differentiated reviews

that factor in an applicant’s prior success, or lack thereof, in operating a high-quality charter school.

Florida law provides another differentiated path for replication of high-quality charter schools. Charter schools that have been designated as “high-performing” by the Commissioner of Education (pursuant to Section 1002.331, F.S.) are authorized to replicate and open new charter schools using a streamlined process.

Clear and Specific Standards

In 2013, the Department, in consultation with Florida authorizers, operators and national experts drafted the *Florida Principles and Standards of Quality Authorizing* (Appendix E). The Principles and Standards, as its name implies, provides authorizers with a clear and coherent set of authorizing standards as well as a roadmap that guides sponsors at all stages and levels of experience while offering practical guidance and advice. The Principles and Standards are organized in the following manner:

- Core Principles of Charter Authorizing
 - Maintain high standards
 - Uphold school autonomy
 - Protect student and public interests
- Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing
 - Sponsor commitment and capacity
 - Application process and decision making
 - Performance contracting
 - Ongoing oversight and evaluation

- Termination and renewal decision making

Each of the above principles and standards includes clear and specific expectations for authorizers. For example, authorizers are expected to:

- Rigorously evaluate each application through a thorough review of the written proposal, a substantive interview with the applicant group, and other due diligence to examine the applicant's experience and capacity, conducted by knowledgeable and competent evaluators. (Standard 2D)
- Provide an annual written report to each school, summarizing its performance and compliance to date and identifying areas of strength and areas needing improvement. (Standard 4A)
- Provide an annual public report that provides clear, accurate performance data for the charter schools it oversees, reporting on individual school performance according to the framework set forth in the charter contract. (Standard 4E)

Florida law requires the Department to produce and publish an annual report on authorizing activity across the state (Section 1002.33(5), F.S.). Additionally, the Department proposes in this application to collaborate with authorizers, operators, and national experts to develop an Authorizer Report Card (ARC) that will evaluate and publicly report on authorizer performance and outcomes. The ARC will evaluate whether and how authorizers align their practices with the Principles and Standards of Quality Authorizing, as well as the academic and financial performance of the charter schools within their portfolio.

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Appeals Process

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are the only authorized public chartering agencies in Florida. However, Florida law provides a robust appeals process that allows a charter developer to appeal an LEA's decision to deny a charter school application. The State Board of Education has final order authority to overturn the LEA's decision and approve the charter school application, if the charter school applicant can demonstrate that the LEA did not have competent substantial evidence to support the application denial.

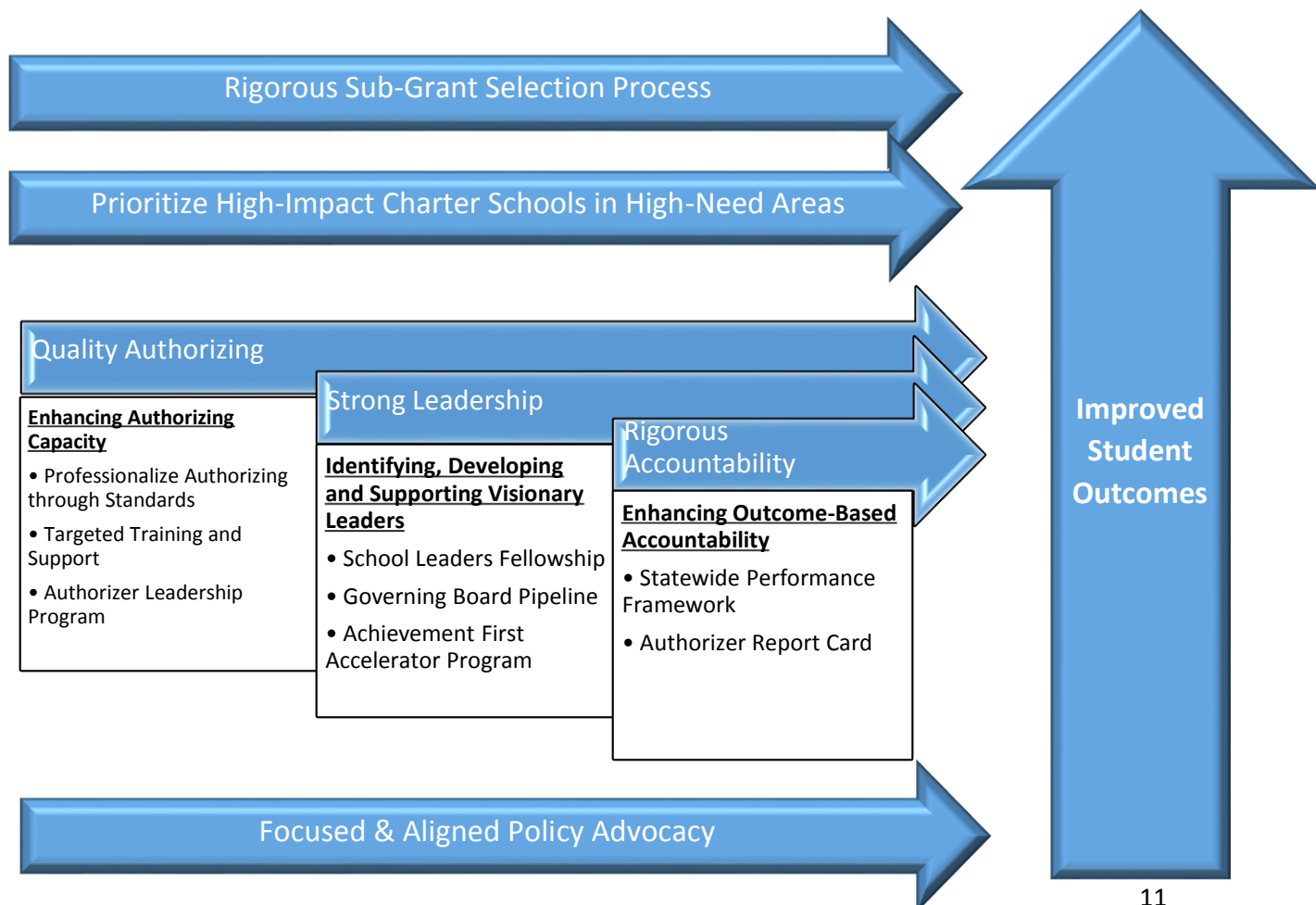
Section 1002.33(6)(c), F.S., and State Board of Education rule 6A-6.0781, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) set forth the framework and procedures for charter school appeals. Charter school appeals are first heard by a Charter School Appeal Commission which reviews the record on appeal and takes oral testimony from both the charter applicant and the LEA. The Charter School Appeal Commission then votes on whether the LEA had competent substantial evidence to deny the application and issues a recommendation to the State Board of Education to either grant or deny the appeal.

The charter applicant and LEA are then offered the opportunity to present their arguments before the State Board of Education at a publicly noticed meeting. The State Board of Education, after reviewing the record and considering the recommendation of the Charter School Appeal Commission, votes to either grant or deny the appeal. If the appeal is granted, the LEA "shall act upon the decision of the State Board of Education within 30 calendar days after it is received." (Section 1002.33(6)(d), F.S.)

Section A: Educationally Disadvantaged Students

Florida's 2016 Charter School Program (CSP) grant proposal will make significant and lasting contributions to Florida's ongoing efforts to ensure that every student, regardless of income or ZIP code, has access to high-quality educational opportunities that allow him or her to meet the state's rigorous academic content standards and graduate high school prepared for college, career and life. The graphic below illustrates the Theory of Change that drives the Department's 2016 CSP proposal.

Strategic Objective: Drive, support and sustain the continued evolution of Florida's charter school sector into a high-impact system that dramatically improves opportunities and outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students.



The strategies and activities included in Florida's Theory of Change are designed to accomplish Florida's 2016 CSP Grant goals:

Goal 1: Increase academic achievement of educationally disadvantaged students

Goal 2: Increase academic achievement of all students

Goal 3: Decrease the achievement gap

Goal 4: Increase access to high-quality charter schools

Florida's proposal is a carefully designed two-pronged approach that will increase the number of high-quality charter schools (through a sub-grant process) while simultaneously strengthening and improving the ecosystem in which high-quality charter schools thrive. This includes direct financial support to new high-quality charter schools and project initiatives that focus on system-wide improvements in the areas of authorizing, leadership, and accountability. These strategies and activities, which are described below and throughout the course of this proposal, are directly aligned with our Strategic Objective and aimed at achieving our CSP Grant goals.

Rigorous Sub-Grant Selection Process & Prioritization

The Department will support the creation of new high-quality charter schools through a rigorous and comprehensive sub-grant application and review process that prioritizes high-quality applicants who propose to open schools in high-need areas. The sub-grant review and selection process, which is more fully explained in section D of this narrative, will utilize a differentiated and multi-tiered method that distinguishes between established operators (operators that have opened at least five charter schools in Florida) and new operators. The

highly selective process for new operators will include a full and complete review of the entire charter proposal, as well as an in-person interview. The selection process for established operators will focus on past performance, prioritizing those operators that have had success with educationally disadvantaged students and plans to open new charter schools in high-need areas (chronically low-performing). The Department will also provide additional sub-grant funding (see budget narrative) for charter schools that will operate in high-need areas, as it has successfully done in its previous CSP award.

Additionally, the Department will undertake a series of system-wide reforms and improvements that will focus on three areas: authorizing, leadership and accountability. Each of these initiatives, which are described below, will strengthen Florida's ecosystem of charter schools and support and accelerate the continued evolution of Florida's charter school sector into a high-impact system that dramatically improves opportunities and outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students.

Enhancing Authorizing Capacity

The Department is deeply committed to quality authorizing, as is evidenced by its creation of the *Florida Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* (Appendix E) and its history of providing training and support to authorizers across the state.

This commitment stems from the understanding that a high-quality charter sector that dramatically improves outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students can only exist if high-quality authorizing is present. As such, the Department proposes to continue its robust efforts to enhance authorizing capacity across the state. Each initiative will be described below as well as in section F of this narrative.

