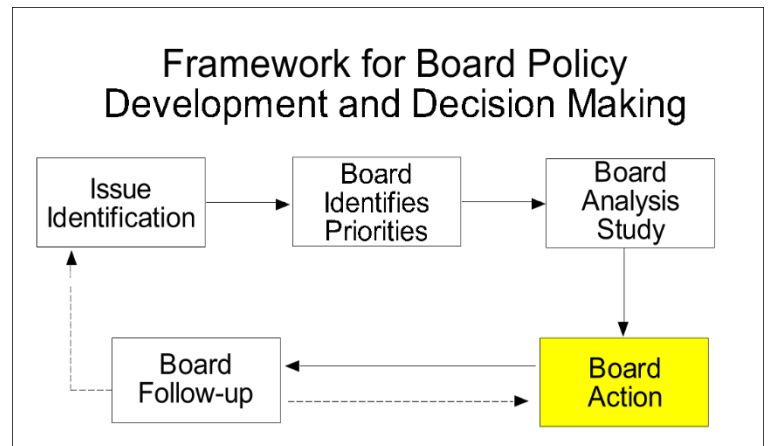


Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

January 11, 2024



- Agenda Item:** CIVICA Cedar Rapids Elementary Charter School
- State Board Priority:** All
- State Board Role/Authority:** Per Iowa Administrative Code 256E, the State Board shall approve or deny a charter school application.
- Presenter(s):** Tina Wahlert, Chief
Bureau of School Improvement
- Janet A. Boyd, Consultant
Bureau of School Improvement
- Attachment(s):** One
- Recommendation:** It is recommended that the State Board approve the charter with or without conditions per the Application Summary.
- Background:** Iowa Code 256E established a 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. CIVICA Cedar Rapids Charter applied under the founding group-state board model. Iowa Administrative Rule chapter 19 states that in order to operate a charter school for the 2024-2025 school year, applications are due no later than

November 1, 2023, and the CIVICA Cedar Rapids Charter application was received prior to the deadline. Department staff have scored the charter school application, completed an interview with the applicant, and attended a public forum with residents, all of which are required components of the application.



January 11, 2024

CIVICA Cedar Rapids Elementary Charter School Application

Background

[Iowa Code 256E](#) established a new charter school law in Iowa that affirmed charter schools shall be a part of the state's public education system. The law allows for two different charter models; the school board-state board model and the founding group-state board model. In conjunction with Iowa Code 256E, the Iowa State Board of Education has also approved [Iowa Administrative Rule Chapter 19](#). Chapter 19 establishes specific application deadlines, additional performance criteria, and finance modifications for charter schools. The deadline established in Chapter 19 to submit an application to open a charter school during the 2024-25 school year was November 1, 2023 11:59 pm.

The Iowa Department of Education (Department) received a founding group-state board model application from CIVICA Cedar Rapids. The applicant was notified via email the application was received before the deadline and was under review.

Applicant Overview

As indicated in the application, CIVICA Cedar Rapids is committed to the following outcomes:

- *Delivering increased learning opportunities for all students, by providing a challenging curriculum within a nurturing and quality learning environment;*
- *Expecting and encouraging that all students will realize their highest academic potential, especially in the core subjects of language arts, mathematics, science and social studies;*
- *Matching or surpassing the average student academic performance of the local district in all required state accountability tests;*
- *Seeking out, establishing, and maintaining sound, mutually beneficial partnerships with local higher education and civic institutions to provide a wide array of educational opportunities outside of the immediate classroom; and*
- *Creating leadership opportunities for students at all levels.*

CIVICA Cedar Rapids provided their mission and vision for the proposed charter as:

Mission: CIVICA's mission is to set an environment that strives for academic achievement, character formation, and college & career readiness.

Vision: Students will strive for academic achievement, character development, and will serve and give back to their community.

Details regarding grades served, target population, location, opening date and requested waivers are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. CIVICA Cedar Rapids Details

Grade Levels	Target Population	Proposed location	Opening date	Waivers requested
K-5	Serve all interested students/families in Cedar Rapids area	Cedar Rapids	August 2025	None

Application Review Process

Iowa Code 256E.5 subsection 5 states:

In reviewing and evaluating charter school applications, the state board shall employ procedures, practices, and criteria consistent with nationally recognized principles and standards for reviewing charter school applications. Each application review shall include thorough evaluation of the written application, an in-person interview with the applicant, and an opportunity in a public forum for local residents of the public school district within which the applicant proposes to locate the charter school to learn about and provide input on each application.

The Department completed the following to adhere to the requirements of Code 256E.5:

1. [Implemented a Review Process](#) to review each submitted application using the Charter School Scoring Rubric aligned to Iowa Code 256E.
2. [Conducted an Interview Process](#) based on the application review results, and aligned with Iowa Code 256E.
3. [Supported a Public Forum](#) within the community identified within the application.

