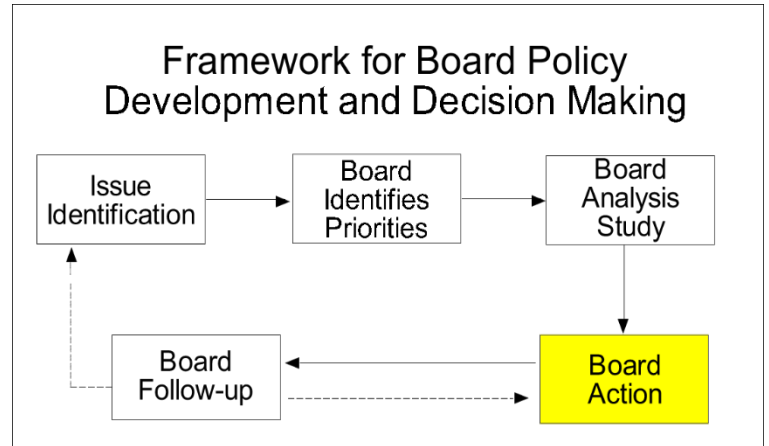


Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

January 9, 2025



- Agenda Item:** Charter School Contract Amendment Request, Empowering Excellence
- State Board Priority:** Goal 5
- State Board Role/Authority:** The State Board of Education is the sole authorizer of Iowa charter schools 256E.1(4).
- Presenter(s):** Deborah Elder
Chief Operating Officer
- Attachment(s):** Four
- Recommendation:** It is recommended that the State Board approve the amendment requests for Empowering Excellence.
- Background:** After authorization, “an enforceable and renewable charter school contract shall be executed between the founding group and the state board setting forth the academic and operational performance expectations and measures by which the charter school will be evaluated,” pursuant to sections 256E.9 and 256E.10 and the other rights and duties of the parties 256E.6(1). As the authorizing agent for the State Board, the Department of Education has reviewed the charter school contract amendment request and provides a recommendation.
- Empowering Excellence submitted contract amendment language, rationale, desired outcome, governing board approval and evidence of a public meeting.

Iowa Charter School Amendment Request Form

Exhibit 1

The ***Iowa Charter School Amendment Request Form*** is completed by an authorized Charter School that requests consideration of a proposed contract amendment to the State Board of Education. To submit this document, make a copy and submit the completed form to charters@iowa.gov labeled: **Amendment Request Form_2024_NAME OF YOUR CHARTER.**

1. Requested Amendment

A. Cite existing contract language to be amended.	B. Provide specific proposed amended language.
<p>Section 2: Proposed vision and mission)page 7 and Section 4 Proposed grade levels and enrollment (page 10)</p> <p>To be eligible for enrollment at Empowering Excellence Charter School, a student must be between the ages of 16 and 21 years old, a resident of Cedar Rapids or the neighboring communities, such as Independence, Iowa City, Marion, Vinton, Linn-Mar, and College Community; in addition, the student must have completed the criteria necessary to attend high school. The staff of EECS will not focus on having a student body that is representative of the county, with proportions that are comparable regarding factors such as race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, disability, giftedness, linguistic requirements, and socioeconomic standing. EECS will not discriminate against applicants who are eligible based on factors such as pregnancy, marital or parental status, sexual orientation, or mental or emotional conditions, national origins, ancestry, religion, or learning disabilities when making admissions decisions. Students of all academic levels, as well as those who are eligible for ESE and ELL programs, will be welcome to enroll at EECS School when it opens in the fall of 2024. Empowering Excellence Charter School will collaborate with every student to help</p>	<p>To be eligible for enrollment at Empowering Excellence Charter School, a student must be between the ages of 14 and 21 years old, a resident of the state of Iowa. Students ages 14 and 15 must have already shown to be behind in credits or academic progress in their previous/current high school, and our older students, (ages 16 and up), must complete coursework before turning 21 years of age.</p> <p>Further, Empowering Excellence Charter School will request a full waiver of the Offer and Teach requirements.</p>

<p>them realize their full academic and personal potential, as stated plainly in the mission statement of the institution.</p>	
--	--

2. **Rationale** Describe the rationale for the language revision from 1A to 1B. Provide sufficient detail to explain the need for the amendment.