Professionalize Authorizing Through Standards: In 2014, the Department, in consultation with Florida authorizers, operators and national experts drafted the *Florida Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*. The Principles and Standards provides a roadmap that guides sponsors at all stages and levels of experience while offering practical guidance and advice. The Department will continue to encourage authorizers to adopt and implement the Principles and Standards, and will continue to provide aligned training and support.

Targeted Training and Support: While all authorizing decisions are important, there are perhaps none more important than deciding whether to approve or deny a charter school application. In addition to the training mentioned above, the Department will also provide targeted training and support to assist authorizers in conducting rigorous and comprehensive charter school application reviews. The Department is perfectly suited to provide this training as it was responsible for the creation of the statewide model charter school application and evaluation instrument. This will include a minimum of six trainings per year focused on core authorizing functions, including but not limited to rigorous charter application reviews and conducting substantive applicant interviews. The Department will also work with the Florida Association of Charter School Authorizers (FACSA), which is a statewide authorizer membership organization, to identify additional training needs.

Florida Leaders in Authorizing: The Department will partner with FACSA to design a leadership development program for select, high-potential leaders within the Florida authorizing community. The program will be designed as a train-the-trainer model, allowing the participants to both strengthen and hone their own authorizing skills while providing them the tools and resources to build capacity within their respective teams and across the state.

Identifying, Developing and Supporting Visionary Leaders

The Department also will focus on developing a robust pipeline of strong, effective and visionary leaders who are committed to ensuring that educationally disadvantaged students have access to high-quality schools.

School Leaders Fellowship: The Department will develop a model for identifying, preparing and supporting high-caliber individuals with the vision, passion and capacity to open and operate high-quality public charter schools in high-need areas. The model will include a rigorous candidate selection process, intensive training and preparation, school visits, internship or practicums, and charter application development support. The Department has initiated discussions with organizations such as KIPP, Achievement First and the Summer Principals Academy (SPA) program at Columbia University, and plans to continue leveraging the expertise of these national leaders as we develop our program. Candidates who successfully complete the School Leaders Fellowship program and submit applications to open charter schools in high-need areas will earn priority treatment in Florida's CSP sub-grant selection process.

Governing Board Pipeline: Strong, effective and focused governance is a key ingredient of a high-quality charter school. The Department has partnered with Charter Board Partners (www.charterboards.org) to develop a pilot project in Florida aimed at identifying, recruiting, training and preparing highly skilled and committed civic and business leaders to serve on charter school governing boards in Tampa, Florida. While still in its early stages, this partnership shows great promise, and the Department will expand it as part of this CSP grant. Charter Board Partners has long had a focus on improving the quality of public schools serving students from low-income families, and this partnership will directly support the Department's efforts to improve outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students by developing a pipeline

of effective leaders to serve in governance roles. The Department will also structure cross-collaboration opportunities between participants in this program and participants in the School Leaders Fellowship.

Achievement First Accelerator Program: In order to sustain and scale the effects of our leadership development efforts, the Department will partner with Achievement First to identify high-potential leaders from Florida who are ready and capable to expand their organization to serve more students and select them for participation in the Charter Network Accelerator program. This will be an intensive cohort-based program that “draws on the tools, practices, and lessons learned from high-performing CMOs” with the goal of increasing access to high-quality schools for low-income students.²

Rigorous Accountability

Strong outcome-based accountability is a necessary component of a high-impact charter sector. While Florida’s charter school law already provides for strong accountability, including a default closure policy for charter schools that receive two consecutive grades of “F”, the Department will develop a statewide performance framework for charter schools and an authorizer report card. These two initiatives, which are also described in section F of this narrative, will further enhance accountability and ensure that operators and authorizers are held to the highest standards.

Statewide Performance Framework: The Department, in collaboration with authorizers, operators, and national experts, will develop a statewide charter school performance framework

²http://www.achievementfirst.org/fileadmin/af/home/2012_New_Site/1_Our_Approach/Residency_Program/CharterNetworkAcceleratorOverview_2015.pdf

that will provide authorizers, schools and the public with a standardized set of objective measures to evaluate the academic, financial, and organizational performance of regular (including virtual) and alternative charter schools.

Authorizer Report Card: The Department, in collaboration with authorizers, operators and national experts, will develop a statewide authorizer report card that will evaluate and publicly report on authorizer performance and outcomes.

Focus and Aligned Policy Advocacy

The Department will continue to support and advocate for policies that will improve outcomes and opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students. In 2015 the State Board of Education adopted a 2016 legislative priority platform that focused on stronger charter school accountability and increasing access to high-quality charter schools for educationally disadvantaged students. Both of these priorities were included in House Bill 7029 which was passed by the Legislature and signed into law by the Governor. The State Board of Education's 2016 priorities also included policy changes that would support Florida's ongoing efforts to recruit high-impact charter management organizations to open charter schools in Florida's highest need areas. The Legislature responded and revised Florida's charter school facility funding program such that it will now provide additional funding to charter schools that serve low-income student populations (75% or more eligible for free or reduced lunch) or high percentages of students with disabilities (25% or more).

Each of these policies enacted during the most recent legislative session will further strengthen Florida's efforts to increase opportunities and improve outcomes for educationally

disadvantaged students. The Department and State Board will continue to be strong leaders in this effort.

Capacity to Deliver

Every state in the nation is focusing on efforts to improve outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students. However, Florida has demonstrated nearly unparalleled success. Florida educates more low-income students and English Language Learners (ELL) than all but two states, with almost 60% of our students eligible for free or reduced lunch.³ Over the last twenty years, Florida has made impressive gains in improving outcomes for all students, and has demonstrated dramatic improvements for educationally disadvantaged students. In 1998, Florida was the fifth worst state in the nation in fourth-grade reading on the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress). Florida is now in the top 10. Similar progress has been made related to achievement gaps between white and African-American and Hispanic students, with Florida outpacing the nation in closing the achievement gap. In fact, Florida was the only state in the nation between 2011 and 2013 to narrow the achievement gap between both white students and African-American students and white students and Hispanic students in grade 4 and grade 8 in both reading and mathematics (NAEP).

Florida's charter schools have been a driving force and key strategy in the state's effective efforts to improve outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students. In fact, Florida's charter school sector was initially created as a strategy to improve outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students, as evidenced by the initial charter school law passed in 1996, which stated:

³ National Center for Education Statistics, Tables 204.10, 204.11 (2014)

“The purpose of charter schools shall be to...increase learning opportunities for all students, with a special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are identified as academically low-achieving.”⁴

This unrelenting focus on ensuring that charter schools offer high-quality educational options to students who need them the most is apparent in Florida’s policies and practices and has paid dividends for students, families, and communities across Florida.

Over the last five years, Florida has implemented a number of strategies, policies, and programs aimed at increasing the number of high-quality charter schools in our highest-need areas (chronically low-performing areas that serve predominately educationally disadvantaged students). In 2011, through its Race to the Top grant, Florida partnered with the Charter School Growth Fund (CSGF) with the goal of creating 15,000 new seats in high-quality schools in high-need areas through expansion of existing high-quality charter schools or creation of new charter schools. CSGF continues to be a strong and reliable partner of the Department.

Florida leveraged its 2011 CSP grant to incentivize and support new high-quality charter schools to open and operate in high-need areas. Using a sub-grant selection process that provided preference points for operators who had a demonstrated track record of effectively serving educationally disadvantaged students, Florida opened 85 new charter schools in high-need areas. These charter schools were four times more likely to receive a school grade of “A” or “B” than the nearby traditional public school (based on 2014-15 school grades).

Additionally, in 2015, the Department partnered with the Gates Foundation to create the nation’s first state-led District-Charter Collaboration Compact (DCCC). Florida’s DCCC is

⁴ Section 228.056(2)(b), Florida Statutes, 1996

focused on improving educational outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students by supporting efforts to rethink and improve how districts and Charter Management Organizations (CMO) can strategically and effectively collaborate to improve student outcomes. Two of Florida's largest and most diverse districts, Miami-Dade and Duval (Jacksonville) are participating in the Florida DCCC. Duval has partnered with KIPP Jacksonville and Miami will soon finalize its partnership with a high-impact CMO.

The result of this persistent focus on improving outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students has been a charter school sector that has risen to the challenge and provided high-quality educational opportunities for thousands of educationally disadvantaged students, as evidenced by the data included in section C (Past Performance) of this narrative.

The data in section C clearly demonstrate that Florida's charter school sector has made significant contributions to improving outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students. However, Florida has not yet achieved the scope and scale necessary to ensure that every student in the state has access to a high-quality educational opportunity. Our 2016 CSP proposal will accelerate our pace toward achieving that ultimate goal.

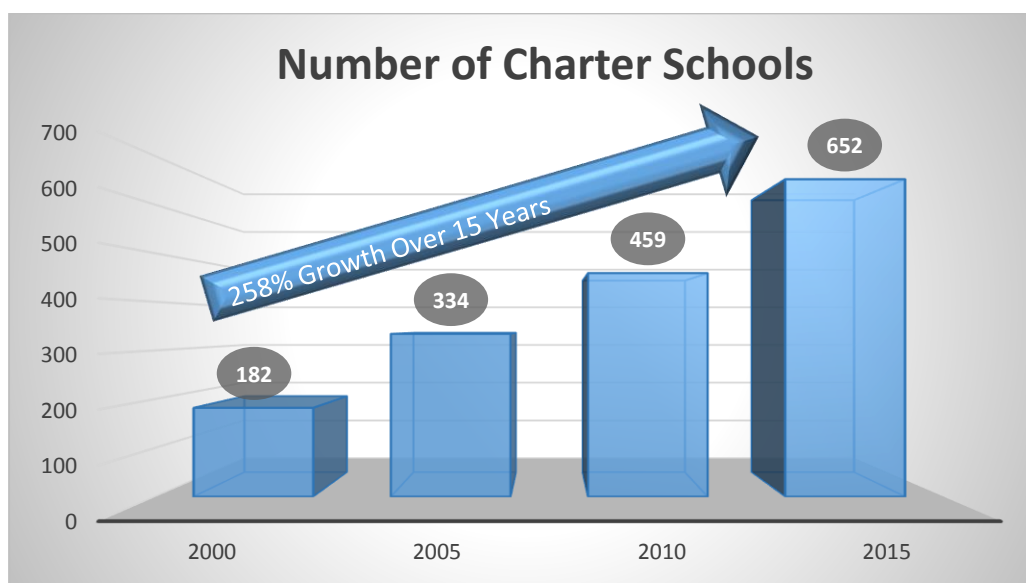
Section B: Vision for Growth and Accountability