Review Process

The Department organized each application for review, and selected reviewers based on expertise in the bureaus of School Improvement and School Business Operations. Reviewer training was conducted on November 6, 2023 that included a review of Iowa Code 256E and an extensive discussion of each required component of the written application. Reviewers were assigned applications to review using the Charter School Scoring Rubric based on a three-point likert scale aligned to Iowa Code 256E.

In addition, on November 8, 2023 the Department conducted an applicant webinar with slide presentation to define the parameters of the interview and public forum. The webinar was recorded and provided to all applicants.

A summary of CIVICA's strengths, challenges and average reviewer score is provided below.

Strengths

The following items were identified by Department staff as strengths - CIVICA Cedar Rapids provides:

- A strong commitment in making community connections;
- A focus on giving back to the community;
- An understanding of charter budgets as demonstrated by their submitted comprehensive budget; and
- Documented success in operating successful charter schools in Florida, Colorado, and Nevada.

Challenges

The following items were identified by Department staff as challenges - CIVICA Cedar Rapids:

- The charter lacks community support/interest at this time;

- There is no evidence provided that families have an interest in enrolling their students in the charter school; and
- Facilities need to be secured.

Average Reviewer Score

The average reviewer score for CIVICA Cedar Rapids is 51.2 with a range of 52-59. The reviewer score summary is available upon request. Note that the rubric is on a 3-point likert scale where, in general:

- 0=item is not addressed
- 1=item is addressed as intended
- 2=item is addressed as intended, and the applicant provided additional information

*There are 48 possible items to rate on the scoring rubric, however 3 of these items are not required that an applicant address. If an applicant scores a 1 at a minimum across each scored item, the maximum points possible is a total average score of 45.

Interview Process

The Department conducted interviews with each applicant. Each question was based on Iowa Code 256E, as well as on the results of the application review. Therefore, each applicant was asked a series of common questions, with additional applicant-specific questions. A schedule of the interview is provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2. In person interview with applicant

Founding Group/Department participants	Date	Location	Questions
Founding Group: Frankie Mestre, Graciela Carbajosa, Carlos Alvarez Department: Janet Boyd, Barbara Ohlund, Stacie Stokes	November 29, 2023 8:00 pm - 10:00 am	Grimes State Office Building, 400 E 14th St, Des Moines, IA	Questions were based on the purposes outlined in 256E and any additional questions from the application. A summary of the interview is available upon request.

Public Forum

The Department supported public forums for each applicant. Two department staff were present at each public forum. All forums were recorded. Details of CIVICA’s public forum are provided in Tables 3-4 below.

Table 3. Public Forum for local residents

Founding Group/Department participants	Date	Location	Public Present
Founding Group: Frankie Mestre, Graciela Carbajosa, Carlos Alvarez Department: Janet Boyd, Barbara Ohlund	November 30, 2023 5:00 pm - 6:00 pm	Cedar Rapids Public Library- Downtown 450 5th SE Cedar Rapids, IA	Iowa Coalition for Public Charter Schools: Mike Huguelet Public Members: 0

Table 4. Public Forum Notice

Date that the applicant requested the public notice.	How did the charter applicant notify the public?	Evidence of public notice.
11/22/2023	The Gazette Newspaper	https://drive.google.com/open?id=15G0EKnBjxzVmb54sGKbMJX6PQdAEQTd1

Recommendation

CIVICA Cedar Rapids Elementary Charter School received an average score of 51.2 across the required components in Iowa Code 256E. The applicant responded affirmatively to all of the assurances and conditions in the charter school application. The applicant did not request any waivers. The submitted calendar indicates a start date prior to the required August 23rd date, legal counsel advises the applicant is exempt from Iowa Code 279.10 (1). It is recommended that the State Board approve the charter, with or without conditions.

Conditions:

In accordance with Iowa Code 256E.5 subsection 8. The state board shall approve a charter school application if the application satisfies the requirements of this chapter. The state board shall approve or deny a charter school application no later than seventy-five calendar days after the application is received. If the state board denies an application, the state board shall provide notice of denial to the applicant in writing within thirty days after board action. The notice shall specify the exact reasons for denial and provide documentation supporting those reasons. An approval decision may include, if appropriate, reasonable conditions that the applicant must meet before a charter school contract may be executed pursuant to section 256E.6. An approved charter application shall not serve as a charter school contract.

Potential Conditions:

- Provide documentation to the Department of Education as requested.
- Meet with the Department of Education as requested.
- Attend required meetings with Student Reporting and School Business consultants.
- Provide any other items needed or requested by the Iowa State Board of Education.