Empowering Excellence Charter School proposes to amend its application to include all students who have completed the necessary criteria to be eligible to attend high school. This is in response to the evolving needs of students in Iowa. Our current target community faces significant challenges, including declining overall enrollment in schools and a lack of parental satisfaction with existing secondary education options. By expanding its grade offerings, Empowering Excellence Charter School aims to address these issues directly, fulfilling a critical need while advancing its mission of delivering high-quality, student-centered education.

1. Retaining Students in Public Education

- Surrounding schools have experienced declining enrollment as families seek alternative educational options, including private schools and homeschooling. This trend reflects a gap in meeting the diverse needs of students and families in the area.
- By expanding to include all students who are eligible to attend high school, Empowering Excellence Charter School can attract and retain students who might otherwise leave the public education system, helping to stabilize enrollment figures.

2. Providing an Alternative to Families

- Many families cite dissatisfaction with the quality of education, particularly at the high school level, as a primary reason for seeking alternatives. Empowering Excellence Charter School's expansion to include all high school grades would offer a viable, high-quality alternative that meets community expectations for academics and individualized attention.

3. Responding to Parent Voice

1. **Demand for Innovative and Personalized Education**
 - Feedback from local parents reveals a strong demand for schools that emphasize personalized learning, small class sizes, and supportive teaching methods—hallmarks of Empowering Excellence Charter School.
 - By expanding to include all students who are eligible to attend high school it allows the school to extend its successful approach, addressing key concerns parents have about the lack of engagement, support, and preparation in existing high school programs.
2. **Fostering Confidence in Public Charter Options**
 - Parents have expressed frustration with large, traditional high schools that often struggle to meet the individual needs of students. Empowering Excellence Charter School's expansion demonstrates responsiveness to these concerns, fostering greater trust and confidence in the public charter school model.

4. Strategic Benefits for Empowering Excellence Charter School

1. **Stabilizing Enrollment and Building Sustainability**
 - By expanding to include all students who are eligible to attend high school the school not only meets the needs of its current students, but also attracts new families seeking high-quality secondary education.
2. **Strengthening Community Ties**
 - The expansion underscores the school's commitment to serving Iowa families and addressing educational challenges, further cementing its role as a trusted educational

partner.

Currently, Empowering Excellence Charter School is not required to adhere to 'Offer and Teach' as they are contracted to enroll high school students 16 - 21. This is per the 'Desk Audit' report in December. As part of requesting to amend contract language to include high school students ages 14 - 21, we are requesting to continue this exemption through a full waiver.

The reason is Empowering Excellence Charter School (EECS) students have a variety of challenges with regard to pursuing their high school diploma. This includes but is not limited to stating their goal is to graduate from high school as quickly as possible, have their classes have increased connection to their current jobs or career aspirations. 'Offer and Teach' requirements shifts our current focus from the individual student to specific mandates on classes offered and taken by students.

Due to our current exemption from 'Offer and Teach' we have been able to better support current individual student needs and continuing to do so is a priority. Further, EECS does work to ensure our classes offered and taken by students are varied in class difficulty and variety.

The decision to amend Empowering Excellence Charter School's application to include all students who are eligible to attend high school is both timely and essential. It addresses the critical issues of declining enrollment and parental voice regarding existing educational options in Iowa. By expanding its offerings, the school can provide a much-needed alternative that meets the needs of students while reinforcing its mission of empowering excellence in education.

Further, EECS' request to have a full waiver for 'Offer and Teach' continues our current practice and ability to meet specific student needs. By adding students 14 - 21, the full waiver would be necessary to continue our current educational framework based on student needs.

3. **Desired Outcome** Describe the desired outcome of the amendment.

