

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

January 15, 2026

Agenda Item: Charter School Application – Horizon Science Academy
Cedar Rapids

**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

Christopher Murphy, Chief Growth and Strategy Officer
and Iowa Superintendent
Concept Schools

Amy Nolte, Director of Teaching and Learning, Iowa
Region
Concept Schools

Lisa Lepic, Governing Board Member
Horizon Science Academy Cedar Rapids

Attachment(s): One

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board approve
authorization of Horizon Science Academy Cedar Rapids
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.
Horizon Science Academy Cedar Rapids applied under
the founding group–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.

Horizon Science Academy Cedar Rapids

Review Team Recommendation: Approve

Charter Overview

Location: Cedar Rapids

Grades: K-9

Education Service Provider: Concept Schools

Opening Year for Students: 2026-2027

Academic Program

- The school uses standards-based, college-preparatory curriculum with emphasis in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and Universal Design for Learning.
- Instructional practices integrate a variety of evidence-based teaching methods alongside problem/project-based learning and technology integration.
- The school uses STEM related extracurriculars, including robotics, codeathon and the opportunity to participate in the annual Concept Schools' Science and Engineering Fair.

Operations Plan

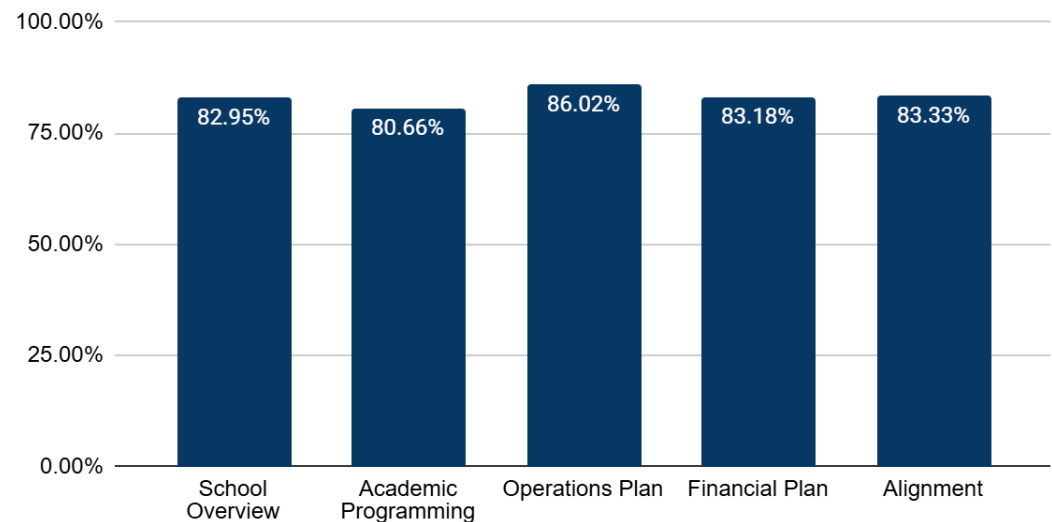
- The founding group includes expertise from an experienced Iowa-based director of teaching and learning and from a national charter management organization: Concept Schools.
- Concept Schools has experience operating 41 charter schools in seven states, including schools in Des Moines and Davenport.
- The application outlines a clear professional development plan, including an annual governing board retreat and tuition reimbursement for teachers pursuing further education.

Financial Plan

- Concept Schools will provide Horizon Science Academy Cedar Rapids a zero-interest loan to support the necessary pre-operational costs.
- Horizon Science Academy Cedar Rapids plans on utilizing two Charter Schools Program (CSP) grants to finance the school: their own CSP grant awarded in September 2025 and the federal CSP Grant Program through the Iowa Department of Education.
- The founding group presented evidence of a realistic and viable five-year budget.

Horizon Science Academy Cedar Rapids

Application Review Team Scores



Innovative Model Description

- The curricular focus is on STEM with available STEM certification for students and career and technical education programs such as Project Lead the Way.
- The Concept Young Scholars Program (CYSP) is designed to improve students' academic success and prepare them for college and beyond.
- The Concept College Readiness Program which starts in middle school prepares students for college.

Environmental Scan and Summary of Need

- Community outreach included meetings with Cedar Rapids Mayor Tiffany O'Donnell and representatives from the Catherine McAuley Center.
- Future plans include community surveys, open meetings, focus groups and meetings with various civic, nonprofit and business partners, including Four Oaks Family and Children's Services and the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance.

Requested Waivers

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

- Horizon Science Academy Cedar Rapids will implement a phase-in model, offering 9th grade in the fifth year of its initial charter.
- Horizon Science Academy Cedar Rapids intends to submit its plan to meet Offer and Teach requirements by the end-of-year three of the initial charter.

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	19	22	27	35	48
Projected Enrollment	140	185	240	295	365
Total Revenue	\$2,464,760.33	\$2,672,793.02	\$3,368,394.89	\$4,014,815.59	\$4,845,487.09
Total Expenditures	\$2,213,666.00	\$2,448,006.36	\$2,997,624.87	\$3,785,068.99	\$5,045,960.95
Net Revenue/Expenditures	\$251,094.33	\$224,786.66	\$370,770.02	\$229,746.60	\$(200,473.86)
Prior Year Surplus/Deficit		\$251,094.33	\$475,880.99	\$846,651.01	\$1,076,397.61
Remaining Balance	\$251,094.33	\$475,880.99	\$846,651.01	\$1,076,397.61	\$875,923.75