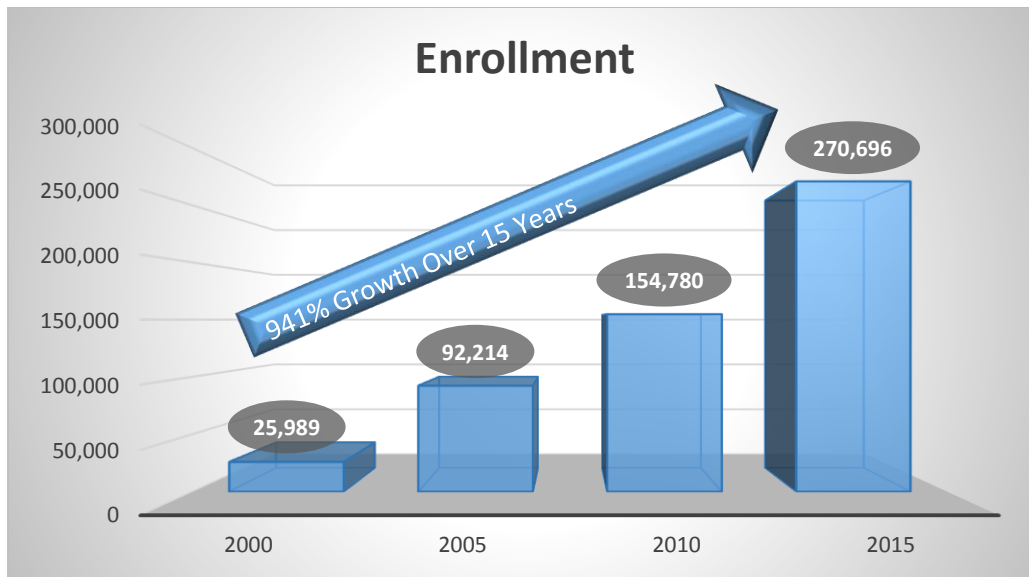
Florida's 2016 CSP Proposal is a bold and ambitious plan to drive, support and sustain the continued evolution of Florida's charter school sector into a high-impact system that dramatically improves outcomes and opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students. Florida will support the creation of 200 new high-quality charter schools over the next five years, while ensuring the closure of academically low-performing charter schools.

Florida's public charter school sector has grown steadily, in terms of scale and quality over its 20 years of existence. In just two decades, the charter sector has grown from an initial five schools in 1996 to more than 650 schools today. The growth, driven by parents demanding high-quality options for their children, shows no sign of letting up.

Since 2010, more than 1,300 charter petitions have been submitted to authorizers across the state, averaging approximately 229 per year. Over that same time period, 440 charter proposals were approved by authorizers, and an average of 65 new charter schools opened each year. Concurrently, authorizers closed more than 125 charter schools that were not serving their students, families or communities well.

The steady growth in the number of schools has been accompanied by an even larger growth in student enrollment in charter schools. More than 270,000 students are choosing a public charter school as their school of choice, representing approximately 10 percent of the public school population in Florida. As of the 2014-15 school year there were more than 135,000 students on charter school waiting lists.





While this impressive growth has been fueled by parental demand, it has been sustained and enabled by strong political support, a healthy policy environment and the Charter School Program (CSP) grant.

As stated above, the number of new charter school applications has averaged almost 230 a year since 2010. During that same time frame, the Department received an average of 90 CSP applications per year, ultimately awarding sub-grants to an average of 49 charter schools per year.

The Department's 2016 CSP proposal aims to support the continued growth of Florida's charter school sector by providing CSP sub-grants to 40 new high-quality charter schools per year. While this represents a slight decrease in the number of sub-grants as compared to our previous five-year average, it reflects the Department's increased focus on quality and rigor as well as our commitment to strategically aligning resources with priorities. The increased rigor of the Department's newly designed sub-grant selection process (described

fully in Section D) will ensure that every new charter school that is selected for a CSP sub-grant has the potential to be a high-quality charter school. The Department projects that 80 percent of the charter schools that receive a CSP sub-grant will receive a school grade of “A” or “B” by their third year of operation, and that 90 percent will receive a school grade of “A” or “B” by their fifth year of operation. Statewide, just less than 60 percent of charter schools received a school grade of “A” or “B” in the 2014-15 school year. This clearly demonstrates the ambitiousness of Florida’s plan and its commitment to quality.

Florida is equally committed to ensuring that charter schools are held accountable for results. This devotion to rigorous outcome-based accountability for charter schools is evident in Florida’s laws, regulations and practices.

The commitment to accountability starts before a charter school ever opens. As more fully described in Section F, Florida has implemented a comprehensive and rigorous charter school application review and approval process. All charter school applicants must use a model charter school application (Appendix A) developed by the Department. Authorizers evaluate charter school applications using a model evaluation instrument (Appendix B), also created by the Department, that includes approximately 85 clear and specific criteria. Florida is committed to ensuring that only those charter applicants who have the vision, plan and capacity to open and operate a high-quality charter school are permitted to open.

Of course, even applicants who have the capacity to operate a high-quality school may struggle and ultimately fail to be successful. Florida law ensures that academically (and financially) poor-performing charter schools are held accountable.

First, every charter school contract must include a detailed description of:

- How the baseline student academic achievement levels and prior rates of academic progress will be established.
- How these baseline rates will be compared to rates of academic progress achieved while the student is enrolled in the charter school.
- How the current rates of progress will be evaluated and compared with rates of progress of other closely comparable student populations.

Florida law also requires every charter school contract to address the student performance outcomes to be achieved and the method of measurement that will be used (section 1002.33(7)(a)3., F.S.). Additionally, every charter contract must include a provision that will “provide for the cancellation of the charter if insufficient progress has been made in attaining the student achievement objectives of the charter and if it is not likely that such objectives can be achieved before the expiration of the charter” (Section 1002.33(7)(a)12., F.S.).

Florida law also provides that, “the sponsor shall make student academic achievement for all students the most important factor when determining whether to renew or terminate the charter.” (Section 1002.33(8)(a), F.S.)

Additionally, in 2011, Florida adopted a default closure policy which requires that a charter school that receives two consecutive grades of “F” be closed⁵ (Section 1002.33(9), F.S.). Florida is one of only 10 states with such an automatic termination policy.

⁵ Schools less than five years old may receive a one-time, one-year reprieve from this required closure if they (a) are a turnaround option, (b) opened in the zone of a failing public school and received at least a majority of their students from that failing school, or (c) if the learning gains of their students are comparable to or better than the learning gains of similar students in nearby public schools and they receive a one-time waiver from the State Board.

As part of our 2016 CSP proposal, the Department will collaborate with authorizers, operators, and national experts, to develop a statewide charter school performance framework that will provide authorizers, schools and the public with a standardized set of objective measures to evaluate the academic, financial, and organizational performance of regular (including virtual) and alternative charter schools. The performance framework will support charter school authorizers in making high-stakes decisions (renewals, terminations, etc.), and bring more transparency to the decision making process. The performance framework will focus on academic, operational and financial performance, including comparisons at the school, district and state level.

Section C: Past Performance

Definitions

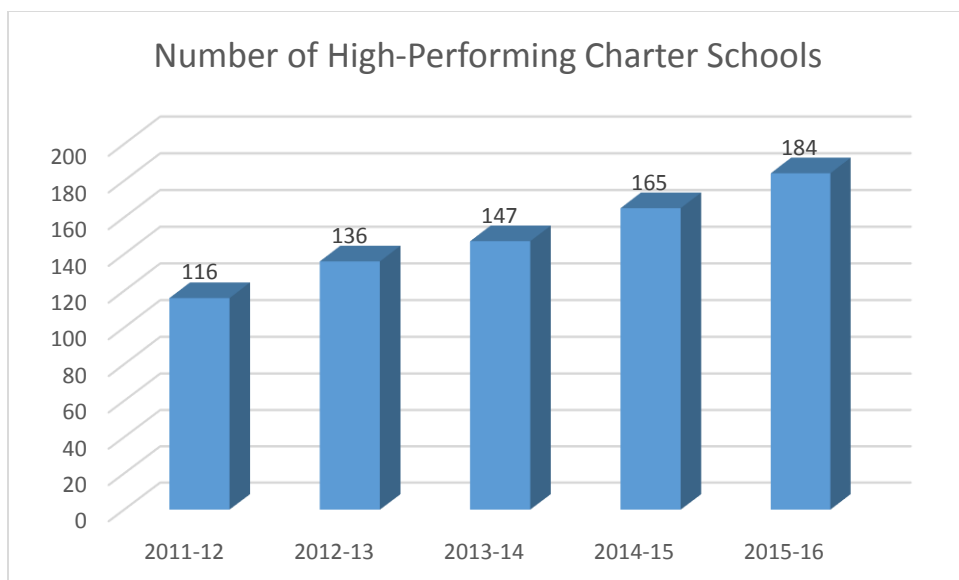
High-Quality Charter School: In 2011, the Florida Legislature created the *High-Performing Charter School* (HPCS) designation for charter schools that met specified academic and financial performance metrics. To be eligible for the HPCS designation, a charter school must have two school grades of “A” and no school grade lower than “B” for the three most recent years. It also must have three consecutive years of clean financial audits. The academic and financial performance of an HPCS is evaluated annually to ensure the school continues to meet the criteria and is eligible to maintain its high-performing status. If a school fails to meet the criteria at any time, its HPCS designation is revoked by the state Commissioner of Education. The Department will use the high-performing designation as its definition for high-quality.

Academically Poor-Performing Charter School: For the purposes of this grant proposal, Florida defines an academically poor-performing charter school as a charter school that has been in operation for at least three years and has been identified as being in the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools in the state.