The desired outcome of amending Empowering Excellence Charter School's contract to include all students who are eligible to attend high school to create a seamless and high-quality educational continuum that meets the evolving needs of students and families in Iowa. By expanding to include these high school grades, the school aims to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Improved Student Outcomes

- **Academic Excellence:** By expanding to include all students who are eligible to attend high school it will allow all students the opportunity to have access to an individualized and alternate education option, particularly through the charter school model, and EECS framework of academic and student support.
- **Personal Development:** Foster social, emotional, and intellectual growth during the formative high school years through personalized learning and programming.

2. Increased Enrollment and Retention

- **Retention of Current Students:** Offer a seamless transition for students graduating from the school's middle grades, ensuring continuity in their educational experience.
- **Attraction of New Families:** Position the school as a preferred choice for families seeking high-quality high school options, driving increased enrollment and community trust.

3. Enhanced Community Impact

- **Addressing Local Needs:** Respond to community concerns about declining school enrollment and parent voice regarding current high school options.
- **Workforce Readiness:** Work to support students with skills and credentials aligned with local workforce needs, including but not limited to career exploration, internships, and partnerships

with local stakeholders.

4. Alignment with Mission and Vision

- **Educational Innovation:** Expand the school's proven model of personalized, student-centered education to all high school grades (9 - 12) ensuring that its mission of empowering excellence is upheld across all grades.
- **Commitment to Equity:** Provide equitable access to high-quality high school education for all students, including those from underserved and marginalized communities.

5. Strengthened Financial and Operational Sustainability

- **Stabilized Funding:** Increased enrollment resulting from the expansion will enhance the school's financial sustainability and operational efficiency.
- **Capacity for Future Growth:** Establish a foundation for further expansion by expanding to include all students who are eligible to attend high school creates a full high school program that meets long-term community and educational goals.

Conclusion

By expanding to include all students who are eligible to attend high school presents a strategic and mission-driven step for Empowering Excellence Charter School. EECS aims to deliver an educational experience that addresses community needs, enhances student success, and positions the school as a leader in supportive, high-quality education for Iowa families.

4. **Best Practices** Describe how previous practices that led to the established contract language (1A) will change to support the current amended language (1B). How will the charter ensure effective implementation of the proposed amendment?

The established contract language (1A) at Empowering Excellence Charter School reflects practices designed for a 11 and 12th grade program, emphasizing education for 11th and 12th grade students and their specific academic and operational needs. With the proposed amendment to expand the school to include grades 9 and 10 (1B), the school must adapt its practices to address the unique challenges and opportunities associated with the needs of younger high school students. This transition requires deliberate changes.

How Practices Will Change to Support Amended Language (1B)

1. Curriculum and Instruction

- **From grades 11 - 12 (ages 16 - 21) to grades 9 - 12 (ages 14 - 21):**
 - **1A:** Focused on specific learning relevant to grades 11 and 12, particularly students of the age 16 - 21. This includes but is not limited to credit recovery, career exploration, and limited advanced coursework.
 - **1B:** Implementation of a high school curriculum that supports all grade levels & a variety of student relevant coursework, including but not limited to career readiness programs, advanced coursework, and post secondary preparatory courses.
 - Development of elective options and pathways aligned with post secondary and career goals.
 - A full waiver from 'Offer and Teach' requirements would continue EECS' ability to be flexible in how they support student needs and student learning. Currently, EECS is exempt from 'Offer and Teach' due to only being contracted to serve students aged 16 - 21. Continuing this framework through a full waiver would allow EECS to continue our individualized support of students upon being able to include students starting at age 14.

5. Documentation

- a. The amendment is approved by the charter school governing board (meeting agenda and minutes reflecting approval of the amendment request - attachment labeled ***GBAmen***
dment Approval)
- b. A public meeting with stakeholders addressing the proposed change/s to the charter contract (attachment labeled ***PMAmen***
dment). Note that a designated public comment specific to the amendment on the governing board agenda may fulfill the public meeting requirement. Include names and roles of each individual that participated in public comment and a summary of their input.

