

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

January 15, 2026

Agenda Item: Charter School Application – Future Frontiers

State Board

Goal: Goal 5

State Board

Role/Authority:

The State Board of Education is the sole authorizer of Iowa charter schools Iowa Code section 256E.1(4).

Presenter(s):

Barbara Ohlund, Executive Officer 4
Division of PK-12 Learning

Ryan Cunningham, Superintendent
Sumner-Fredericksburg Community School District

Beth Weepie, School Business Officer
Sumner-Fredericksburg Community School District

Attachment(s): One

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board approve authorization of Future Frontiers without conditions as per the recommendation summary.

Background:

Iowa Code chapter 256E established charter school law, where both local school boards and founding groups may apply to the State Board for approval to establish and operate a charter school. Charter schools, under this law, are a part of the state's program of public education. Future Frontiers applied under the school board–State Board model by the deadline specified in Iowa Administrative Code chapter 19 (November 1, or the following Monday if the date falls on a weekend). In accordance with statutory requirements, Department staff have reviewed and scored the application, conducted a capacity interview with the applicant and attended a public forum hosted by the applicant.

Futures Frontiers

Review Team Recommendation: Approve

Charter Overview

Location: Fredericksburg

Grades: 9-12

School Board Model: Sumner-Fredericksburg Community School District

Opening Year for Students: 2026-2027

Academic Program

- Highly individualized learning model with 40% of the day focused on hybrid academics and 60% dedicated to work-based learning.
- Students complete an annual capstone project that synthesizes their learning by presenting the project to peers, educators and community members.
- Concern:** To obtain a high degree of individualization, the intended programming requires a high volume of strategic partnerships and agreements from surrounding communities, districts and employers.

Operations Plan

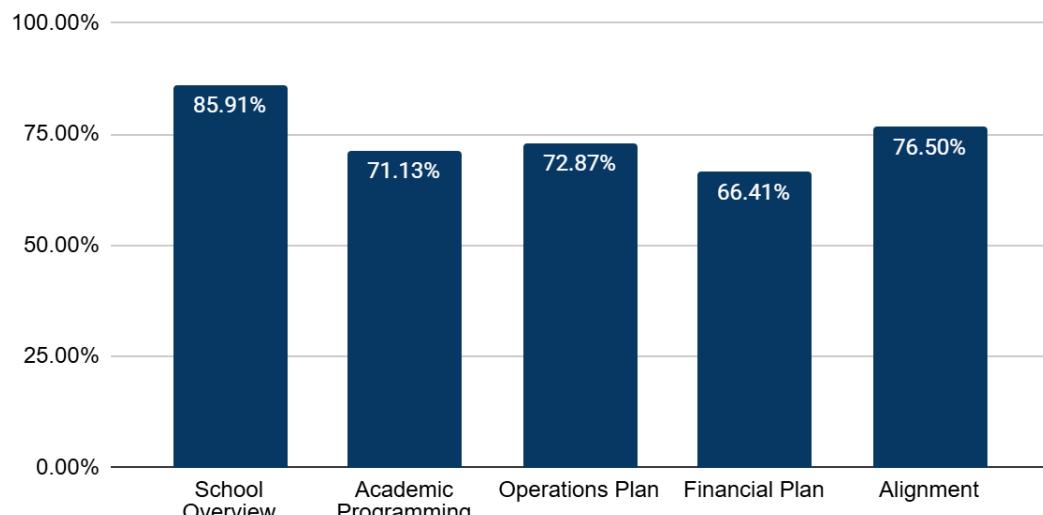
- The staffing plan includes: a director of teaching and learning, a director of operations, director of outreach and school business official. Teaching positions will be offered via stipends.
- The student recruitment plan maintains focus on the needs of rural students, specifically in the Sumner-Fredericksburg community.
- Concern:** Enrollment territory is scheduled to expand significantly in year two of operation after projecting an initial year of 30 students.

Financial Plan

- Future Frontiers will use unspent Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) dollars to finance the school startup costs.
- The founding group presented evidence of a realistic and viable five-year budget.

Future Frontiers

Application Review Team Scores



Innovative Model Description

- The curriculum provides students with the opportunity to complete up to five six-week internships per year to explore their passions and identify potential long-term career paths.
- Students receive mentoring from one of the school's three directors. Mentors assist students in crafting personalized learning paths that align with their career interests and postsecondary aspirations.
- Employability skills and core competencies are strongly emphasized and supported throughout student programming.

Environmental Scan and Summary of Need

- Fifty-two attendees were at the public forum both online and in-person.
- Programming focuses on growing work-based learning opportunities and reducing geographic barriers impacting rural students' access to these opportunities.
- The application included eight letters of support, including letters from the Fredericksburg City Council, Fredericksburg Community Development Corporation and the work-based learning consultants that are assisting with the school's launch.

Requested Waivers

Provision of Iowa Code section 256.7(21) and the required Offer and Teach educational standards of Iowa Code section 256.11

- Future Frontiers wants to offer highly individualized academic programming where web-live/asynchronous instruction, accredited concurrent enrollment, approved third-party providers and verified work-based learning can all count toward high school credit and Offer and Teach requirements.

Provision of instruction for at least the number of days or hours required by Iowa Code section 279.10(1)

- Highly individualized academic programming potentially requires more than five days/30 hours of primarily virtual instruction in a school year based on student interest and need.

Five-Year Projections	Year One 2026-27	Year Two 2027-28	Year Three 2028-29	Year Four 2029-30	Year Five 2030-31
Projected Staff	6.50	7.50	9.60	14.60	17.70
Projected Enrollment	30	52	85	160	220
Total Revenue	\$258,618.08	\$452,754.04	\$747,479.51	\$1,421,090.46	\$1,973,539.38
Total Expenditures	\$499,491.00	\$552,460.50	\$646,546.60	\$807,234.00	\$1,066,656.40
Net Revenue/Expenditures	\$(240,872.92)	\$(99,706.46)	\$100,932.91	\$613,856.46	\$906,882.98
Prior Year Surplus/Deficit		\$(240,872.92)	\$(340,579.38)	\$(239,646.47)	\$374,209.99
Remaining Balance	\$(240,872.92)	\$(340,579.38)	\$(239,646.47)	\$374,209.99	\$1,281,092.97

Note: The remaining balance total for years three to five is different on the summary than what is in the application itself as the Department of Education corrected the summary for the carryover balances year over year.