

# Iowa State Board of Education

## Executive Summary

January 15, 2026

**Agenda Item:** Charter School Application – STEM Innovation High School

**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

Vickie Murillo, Superintendent  
Council Bluffs Community School District

Tracy Mathews, Chief Academic Officer  
Council Bluffs Community School District

Melissa Comine, Chief of Secondary Schools  
Council Bluffs Community School District

**Attachment(s):** One

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the State Board approve authorization of STEM Innovation High School 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. STEM Innovation High School 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.

# STEM Innovation High School

## Review Team Recommendation: Approve

### Charter Overview

**Location:** Council Bluffs

**Grades:** 9-12

**School Board Model:** Council Bluffs Community School District

**Opening Year for Students:** 2027-2028

### Academic Program

- The school uses an interdisciplinary project-based learning environment where students integrate academic standards and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) applications to solve authentic real-world problems.
- The school uses planned extra-curriculars that are aligned with the charter vision such as robotics, coding, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship clubs.

### Operations Plan

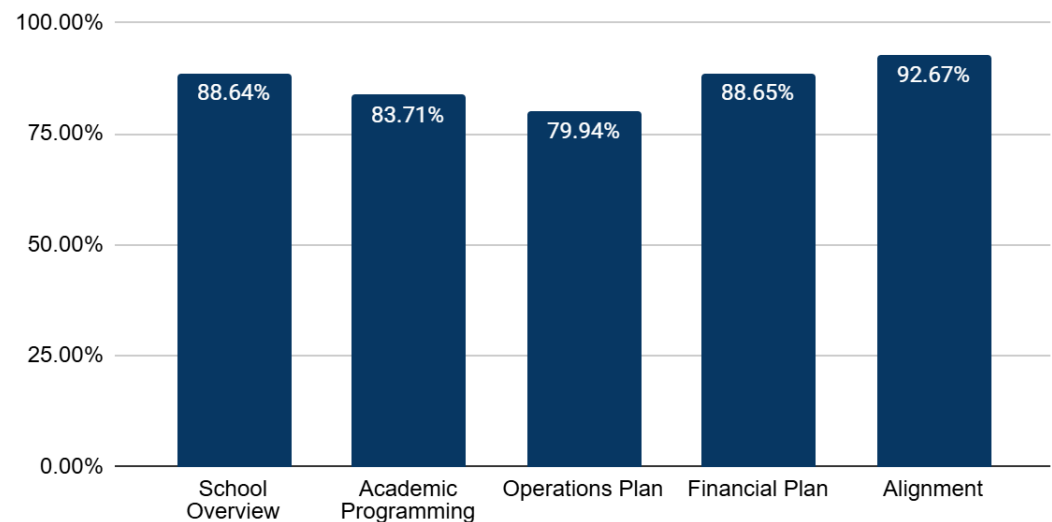
- The founding group plans to construct a state-of-the art facility that includes flexible lab spaces, a robotics and drone area, AI coding hub and creative design studios.
- The founding group possesses extensive expertise in establishing community partnerships and innovative educational practices.
- Council Bluffs Community School District Board of Education will also serve as the charter school's governing board.

### Financial Plan

- The founding group has received \$24 million from foundations and private donors.
- The founding group anticipates that approximately 10% of the students attending the school will be tuition-paying residents of Nebraska.
- The founding group presented evidence of a realistic and viable five-year budget.

### STEM Innovation High School

#### Application Review Team Scores



## Innovative Model Description

- The school emphasizes STEM.
- The school uses real-world problem-solving and community partnerships based on workforce needs and community aspirations.

## Environmental Scan and Summary of Need

- The founding group collected and analyzed social, technological, economic, environmental and political data in the Omaha-Council Bluffs region.
- The founding group administered parent and student surveys to gather feedback regarding a proposed STEM high school.
- The founding group fostered strategic partnerships with community and technology leaders, including Council Bluffs Mayor Matt Walsh and Google executives in Council Bluffs.

## Requested Waivers

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

- The academic programming requires greater flexibility in course delivery, instructional time and interdisciplinary integration of the Iowa Academic Standards in order to implement the school's innovative, project-based learning model.

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

- The academic programming features a restructured total learning time to accommodate for personalized and experiential learning opportunities, integrating classroom instruction, project-based learning and off-site experiences.

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	1	29	36	40	40
Projected Enrollment	0	150	225	300	300
Total Revenue	\$200,000.00	\$2,508,161.71	\$3,434,362.98	\$3,882,326.15	\$3,919,853.41
Total Expenditures	\$186,000.00	\$2,403,930.00	\$3,066,915.00	\$3,818,675.00	\$3,908,029.00
Net Revenue/Expenditures	\$14,000.00	\$104,231.71	\$367,447.98	\$63,651.15	\$11,824.41
Prior Year Surplus/Deficit		\$14,000.00	\$118,231.71	\$485,679.69	\$549,330.84
Remaining Balance	\$14,000.00	\$118,231.71	\$485,679.69	\$549,330.84	\$561,155.25

**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.