[GBAmen](#)
[dment Approval](#)

[PMAmen](#)
[dment](#)

Iowa Charter School Amendment Request Form

Exhibit 1

The ***Iowa Charter School Amendment Request Form*** is completed by an authorized Charter School that requests consideration of a proposed contract amendment to the State Board of Education. To submit this document, make a copy and submit the completed form to charters@iowa.gov labeled: **Amendment Request Form_2024_NAME OF YOUR CHARTER.**

1. Requested Amendment

A. Cite existing contract language to be amended.	B. Provide specific proposed amended language.
<p>Section 3: Propose location section 3.1(page 8)</p> <p>Empowering Excellence Charter School's main office will be located at 1800 First Avenue NE #201 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. This location offers easy access, safety, and a welcoming atmosphere for students.</p>	<p>Proposed location: Empowering Excellence Charter School's primary physical location will be located in Cedar Rapids or within the Cedar Rapids Metropolitan area. This flexibility ensures the School can effectively adapt to meet the evolving needs of staff and students on an annual or ongoing basis.</p>

2. Rationale Describe the rationale for the language revision from 1A to 1B. Provide sufficient detail to explain the need for the amendment.

Empowering Excellence Charter School is committed to providing a superior educational environment that supports its mission of fostering academic excellence, innovation, and community engagement. The proposed amendment from citing our exact address 1800 1st Ave NE to citing our physical location will be in the Cedar Rapids or within the Cedar Rapids Metropolitan area aligns with the school's strategic goals and addresses several critical needs. Below is a detailed rationale for this transition:

Ability to Meet Student & Staff Needs

The current location at 1800 1st Ave NE inconsistently accommodates the number of students attending on a daily basis. Further, the current physical location is limited in creating effective office space for staff.

Amending the language to cite our physical location will be in Cedar Rapids or within the Cedar Rapids Metropolitan area allows the School the ability to look at other physical locations with any of the following, but not limited to increased workspace for students, increased office space for staff, and larger common areas for different School partners.

Cost Efficiency and Sustainability

Charter schools funding streams are predictable on an annual basis, however, changes in educational frameworks including resident districts adjustment to student needs affects enrollment on when projecting enrollment past one (1) - two (2) years.

Amending the language to cite our physical location will be in Cedar Rapids or within the Cedar Rapids

Metropolitan area allows the School the ability to look at other physical locations that may have but not be limited to better utility costs, improved access to reliable technology/internet access, and lease costs.

Community Engagement and Growth

In part, amending the language to cite our physical location will be in Cedar Rapids or within the Cedar Rapids Metropolitan area allows the School to continually prioritize how our physical location connects with the surrounding community. As our enrollment evolves, part of sustaining a successful Charter School is to ensure physical locations connect with the surrounding community and area.

3. **Desired Outcome** Describe the desired outcome of the amendment.

The desired outcome of amending the contract to cite our physical location will be in Cedar Rapids or within the Cedar Rapids Metropolitan area allows the School the autonomy and flexibility to meet financial, student, and school stakeholder needs responsively and effectively.

Further, this amended language formalizes the school's legal ability to change the School's physical location and still be in accordance with the contract with the State Board of Education.

4. **Best Practices** Describe how previous practices that led to the established contract language (1A) will change to support the current amended language (1B). How will the charter ensure effective implementation of the proposed amendment?

Under the current contract language, Empowering Excellence Charter School operates at the existing facility at 1800 1st Ave NE. This framework was based on the physical location's capacity, infrastructure, and location.

Amended Practices (1B):

The proposed contract amendment acknowledges the need for the School to change physical location based on the evolving needs of students, staffing, and school stakeholders.

In conversations about supporting students, staffing, and school stakeholders, the School would continue to look at a variety of options in Cedar Rapids or the Cedar Rapids Metropolitan area based on continual data and feedback on student needs, School financial needs, and deepening a connection with the community surrounding a physical location.

Included in these needs are transportation access for students, parking, and the value/cost of leasing a space that is a stand alone building or a space that is part of a larger commercial space.

Further, lease terms regarding costs and length would be more aptly able to be included in conversations with possible physical locations for the School.

5. **Documentation**

- a. The amendment is approved by the charter school governing board (meeting agenda and minutes reflecting approval of the amendment request - attachment labeled **GBAmendment Approval**)
- b. A public meeting with stakeholders addressing the proposed change/s to the charter contract (attachment labeled **PMAmendment**). Note that a designated public comment specific to the amendment on the governing board agenda may fulfill the public meeting requirement. Include names and roles of each individual that participated in public comment and a summary of their input.