Performance of Florida Charter Schools: Florida has a strong, robust charter school sector that is successfully preparing students for college, career and life. Over the last 20 years, Florida has witnessed dramatic growth in the number of charter schools, the number of students attending charter schools and the performance of those students. Changes in state standards, assessments and state policy can make year-to-year comparisons difficult. For example, in 2011, Florida's statewide standardized assessment moved from the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) to the FCAT 2.0, which was necessary to align to the then-newly adopted and more rigorous English Language Arts and Mathematics standards. As another example, in 2013-14, Florida reduced the minimum number of test scores necessary to issue a school grade, thereby increasing the number of smaller schools that were issued a school grade. Notwithstanding the expected year-to-year fluctuations, Florida's charter school sector has seen steady improvements, as evidenced by the data below.

State Level Data

As stated above, in 2011 the Florida Legislature created the High-Performing Charter School (HPCS) designation for those charter schools that demonstrated superior academic performance and financial stability for three consecutive years. Since that time, the number of charter schools that have received the HPCS designation from the Commissioner has steadily risen.



It is important to note that charter schools that receive the HPCS designation must continue to meet the academic and financial criteria each year, or the designation is revoked. The graph above shows that Florida has seen a steady increase in the number of charter schools that have earned this distinction. This is more impressive considering that Florida has steadily raised the achievement bar over the last five years. In 2011-12 Florida implemented the second generation of the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT 2.0), which was a more rigorous statewide assessment than the original FCAT, and in 2014-15 completed its transition to the Florida Standards and the accompanying Florida Standards Assessment.

Over the last three years, Florida has seen a decrease in the number of charter schools in the lowest 5 percent (as measured by performance on the statewide standardized assessment). In 2012-13 there were 47 charter schools in the lowest 5 percent. That number decreased to 35 schools in the 2014-15 school year. As further evidence that the charter school sector is working as designed, only one charter school has been in the bottom 5 percent for each of the last three years. Charter schools that are not performing well are given limited time and opportunity to

improve before they are closed. In fact, as explained elsewhere in this narrative, Florida law requires the closure of charter schools that receive two consecutive grades of “F”.

Each year the Department publishes the *Student Achievement in Florida’s Charter Schools* report (Appendix F). This report, which is required by law, compares the average performance of students enrolled in charter schools to similar students enrolled in traditional public schools (TPS) on statewide assessments. The report compares performance on the statewide assessment in terms of proficiency, growth, and achievement gap by grade level (elementary, middle, high), subject area (Reading, Mathematics, Science), and student subgroup.

Table 1 below provides a summary of the findings related to proficiency and growth in each of the last four reports (disaggregated data for 2014-15 was not available at the time of this application). For each year and each student group the table provides the number of comparisons in which charter school students performed better or traditional public school students performed the same or better.

Table 1

	2010-11		2011-12		2012-13		2013-14	
	Charters Better	TPS Same or Better	Charters Better	TPS Same or Better	Charters Better	TPS Same or Better	Charters Better	TPS Same or Better
All Students	22	3	25	0	21	4	22	3
White Students	19	6	20	5	17	8	19	6
Black Students	22	3	24	1	18	7	22	3
Hispanic Students	23	2	25	0	23	2	22	3
FRL Students	22	3	24	1	23	2	23	2
SWD Students	20	5	20	5	23	2	21	4
ELL Students	8	1	7	2	9	0	8	1

Additionally, the Student Achievement Report includes comparisons of the achievement gaps present in charter schools and traditional public schools. Each report includes 18 comparisons of achievement gaps between white, African-American and Hispanic students in Reading, Mathematics and Science. Table 2 below provides the number of comparisons in which the achievement gap was smaller in either charter schools or traditional public schools in each of the last four reports.

Table 2

2010-11		2011-12		2012-13		2013-14	
Gap Smaller in Charter	Gap Smaller in TPS	Gap Smaller in Charter	Gap Smaller in TPS	Gap Smaller in Charter	Gap Smaller in TPS	Gap Smaller in Charter	Gap Smaller in TPS
16	2	18	0	18	0	16	2

The data in the above tables clearly demonstrate that students enrolled in charter schools are on average performing better than students in traditional public schools. This is true for all students, as well as students eligible for free or reduced lunch and students with disabilities. The same outcomes are present when examining national data.

National Data: 2015 NAEP Results

The 2015 NAEP assessment results also provide clear evidence that Florida's charter school sector is providing high-quality educational opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students. Tables 3 through 6 below represent the performance of low-income students in Florida charter schools as compared to low-income students in charters schools in other states.

Table 3

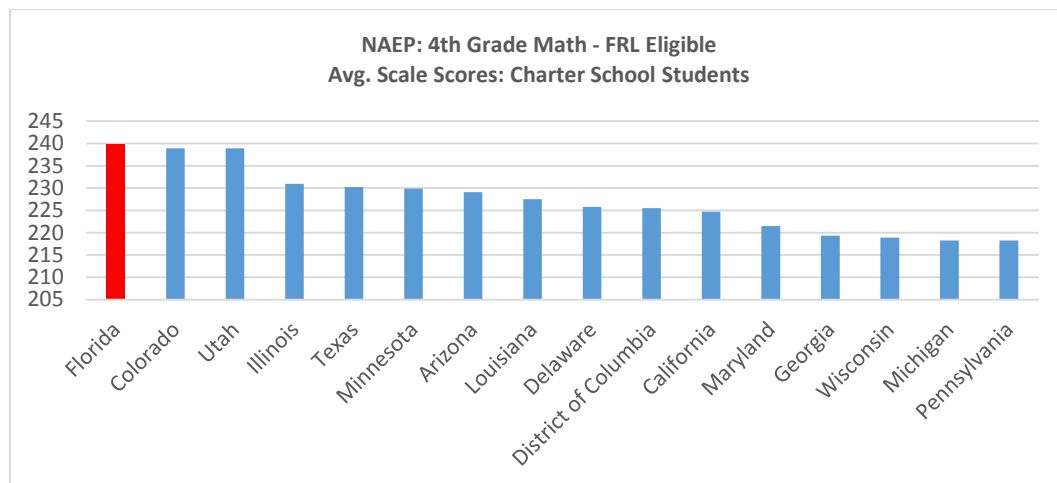


Table 4

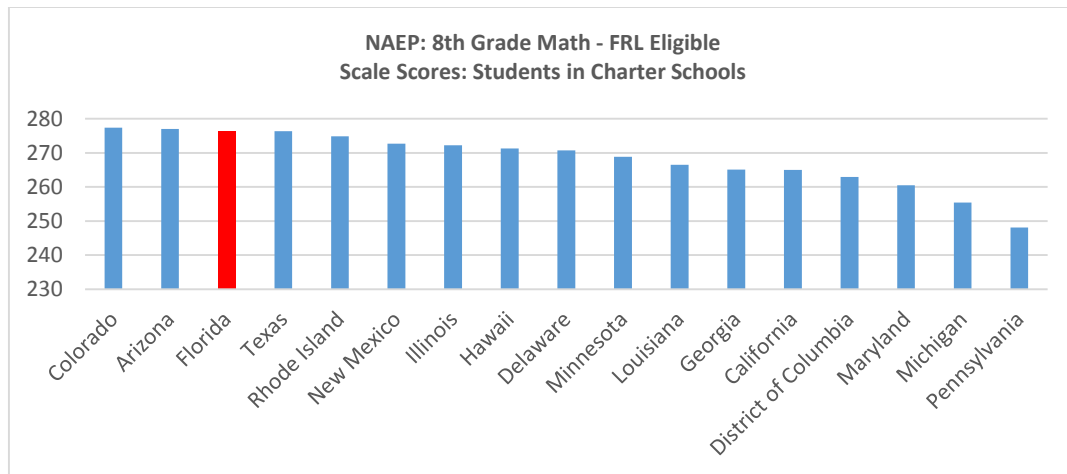


Table 5

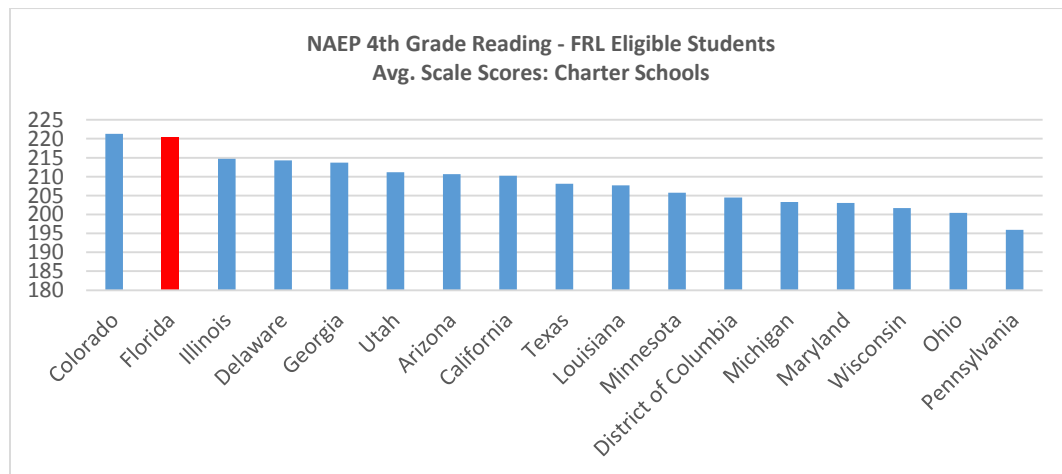
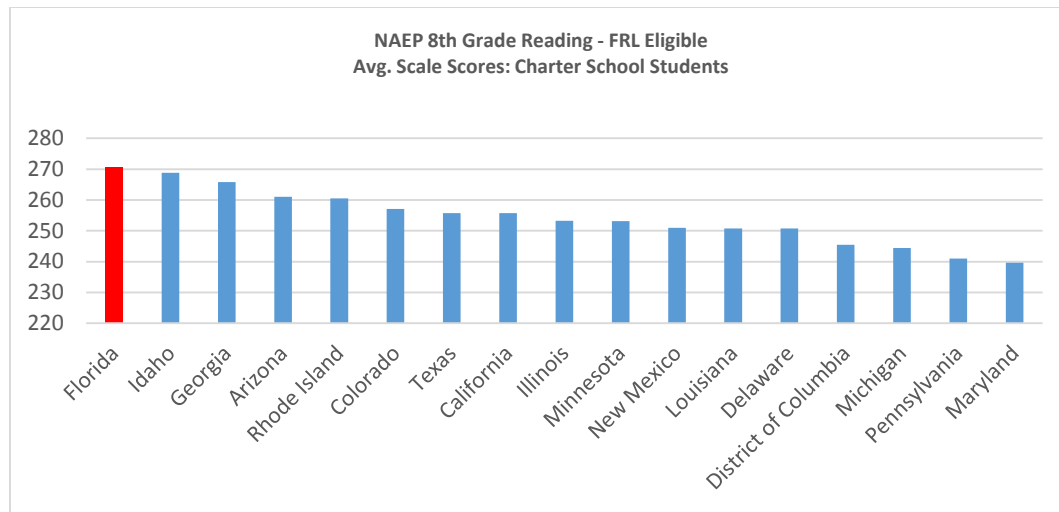


Table 6



As the data above clearly demonstrate, Florida has a strong, stable, and high-quality sector of charter schools that are preparing students for college, career and life. As Florida continues to raise the bar, expecting more of our students and teachers, our charter schools are meeting and exceeding that challenge.