[GBAmendment Approval](#)

[PMAmendment](#)

Iowa Charter School Amendment Request Form

Exhibit 1

The *Iowa Charter School Amendment Request Form* is completed by an authorized Charter School that requests consideration of a proposed contract amendment to the State Board of Education. To submit this document, make a copy and submit the completed form to charters@iowa.gov labeled: **Amendment Request Form_2024_NAME OF YOUR CHARTER.**

1. Requested Amendment

A. Cite existing contract language to be amended.	B. Provide specific proposed amended language.
<p>Section 20: Proposed Transportation, Food, Operational, and/or Ancillary Services (Page 57)</p> <p>Food Services: EECS will provide free and reduced-cost meals for kids who are unable to afford the full price of a meal through the School Board-managed National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. Under this program, children from families with incomes that are less than or equal to the eligibility requirements may be eligible for free or reduced-priced meals. Direct certification may be available to students whose families are eligible for TANF and/or food stamps and who have a social security number on file with the school. No application must be on file for students who have been granted direct certification. At the time of enrollment, we will give copies of the application forms to the parents. Applications will be accessible. Parents can complete and submit the application forms to determine their child's eligibility for free or reduced-priced meals. The school will review the applications and notify parents of their child's eligibility status within a specified timeframe.</p> <p>The presence of the school and its intention to offer food service to children from public</p>	<p>Empowering Excellence Charter School wishes to waive participation in the National School Lunch and Breakfast program for several reasons, which includes, but is not limited to the following reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Low Student Participation: Since we are an online school we have a limited number of students participating daily for in person support. With those that do attend, many are not participating in the lunch program due to bringing meals from home or other preferences, maintaining a lunch program might not be practical. 2. Financial Constraints: Setting up and operating a lunch program requires staffing, food supplies, and infrastructure. The additional staff needed to offer the lunch program creates a financial challenge for the school. 3. Facility Limitations: The school lacks the appropriate kitchen facilities, staff and/or dining space needed to run a compliant lunch program effectively. 4. Flexibility in Focus: Empowering Excellence Charter School wishes to focus more on academic programming or other specialized services and streamline non-instructional programs to reduce operational burdens.

schools in the manner outlined above will be communicated to the local health department. In order to assure compliance, the school will submit the required documentation to get a "permit to operate" and keep the required certifications and licenses. This process ensures that the school meets all health and safety standards set by the local health department. Additionally, regular inspections will be conducted to ensure ongoing compliance with food service regulations.

EECS wishes to adhere to the laws and regulations set forth by the health department and the school board. We will set aside \$3,000 for lunch supplies in the first year. Right now, we have a two-door refrigerator that has an average cost of \$3,000. Once the application is granted, various plates, dishes, and other items worth about \$500 will be bought.

EECS plans to collaborate with a Food Service Management Company to provide nutritious meals to students. The school intends to participate in the National School Nutrition Program, offering free or reduced-cost meals based on family income. EECS staff will also consider Hy-Vee Catering services as an option. Hy-Vee has quoted their services at a price of \$7.00 to \$12.00 per person. We are currently working with Aramark Foods to gather information on their catering services. When it comes to finding and choosing a food service provider management business, EECS will work in tandem with the Bureau of Health and Nutrition at the Iowa Department of Education. EECS will hire a catering firm in accordance with the predetermined procedures and schedule.

2. **Rationale** Describe the rationale for the language revision from 1A to 1B. Provide sufficient detail to explain the need for the amendment.

Stepping away from a lunch program, such as the federally funded National School Lunch Program (NSLP), is a significant decision for Empowering Excellence Charter School. It involved careful consideration of financial, operational, and educational factors. Below are reasons why EECS have made the decision to withdraw and waive the desire to offer a lunch program:

1. Regulatory Constraints

- **Administrative Burden:** The program involves extensive paperwork and reporting. For a smaller or charter school, managing these requirements can strain resources.