Most importantly, Florida's charter school sector is making significant contributions to improving educational outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students. Florida's 2016 CSP proposal will build on this strong foundation and accelerate Florida's efforts to ensure that every student has access to a high-quality charter school.

Section D: Project Design

Florida's charter schools play an important role in the state's efforts to increase access to high-quality educational options. As such, Florida's 2016 CSP grant proposal will serve as a core component of the state's strategy for increasing the number of high-quality charter schools and improving academic achievement.

Policy makers in Florida have embraced high-quality charter schools as a strategy to improve outcomes for students. Florida’s State Board of Education and the Department strongly support the creation of new high-quality charter schools as a tool to provide opportunities to families and to increase academic achievement across the state.

The State Board of Education recently adopted a Strategic Plan Framework (SPF) which will serve as the guide for the creation of the Board’s new five-year strategic plan. Additionally, the SPF and strategic plan will guide the Board’s policy and budget discussions as it annually contemplates legislative priorities.

The SPF adopted by the State Board includes eight overarching system-level strategies. These strategies are directly aligned to the goals of Florida’s education system (as described in Section 1008.31, Florida Statutes) and will direct the Department’s efforts to achieve those goals. One of the system-level strategies is to “promote high-quality educational choice.”

Sub-Grant Application and Peer Review Process

Florida’s sub-grant application and peer review process will ensure that sub-grants are awarded to eligible applicants who demonstrate the capacity to open and operate high-quality charter schools. Florida has long had a strong application and review process for selecting CSP sub-grantees. In fact, each of the last two monitoring reports developed by WestEd (prepared for the U.S. Department of Education) indicated that Florida fully complied with the requirements for using a peer review process to select sub-grantees. In fact, in its most recent CSP monitoring report (2013), WestEd reported that Florida, “operates a high quality peer review process that

undergoes regular analysis by external evaluators” and recognized Florida for employing promising practices that are “worthy of examination and/or replication by other SEA grantees.”⁶

Florida proposes to once again raise the bar and improve an already rigorous process. The following is a detailed description of how Florida will select and award planning, program design, and initial implementation awards to new CSP sub-grantees.

A New, More Rigorous, Application

In 2009, the Florida Legislature directed the Department of Education to develop a statewide model charter school application and evaluation instrument to be used by all charter applicants and authorizers. The Department, in collaboration with authorizers, operators and national experts, created and adopted the model charter school application in 2010. Over the next five years, the Department made revisions and upgrades to the model application consistent with changes in law and policy.

In 2015, the Department partnered with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to conduct a thorough review and revision of the model charter school application and evaluation instrument. Over the course of 12 months, with significant stakeholder input and several public workshops, the Department and NACSA developed a revised model charter school application that is comprehensive and rigorous and ensures that authorizers have the information they need to fully evaluate an applicant’s vision, plan and capacity to open and operate a high-quality charter school. **The Department will use the new model charter school application and evaluation instrument as its CSP sub-grant application.**

⁶ Florida Department of Education: Charter Schools Program Monitoring Report (2013), prepared by WestEd

The model application (Appendix A) is divided into three main sections: educational plan, organizational plan and business plan. Each of these sections is further divided into subsections, and each subsection includes specific questions and evaluation criteria.

Applicants must describe, among other things: the school's mission and vision; the student population to be served; the research base used to design the educational program; the curriculum for the core academic areas and the research base and foundation used to develop the curriculum; the multi-tiered system of supports for students performing below grade level; the goals for student learning, how the school will serve students with disabilities and English language learners; the governance structure of the school; management and staffing plan; parent and community involvement; the budget and much more. Across the three main sections, the application includes approximately 110 questions and 85 evaluation criteria.

The application also includes separate sections for applicants who are replicating an existing school and applicants who propose to use a management company. Applicants who will utilize the services of a management company must explain and describe how and why they selected the management company, the company's background and leadership team, the track record of student achievement and financial performance of each of the schools the management company serves, the legal relationship between the nonprofit governing board of the school and the company and the organizational structure of the management company. Additionally, the school must describe the payment schedule, including all fees, bonuses, early termination penalties and any other compensation to be paid to the management company.

Additionally, all applicants must complete and submit an Applicant History Worksheet (Appendix C), which includes a complete listing of all charter schools the applicant or proposed

management company currently or previously operated, including five years of academic and financial performance data.

In summary, the model charter school application, which will also serve as the Department's CSP sub-grant application, is a comprehensive and rigorous application that will allow the Department to conduct thorough and complete evaluations and ensure that it awards sub-grants to operators who have the vision, plan and capacity to open and operate a high-quality charter school.

A New Review Process

A charter school developer who submits a charter school application to an authorizer may apply for a CSP sub-grant by submitting that same application to the Department through a web-based portal at the same time they submit their charter application to their authorizer.

The Department will utilize separate and distinct review processes. One process will be used for established operators (operators who have opened at least five charter schools in Florida) and a separate process will be used for new operators.

Prior to each CSP competition, the Department will determine the number of awards available for new operators and the number available for established operators. This allocation will be based on a rolling three-year average of the types of new charter schools opened in Florida. For example, if over the most recent three years 60 percent of new charter schools were opened by new operators, then 60 percent of the CSP grants will be made to new operators.

Applicants will be required to submit to the Department the entire charter school application that was submitted to their authorizer, including all attachments. The Department

will not fund any charter school unless and until it has been fully approved by the local authorizer.

Here is how each process will work:

New operators: For new operators the Department will partner with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers to recruit, select and train highly competent individuals to serve as reviewers. Each application will be fully reviewed by a team of three reviewers. Each reviewer will first independently review the entire application using the evaluation instrument and then participate in a team debrief meeting.

The review team will then conduct an in-person interview with the charter school applicant team. The purpose of the in-person interview is to evaluate the applicant's understanding of the application and their capacity to open and operate a high-quality charter school. At the conclusion of the capacity interview, the review team will develop and deliver a detailed consensus recommendation report which will include an overview of each aspect of the charter application with analysis of the degree to which the application meets or does not meet the evaluation criteria. The recommendation will also include a final score by which to rank the application. The final score will include preference points for schools that will primarily serve educationally disadvantaged students in high-need areas. The Department will then rank order the applications based upon their final score and select the top 20 applications for funding (or the number of slots set aside for new operators).

Established operators: Established operators, which are those operators who have operated at least five charter schools in Florida (this includes a school that proposed a management company that has operated at least five schools in Florida), will also submit their

complete charter application as their CSP sub-grant application. As stated above, the model charter school application requires applicants to include an Applicant History Worksheet (Appendix C), which includes a listing of all charter schools currently or previously operated by the applicant (or management company) with five years of demographic information and academic and financial performance.

The Department's CSP review will carefully evaluate the academic and financial history of the applicant to determine if they have demonstrated the capacity to operate a high-quality charter school. Additionally, the CSP review will consider where the proposed school will be located and whom the school will serve. More specifically, the criteria examined will include:

- The composition of students served by existing schools operated by the applicant, including the percentage of educationally disadvantaged students
- The academic and financial performance of existing schools
- Whether any schools operated by the applicant have closed
- The proposed location of the new school, including:
 - Whether the school will serve students in a high-need area
 - Whether the school will offer enrollment preferences for students transferring from a failing school

The Department will then rank order the applications based upon their final score and select the top 20 applications for funding (or the number of slots set aside for established operators). This process, for both established and new operators, will take place over the winter and early spring of each year, with sub-grantees selected by April.

Estimate of Annual Awards

The Department is requesting funding to provide planning and implementation sub-grants to 40 new charter schools each year of the grant. This request is based upon the Department's experience administering its current (2011-2016) CSP grant and the recent trend in charter school applications, approvals, and openings. The table below provides an *average* of each year's activity.

Average Annual Activity During Florida's Current CSP Grant (2011-2016)			
# of charter applications submitted to sponsors	# of CSP sub-grant applications submitted to Department	# of sub-grant applicants selected for funding	# of new charter schools opened
229	90	49	65

As can be seen from the table above, Florida has seen significant activity in terms of charter school applications and CSP applications over the last five years, with an average of 90 CSP applications submitted per year and 65 new charter schools opening per year.

Monitoring CSP Sub-Grantees

The Department has a thorough set of policies and practices related to CSP sub-grantee monitoring. Florida's CSP grant will continue to be administered by the Charter Schools Office within the Florida Department of Education. The Charter Schools Director (Adam Emerson) is the project director. The Department also has a CSP Grant Director (Yolanda Miranda-Hill) and three full-time CSP grant specialists who are responsible for the day-to-day administration of the

grant and monitoring of sub-grantees. The Department uses a risk-based monitoring approach that is described below.