2. Financial Considerations

- **Alternative Funding:** The school may identify other funding sources or community partnerships that provide greater flexibility or financial efficiency.

3. **Desired Outcome** Describe the desired outcome of the amendment.

To waive the requirement of creating a school lunch program through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast program.

4. **Best Practices** Describe how previous practices that led to the established contract language (1A) will change to support the current amended language (1B). How will the charter ensure effective implementation of the proposed amendment?

The established contract language (1A) at Empowering Excellence Charter School reflects practices for providing free & reduced meals for students who are unable to afford the full prices of a meal. With the proposed amendment to waive participation in the National School Lunch & Breakfast program, the school is further prioritizing its goals on supporting high school students in their academic and general supports by reallocating resources towards these goals and allowing school flexibility.

How Practices Will Change to Support Amended Language (1B)

1. School Nutrition with regard to Student Support

- Reallocate current staff time and efforts previously devoted to the administrative requirements of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)—such as documentation, reporting, and compliance monitoring—to initiatives further supporting students' overall well-being and academic progress.

5. **Documentation**

- a. The amendment is approved by the charter school governing board (meeting agenda and minutes reflecting approval of the amendment request - attachment labeled **GBAmendment Approval**)
- b. A public meeting with stakeholders addressing the proposed change/s to the charter contract (attachment labeled **PMAmendment**). Note that a designated public comment specific to the amendment on the governing board agenda may fulfill the public meeting requirement. Include names and roles of each individual that participated in public comment and a summary of their input.

[GBAmendment Approval](#)

[PMAmendment](#)

Empowering Excellence Charter School
Board Meeting Minutes, December 19, 2024

- I. **Lauren White, Board Chair** called the meeting to order at 4:32 p.m.

- II. **Roll call—Carol Gorman, Board Secretary.**
 - A. Present: Lauren White, Board Chair; Joe Nguyen, Board Vice-Chair; Tom Darden, Finance Chair; Maurice Carol Gorman, Board Secretary; Sarah Swayze, Executive Director, Dee Swayze, LaToya Harrington
 - B. Absent: Maurice Davis

- III. **Board Chair—no report**

- IV. **Community Feed back (No one joined the link provided)**

- V. **Presenting Agenda: Lauren White**

- VI. The President opened the meeting to the public at 4:30 P.M. and closed it to the public at 4:50 with no public feedback.

- VII. **President close meeting to the public at 5:15 pm**
 - A. Sarah directed the board to retrieve the documents on amendments provided to them four days prior to the meeting. She explained that the meeting's purpose was to vote on amending Empowering Excellence Charter School's application in three areas: expanding services, withdrawing from the National Lunch Program, and relocating.

B. LaToya H. questioned how enrolling younger students aligns with the school's mission, which focuses on supporting students who are struggling academically. After a ten-minute discussion, the board agreed to add a provision stating: "If students are not coming from organizations such as Tanager Place or Four Oaks, they must provide evidence of not succeeding in a public-school setting." The amendment was promptly updated during the meeting and resubmitted to the board. The motion for approval was made by Thomas Darden, seconded by Joseph Nguyen, and subsequently approved by the board.

C. Sarah then presented the next proposed amendment to the board, which involved discontinuing participation in the National School Lunch Program. She explained that Empowering Excellence Charter School lacks the staff and resources necessary to meet the program's requirements. Joe Nguyen added that there is a possibility the government could deny the school's application if it continues to attempt participation without meeting the standards, potentially resulting in greater financial losses. He suggested exploring alternative methods to provide meals for students. After discussing other options, the board voted to approve the amendment to withdraw from the National School Lunch Program. The motion was made by Lauren White and seconded by Thomas Darden subsequently approved by the board..

D. Finally, Sarah presented the last proposed amendment, which involved relocating from 1800 1st Ave NE #201 to a larger facility. She explained that the move was necessary due to increasing enrollment numbers, the need to hire additional staff, and a request from the bank to vacate the current location. A motion to approve the relocation was made by Dee Swayze and seconded by Joe Nguyen subsequently approved by the board.

VIII. Meeting adjourned at 5:28 p.m.