Rigorous Selection Process: As described above, the Department has a comprehensive and rigorous sub-grant application review process. The process includes a full review of the charter application, which includes educational, organizational and business plans. This complete and comprehensive review will ensure that only those applicants who have the vision, plan and capacity to operate a high-quality charter school will be awarded CSP funds.

Budget Reviews: All CSP sub-grantee budgets are reviewed by two separate divisions within the Department. A program office review is completed by the Charter Schools Office, and a separate review is completed in the federal grants office. Both reviews ensure that all items on the CSP sub-grantee budget are allowable, reasonable, necessary and allocable and are aligned with the purposes of the CSP.

Pre-Grant Review: The Department uses a web-based CSP grant-tracking system (CSP-GTS) to monitor all CSP sub-grantees. Once a sub-grantee has been selected for a CSP award, an account is set up in CSP-GTS. Sub-grantees then use the CSP-GTS to submit all required documentation and reports, which are then reviewed by the sub-grantee's assigned CSP grant specialist (Appendix G).

Prior to releasing planning grant funds (maximum \$25,000), CSP sub-grantees must upload into the CSP-GTS a list of their current governing board members, proof of nonprofit status, a GEPA plan, and a completed questionnaire if the school will utilize the services of a charter management organization. The documents must be reviewed and approved by the Department's CSP grant specialist. These documents allow the Department to verify that the

school is registered as a nonprofit organization within Florida and that there are no conflicts of interest with a management company.

Prior to releasing implementation funds, CSP sub-grantees must provide proof (through the CSP-GTS) of an executed charter contract, a signed lease, and a copy of the school's policies and procedures related to admission lotteries, procurement, inventory control, and segregation of financial duties. Each of these required documents must be reviewed and approved prior to the release of implementation funding. These documents allow the Department to verify that the school will open in the upcoming school year, utilize an appropriate and allowable student lottery process, and has adopted the necessary internal controls and procedures to safely and appropriately administer a federal grant.

Regular Reporting Requirements

CSP sub-grantees are required to provide regular reports and updates to the Department through the CSP-GTS. Each sub-grantee must provide quarterly expenditure reports (which are reported against the approved budget) and semi-annual inventory reports for capitalized items purchased with CSP funds. These reports are completed through the CSP-GTS and are reviewed and approved by the CSP grant specialist. Failure to complete timely reports may result in the suspension or termination of the CSP sub-grant.

Site-Visit Monitoring

Each year the Charter Schools Office conducts on-site monitoring visits to at least 50 percent of the sub-grantees. The Charter Schools Office developed a risk assessment protocol to select the sub-grantees that will receive on-site monitoring visits. The Office developed an algorithm that considers and weights the following factors in calculating a "risk score":

- Enrollment (actual versus projected)
- Co-location (whether the school is co-located with another school)
- Expenditure rate
- Funding distribution policies (strength of the authorizers funding distribution policies)
- Late reporting (does the school submit expenditure and inventory reports on time)
- Management company performance (what is the academic and financial performance of schools managed by the management company)
- Prior monitoring issues (did the school have past monitoring findings and were they resolved quickly)

The risk assessment protocol, which works within the CSP-GTS, calculates a risk score for each active CSP sub-grantee and rank orders them from highest to lowest. The CSP grant director uses the risk-score ranking to select the schools that will receive an annual on-site monitoring visit. The CSP grant director may, at her discretion, select additional schools for on-site monitoring.

The onsite monitoring visit utilizes a monitoring rubric that allows the CSP grant specialist to document that the sub-grantee either fully met, partially met, or did not meet each of the monitoring standards. The results are then entered into the CSP-GTS, and the sub-grantee is required to provide documentation (through the CSP-GTS) of corrective action for each standard that was not fully met. The CSP-GTS automatically sends e-mail reminders to the sub-grantee as the deadline for corrective action approaches. Failure to provide evidence of corrective action can result in suspension or termination of the sub-grant.

The above description is not an exhaustive list of the monitoring practices utilized by the Charter Schools Office; it is offered here to demonstrate that the core monitoring structure and processes are strong, reliable and sufficient to minimize risk and ensure that all CSP sub-grantees are complying with applicable laws and administering their CSP sub-grant in a manner that is consistent with the purposes of the Charter Schools Program.

Section E: Dissemination of Information and Best Practices

The Department plans to fund at least three dissemination sub-grants aimed at 1.) recruiting, preparing and retaining highly effective teachers in Florida's charter schools, 2.) promoting best practices in charter school governance, particularly in helping high-quality charter schools seeking to grow and become their own Charter Management Organizations, and 3.) promulgating policies, practices and procedures to lower disciplinary and truancy rates among educationally disadvantaged students. Additionally, the Department will disseminate information gleaned through the nation's first-ever statewide district-charter collaborative compact (DCCC), as well as continue the successful initiatives begun in our previous CSP project. These include a popular series of technical-assistance webinars and a well-regarded effort to prepare charter schools to meet or exceed Florida's more rigorous statewide academic standards. While each of these initiatives will have their respective vehicles to disseminate best or promising practices, they all will extend their reach at the Department's annual charter school conference, the only SEA-sponsored conference of its kind.

For each of the proposed dissemination sub-grants, the Department aims to measure efficacy by recording the number of charter schools or personnel that employ the practices and strategies being disseminated. This is a different practice than in past CSP projects, where sub-grantees proposed goals that captured feedback on surveys or counted participants in workshops

or seminars as desired outputs. While these past goals have been helpful, the Department is more interested in ensuring that schools that benefit from this professional development have *shown* development. Therefore, prospective sub-grantees would have to show how they plan to go into at least a selection of schools being trained to provide another level of coaching and to assure progress is made toward the adoption of best practices.

The proposed dissemination sub-grants are described as follows:

Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Highly-Effective Teachers: The Department proposes to fund one dissemination sub-grant to an eligible charter school for the purpose of disseminating policies, procedures, and practices aimed at recruiting, preparing and retaining highly effective teachers. The Department is interested in charter schools that have designed effective practices that ensure that new teachers are prepared to teach students on day one, and are still teaching on day 1001, and beyond. The Department is also interested in leveraging a new state law that allows charter schools to develop their own Professional Educator Competencies program and Professional Development System. This sub-grant will result in reduced teacher attrition rates at charter schools in Florida and, ultimately, increased student achievement.

Effective governance: The Department proposes to fund one dissemination sub-grant aimed at disseminating the practices of the state's most effective governing boards, particularly those that have successfully and responsibly replicated their charter schools. Florida can claim many home-grown Charter Management Organizations that have fostered an ambitious mission and vision, employed effective leadership, and decided when – and when not – to replicate their models. This dissemination grant will help governing boards build their capacity to better steer

and expand their organizations more strategically and will align with the Department's goal to match skilled governing board members with schools that need them.

School climate and discipline: The Department proposes to fund one dissemination grant aimed at spreading the practices of a school that has implemented policies and procedures that have been successful in lowering the number of disciplinary actions, particularly among students with disabilities and educationally disadvantaged students. The dissemination grant aims not only to lower disciplinary and truancy rates, but to build understanding and capacity to more effectively deal with challenging behaviors in classrooms.

Previous dissemination activity

The Department has funded dissemination grants in each of its last three CSP awards. In the most recent period, from 2011-16, the Department funded six dissemination awards that achieved the following: a.) Created a free online community with resources specifically for charter school teachers and leaders; b.) Hosted workshops and distributed toolkits to foster improved literacy in K-5 classrooms; c.) Disseminated effective research-based instruction in mathematics and science inquiry in K-5 classrooms while focusing on the transition to the new Florida Standards; d.) Designed an instructional framework aimed at boosting critical thinking and academic achievement among educationally disadvantaged students in grades 6-12 with the goal of increasing graduation rates; e.) Provided teachers in 6-12 classrooms with "ready-to-use" curricular, instructional, and assessment activities that focused on technology integration and literacy; f.) Enhanced the special education classroom by promulgating assistive learning technologies to help students with disabilities.

The Department's external evaluation team at the University of Florida has stated that the dissemination grants awarded in this period "have been very successful in distributing

instructional best practices, which is of great use to charter schools that may not have full access to district professional development⁷.” It also is important to note that the Department in this most recent award period has used a dissemination-grant strategy that employs a focused approach to awarding dissemination grants, typically funding projects that will achieve a set of objectives determined by the Department. That will remain the strategy going forward.

Peer Review Process for Dissemination Grants

The Department will employ a peer review process for awarding dissemination grants that will utilize content experts. Five reviewers, both internal to the Department and external, will be selected based on their expertise to the work to be disseminated and on their backgrounds. Each reviewer will score proposals on a 100-point scale. The Department will drop the high and low score for each application and average the middle three scores, and select the highest scoring proposal.

Other dissemination activities

The Department, however, will not only rely on dissemination grants to propagate the best practices of Florida’s charter school space. Through the CSP, the Department will enhance initiatives begun in the last three years, particularly the nation’s first SEA-led district-charter collaborative compact (DCCC). The DCCC works to encourage interested school districts to partner with a high-impact charter school organization to open new seats to serve educationally disadvantaged students in neighborhoods where they are currently zoned for low-achieving public schools, and to support creative and focused strategies for collaboration and knowledge sharing between charter schools and districts.

⁷ Miller, D., Dana, T., Thornqvist, N., “Evaluation of Florida’s Charter School Program Grant Implementation,” University of Florida, November 2015.

To date, six major school districts competed to participate in the DCCC; two of them were chosen to inaugurate this initiative. They are Miami-Dade Public Schools, the fourth-largest school district in the United States, and Duval County Public Schools. Duval County currently is partnering with KIPP Jacksonville to launch joint teacher recruitment and retention programs and is developing the mechanism to facilitate the transfer of best practices between teachers in high-need areas in charter and district schools. Miami-Dade County is actively recruiting a nationally prominent charter school organization to partner on strategies to serve students in perhaps the county's most low-income and high-need ZIP code.

The compact between these two sectors, however, is not meant to be limited to only those participating districts and charter school organizations. The Florida compact is presently evaluated by the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) at the University of Washington. CRPE has evaluated district-charter compacts in sixteen cities with an eye toward showcasing what has worked, and hasn't worked, in these initiatives. As the compact in Florida progresses, the Department plans to not only evaluate the efficacy of the project, but to actively disseminate the practices and the outcomes in publications, workshops, and at the Department's annual charter school conference.

Moreover, the Department has shown that it has the capacity to provide regular dissemination throughout its various outlets and partners. This includes the following:

- ***Florida Charter Support Unit.*** Though its popular webinar series, the Charter Support Unit (CSU) has hosted 69 webinars during the last four years on topics that have ranged from finding and planning for facilities to Special Education 101 to strategic board planning. Nearly 2,000 people have participated live in these webinars and another 1,200 have viewed the webinar recordings.

- **Showcase Schools.** Through a partnership with Public Consulting Group, the Department selected six charter schools and principals from various regions throughout the state based on their proficiency in implementing the new Florida Standards. These “showcase” schools opened their doors and allowed principals from each region throughout the state the opportunity to see best practices in action through regional symposiums. More than forty schools participated in these symposiums, which included classroom walkthroughs, leadership presentations and collaborative discussions.
- **C-Palms Charter.** Through an online learning community that started as a CSP dissemination grant, the Department has enhanced its relationship with Florida State University to bring to charter school personnel resources that include peer-reviewed lesson plans, professional development, and curriculum mapping tools. This site, called C-Palms Charter⁸ has attracted about 7,000 members since its inception.

Finally, the Department’s own charter school conference has annually featured the efforts and the outcomes of all of the Department’s dissemination activities, in addition to providing an abundance of professional development aimed at charter school leaders and governing board members. It is the only such charter school conference in the United States hosted by a State Educational Agency. In 2015, the conference was held over three days and attracted close to 1,000 participants.

⁸ <http://www.cpalms.org/project/cpalmscharter.aspx>

Section F: Oversight of Public Charter Agencies

Florida has a comprehensive plan to monitor, evaluate, assist and hold accountable authorized public chartering agencies throughout the state. Its plan relies upon the state's robust statutory and regulatory framework, existing policies and practices, and a set of strategically conceived and designed initiatives incorporated into this proposal.

Florida's 67 school districts serve as our state's public chartering authorities. Pursuant to Article IX, Section I, of the Florida Constitution and Section 1002.33, Florida Statutes, elected school boards have the authority and responsibility to authorize public charter schools (as stated earlier in this narrative, the State Board of Education may overturn a district's decision to deny a charter school petition).

While the Department is not an authorizer, it does have considerable influence over authorizing activity in the state. The Department is responsible for the creation of the statewide charter school application and application evaluation instrument, as well as the appeal process made available to charter developers whose applications have been denied by an authorizer. Additionally, the Department has created and published authorizer standards through the *Florida Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*, and annually publishes an Authorizer Report.

Approving Charter School Petitions

As stated earlier in this narrative, Florida law requires that all applicants submitting a charter petition to an authorizer must use a model charter school application developed by the Department. The initial model application was adopted by the State Board of Education in 2009 and revised several times over the ensuing six years. In 2015, the Department partnered with the

National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to revise, enhance and strengthen the model application. This newest version of the model charter school application (adopted by the State Board of Education in January 2016) is the strongest and most comprehensive charter application ever used in Florida. The model application includes an accompanying evaluation instrument which must be used by authorizers in evaluating the application. Authorizers may also request additional information beyond what is included in the model application.

The application (Appendix A) is divided into three main sections: educational plan, organizational plan and business plan. Each of these sections is further divided into 22 subsections, and each subsection includes questions and evaluation criteria. Every question was carefully constructed and vetted by experts in the field.

Applicants must describe, among other things: their school's mission and vision; the student population to be served; the research base used to design the educational program; the curriculum for core academic areas and the research base and foundation used to develop the curriculum; the multi-tiered system of supports for students performing below grade level; the goals for student learning; how the school will serve students with disabilities and English language learners; the governance structure, management and staffing plan; parent and community involvement; a five-year pro forma budget and more. Across the three main sections, the application includes approximately 110 questions and 85 evaluation criteria. Below is a small sample of some of the questions included in the model application:

Section 4.A: Describe the school's curriculum in the core academic areas, illustrating how it will prepare students to achieve Florida standards. Describe the primary instructional strategies that the school will expect teachers to use and why they are appropriate for the anticipated student population. Describe the

methods and systems teachers will have for providing differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students, including how students who enter the school below grade level will be engaged in and benefit from the curriculum and the formalized multi-tiered level of supports that will be provided to students who are performing below grade level.

Section 4.D: Provide evidence that reading is a primary focus of the school and that there is a research-based curriculum and set of strategies for students who are reading at grade level or higher and, independently, a curriculum and strategy for students reading below grade level. Include the school's reading curriculum as Attachment D.

Section 4.F: Discuss the system and structures the school will implement for students at risk of not meeting academic requirements or of dropping out.

Section 14.B: Explain how the school will achieve a racial/ethnic balance reflective of the community it serves or within the racial/ethnic range of other local public schools in accordance with section 1002.33(7)(a)8., F.S.

The application also includes separate sections for applicants who are replicating an existing school and applicants who propose to use a management company. Applicants who will utilize the services of a management company must explain and describe how and why they selected the management company, the company's background and leadership team, the track record of student achievement and financial performance of each of the schools the management company serves, the legal relationship between the nonprofit governing board of the school and the company and the organizational structure of the management company. Additionally, the

school must describe the payment schedule, including all fees, bonuses, early termination penalties and any other compensation to be paid to the management company.

Additionally, all applicants must complete and submit an Applicant History Worksheet (Appendix C), which includes a complete listing of all charter schools the applicant or proposed management company currently or previously operated, including five years of academic and financial performance data.

Of course, the model charter school application and evaluation instrument are only as good as the authorizers using them to evaluate an applicant's capacity to operate a high-quality charter school. Understanding this, the Department has prioritized training and support for authorizers over the last five years and will continue to do so under this award.

As illustrated in our 2016 CSP Theory of Change graphic (p. 11) quality authorizing is one of three core strategies to achieve system-wide improvements. These efforts will focus on enhancing authorizer capacity through standards, training, leadership development and increasing authorizer accountability through the development of an authorizer report card. Each of these initiatives is described below.

Professionalize Authorizing Through Standards: In 2014, the Department brought together authorizers, operators and national experts to create the *Florida Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* (Appendix E). The Department will continue to support authorizers across the state in understanding, adopting and incorporating the Principles and Standards in their authorizing policies and practices. All trainings provided by the Department to authorizers will align with the Principles and Standards.

Targeted Training and Support: The Department will annually provide training to authorizer review teams on the model charter school application and evaluation instrument. The training will focus on building skills and resources necessary to conduct thorough and complete application reviews to identify both strengths and areas of concern. The training will be offered at four regional locations around the state at no cost to authorizers. The Department will also offer training to authorizers on how to effectively conduct applicant interviews, and may offer additional training based upon requests from authorizers.

Florida Leaders in Authorizing: The Florida Leaders in Authorizing (FLA) will provide select, high-potential leaders within the Florida authorizing community an opportunity to strengthen and hone their skills in authorizing. The Department will partner with the Florida Association of Charter School Authorizers (FACSA) to create the FLA and select the participants. The FLA will develop and build capacity of individual leaders as well as the authorizing community through a train-the-trainer model, in which participants will be expected to disseminate information through FACSA.

Authorizer Report Card: The Department will develop, in consultation with authorizers and operators, a standardized Authorizer Report Card (ARC) that will evaluate and publicly report on authorizer performance and outcomes. The ARC will evaluate whether an authorizer's practices align with the *Florida Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*, as well as the academic and financial performance of the charter schools within the authorizer's portfolio. The ARC will build upon the Annual Authorizing Report already produced by the Department. The ARC will provide authorizers valuable feedback on their strengths and areas that require attention and improvement. It will also provide the public and

policy makers information on how well the authorizer is managing its portfolio of charter schools.

Establishing Measurable Academic and Operational Performance Expectations

Florida law and State Board of Education rule require authorizers to establish measureable academic and operational performance expectations for all charter schools. It is important to note that Florida has a well-established policy for issuing school grades (A-F) to all public schools in the state, including charter schools, based on student performance and growth.

Every charter school in Florida is “accountable to its sponsor for performance” pursuant to Section 1002.33(9)(c), F.S. The process of establishing measureable academic and operational performance expectations begins with the charter application that is submitted to the authorizer. The model charter school application, which must be used by all charter applicants (developers) devotes an entire subsection to student performance (section 5) and must respond specifically to the following prompts:

- *Describe the expected incoming baseline of student academic achievement of students who will enroll in the school. Based upon the expected incoming baseline performance, describe the school’s goals for academic growth and improvement that students are expected to show each year and the rationale for those goals. Describe how the school’s academic goals and objectives for improving student learning will be revised if the actual incoming baseline is substantially different than the expected baseline. Describe how success will be evaluated, and the desired overall results to be attained through instruction.*

- *Describe any mission-specific educational goals and targets for the school not captured by state accountability requirements. State goals clearly in terms of the measures or assessments the school plans to use.*

Upon approval of a charter school application, the applicant and authorizer negotiate a legally binding charter contract. Florida law (Section 1002.33(7)(a)3., F.S.) requires every charter school contract to include a detailed description of:

- How the baseline student academic achievement levels and prior rates of academic progress will be established.
- How these baseline rates will be compared to rates of academic progress achieved while the student is enrolled in the charter school.
- How the current rates of progress will be evaluated and compared with rates of progress of other closely comparable student populations.

Florida law also requires every charter school contract to address the student performance outcomes to be achieved and the method of measurement that will be used (Section 1002.33(7)(a)3., F.S.). Additionally, every charter contract must include a provision that will “provide for the cancellation of the charter if insufficient progress has been made in attaining the student achievement objectives of the charter and if it is not likely that such objectives can be achieved before the expiration of the charter.” (Section 1002.33(7)(a)12., F.S.)

The Department annually provides authorizers (and schools and the public) detailed reports on student academic performance for every public school in the state, disaggregated by student subgroup, including the district and state comparison data. The School Public Accountability Reports (SPARS), available on the Department’s website, include disaggregated

data on enrollment, school readiness, graduation and drop-out rate and student performance on statewide assessments. The disaggregation includes separate data reporting for: all students, white, black, Hispanic, disabled, economically disadvantaged, and English language learners.

Florida law also provides a robust framework for authorizers to monitor operational and financial performance of their charter schools. Charter schools are required to provide authorizers with an annual budget adopted by the charter school governing board and monthly financial reports, using a financial report form developed by the Department that includes a balance sheet and report on revenues, expenditures and fund balance (Section 1002.33(9)(g)3., F.S.). Charter schools are also subject to an annual financial audit conducted by an independent certified public accountant (Section 218.39, F.S.). Additionally, a charter school whose audit or monthly financial report demonstrates a deteriorating financial condition is subject to expedited review by the authorizer and must develop and submit to the authorizer a financial corrective action plan (Section 1002.345, F.S.)

Annual Reporting

As stated above, the Department provides annual reports on the performance of all public schools in the state, including charter schools, through the SPAR reports. These reports provide disaggregated data on student performance at the school, district and state level.

Additionally, Florida law provides that each charter school must annually report its progress to its authorizer (Section 1002.33(9)(k), F.S.). This annual accountability report, which becomes public after completion, must include information on student achievement, and requires charter schools to provide an explanation if their actual performance falls short of their performance goals (Section 1002.33(9)(k), F.S.).

The Department is required to annually produce a report that includes an analysis and comparison of the overall performance of charter school students versus comparable public school students in the district, and provide that report to the Governor, State Board of Education, President of the Senate and Speaker of the House (Section 1002.33(23), F.S.). This report is available in Appendix F.

While Florida's regulatory framework includes strong outcome-based accountability for charter schools, it simultaneously preserves autonomy. Florida policy makers have honored the charter school bargain: increased autonomy in exchange for increased accountability. Charter schools enjoy blanket exemption from the state Education Code, with exceptions for those provisions dealing with civil rights, discrimination, health safety welfare, services to students with disabilities, and the state assessment and accountability system (Section 1002.33(16), F.S.). Charter schools are responsible for developing and adopting their own budgets, hiring their own staff, selecting a curriculum, developing instructional strategies, and making day-to-day decisions on how to best serve their students. Charter schools are also explicitly exempt from district school board policies (Section 1002.33(5)(b)1.d., F.S.).

Seeking and Approving Applications

As described above, Florida law requires that all charter applicants and authorizers use a model charter school application and evaluation instrument developed by the Department. The model charter school application is rigorous, comprehensive and ensures that authorizers have the information necessary to make informed decisions about which charter applicants should be approved and which should be denied.

The Department also created a searchable database that allows authorizers to identify whether a charter applicant (developer) has operated or worked at other Florida charter schools. By simply typing in the name of an applicant, the database will return a list of all charter schools that person has been associated with (as an employee, administrator, or governing board member), along with enrollment data and academic performance for each school. The database can also search by management company. This resource is readily available to all districts to support their due diligence efforts. The Department also partnered with NACSA to create a similar tool that allows the authorizer to conduct a comparable nationwide search. The NACSA tool is still in its beta stage.

To further support authorizers in carrying out this most important authorizing function, the Department developed the *Florida Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*, and has provided training and support to authorizers across the state. The Department will continue that training and support under this grant proposal focusing on application reviews and conducting effective applicant interviews. The Department also partnered with NACSA to offer full authorizer evaluations, with NACSA conducting eight such evaluations over the last 18 months.

Additionally, the Department will create an authorizer report card which will publicly report on authorizer quality. The authorizer report card will evaluate both authorizer processes and outcomes, including, but not limited to:

- Whether the authorizer conducted applicant interviews
- Whether the authorizer used external experts in their application review process
- How effectively the authorizer responds to charter school audit findings

- Whether the authorizing office has sufficient staff to carry out responsibilities
- Portfolio performance
- Renewal decisions

Monitoring Charter Schools and Making Renewal Decisions

As stated in Absolute Priority 1 and earlier in this section, all charter schools are required to submit to their authorizers an annual accountability report. The annual report is submitted using a report template developed by the Department and includes academic and financial performance data, which must be reviewed by the authorizer and submitted to the Department. Additionally, Florida law provides that a charter contract may be renewed only if the authorizer completes a program review that demonstrates that contract terms and objectives have been met, including the student performance measures included in the contract, and that the school is financially viable and has demonstrated compliance with applicable laws and regulations (Section 1002.33(7)(b)1., F.S.)

It is important to note that Florida law explicitly provides that, “the sponsor shall make student academic achievement for all students the most important factor when determining whether to renew or terminate the charter” (Section 1002.33(8)(a), F.S.). Florida law also provides for the automatic closure of a charter school that receives two consecutive grades of “F”, with the limited exceptions noted in footnote 5.

Florida completed its transition to new standards and assessments in the 2014-15 school year. The Legislature set 2014-15 as a one-year transition and directed the Department to issue school grades which were baseline grades to be used for informational purposes only. Charter schools were still subject to closure during this time, except that a closure decision could not be

based solely upon the 2014-15 school grade. The one-year transition period has passed and Florida's robust accountability system is fully operational.

Section G: Policy Context for Charter Schools

Ever since Florida's charter school law was drafted in 1996, it has been a governing principle that a charter school in the state "shall be exempt from all statutes in chapters 1000-1013" (Section 1002.33(16)(a), F.S.)⁹. There are exceptions to those exemptions: charter schools are held to the same state assessment program and school grading system applied to school districts; and charter schools are held to those statutes pertaining to civil rights, to the provision of services to students with disabilities, and to student health, safety, and welfare. But these exemptions, and their exceptions, are evidence that the statutes and rules governing Florida's charter schools fulfill the original intent of the nation's charter school movement from its beginning: uphold charter school autonomy while exercising high standards, accountability, and accessibility.

A Florida charter school shall, in fact, operate "in accordance with its charter ..."
(Section 1002.33(16)(a), Florida Statutes) This is the school's performance contract; its existence explicitly reflects the provision in Florida law freeing a charter school from the policies of its authorizing school district unless it agrees to them. (Section 1002.33(5)(b)1.d., F.S.) Charter schools develop their own budgets, hire their own instructional and administrative staff, and select their own curriculum. Charter school teachers must be certified in the State of Florida, but school districts cannot determine how schools hire their instructional staff, nor does state law dictate the constitution of a charter school's governing board, as in some other states.

⁹ Chapters 1000-1013 are the state education code.

But this freedom is granted only to schools that have the capacity to open and operate a high-quality public school. A charter is approved only after meeting every standard set forth in Florida's model charter school application. That model application has been in place, in varying forms since 2009. Starting in fall 2015, the Florida Department of Education and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers set to work on redeveloping the model application to include more standards and to require greater assurances from charter school developers that they possessed the capacity for excellence and quality control while still affording a high degree of autonomy.

The rigor and comprehensive nature of the model application demonstrates not only Florida's commitment to quality, but also the state's commitment to ensuring that charter schools are truly autonomous. If Florida required its charter schools to mimic their local district schools, the model application would not require such detail in the areas of curriculum, instructional design, budget, personnel, and purchasing.

Such a balance of autonomy and accountability in Florida has helped to place the state in the top 10 of the Model Law and State Rankings published annually by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Also, the Center for Education Reform has ranked Florida No. 2 in its national Parent Power Index, thanks in part to its "strong charter law."

Additionally, greater flexibility is extended to charter schools deemed high-performing in the State of Florida. Schools that are consistently graded A on the state's report card and that show an unqualified opinion on their three most recent audits are allowed to increase their student enrollment, expand their grade levels and modify the length of their charter contract terms to 15 years without having to go to their school district for approval. Further, a high-

performing charter school may consolidate under a single charter the charters of multiple high-performing schools operated in the same school district, whether they are up for renewal or not.

But flexibility is not only granted to individual charter schools. State law encourages the formation of charter school “cooperatives.” These cooperative organizations allow charter schools to mutually provide one another the following services: charter school planning and development, direct instructional services, and contracts with governing boards to provide personnel administrative services, payroll services, human resource management, evaluation and assessment services, teacher preparation, and professional development.

Florida statute explicitly requires all public schools, including charters, to comply with the provisions of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). With the exception of one charter school network comprised of six schools, Florida charter schools are considered public schools within the LEA.

While Florida charters are exempt from the state’s Education Code, the charter school law explicitly states that charters still must abide by “those statutes pertaining to the provision of services to students with disabilities” (Section 1002.33(16)(a)3., F.S.). Additionally, Section 1008.31, Florida Statutes, requires that Florida’s K-20 education performance accountability system comply with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001¹⁰, Pub. L No. 107-110, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Further, Florida statute states that “a charter school shall not violate the antidiscrimination provisions of” the Florida Educational Equity Act (s. 1000.05, F.S.). That act provides that “no person in this state shall, on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, disability, or marital status, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to

¹⁰ This provision will likely be updated to refer to ESSA.

discrimination under any public K-20 education program or activity, or in any employment conditions or practices, conducted by a public educational institution that receives or benefits from federal or state financial assistance.”

In carrying out its oversight role, the Department is required to oversee the performance of every LEA in the state to ensure the effectiveness of each district’s efforts to educate students with disabilities. In fulfilling this requirement, the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services examines and evaluates procedures, records, and ESE services within all LEAs. By extension, charter schools are required to adhere to the extensive monitoring and compliance guidelines established both in state and federal regulations.

Also, the Model Florida Charter School Application referenced above includes an entire section on Exceptional Student Education (ESE) and requires applicants to provide a detailed plan for 1.) how they will ensure that students with disabilities will have an equal opportunity of being selected for enrollment, 2.) how it will work with the LEA to ensure these students receive a free appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, and 3.) how it will evaluate the effectiveness of its ESE services.

Lastly, the Florida Standard Charter Contract, adopted by the State Board of Education in November 2014, states that “Exceptional students shall be provided with programs implemented in accordance with applicable Federal, state and local policies and procedures; and specifically, the [IDEA], Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, sections 1000.05 and 1001.42(4)(1) of the Florida Statutes, and Chapter 6A-6 of the Florida Administrative Code.”