

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

January 11, 2024



- Agenda Item:** Quest Forward Charter School Cedar Rapids
- 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. Quest Forward Cedar Rapids Charter School 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 Quest Forward

Cedar Rapids Charter School 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

Quest Forward Charter School Cedar Rapids 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 school 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 Quest Forward 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, Quest Forward Cedar Rapids has a strong commitment to delivering a comprehensive education. The clear focus is on work-based learning experiences with career/college connections through the Pathways curriculum/framework, as well as technology/digital creativity. Quest Forward Cedar Rapids provided their vision for the proposed charter as:

A school where each student is challenged to take ownership of their lives and education as they learn to fully harness all resources available. A school that is not a walled garden but a launching pad propelling students into outside learning opportunities such as dual enrollment, internships, and career technical education. A school that prepares each student to succeed in a path of their choosing and to continue learning, adapting, and contributing in a dynamic and personally fulfilling future. A school that produces capable citizens, who are active members of, and participants in, their community and country.

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

Table 1. Quest Forward Details

| Grade Levels | Target Population | Proposed location | Opening date | Waivers requested |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| 6-12 | All students in a diverse population | 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 Quest Forward's strengths, challenges and average reviewer score is provided below.

Strengths

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

- A strong understanding of MTSS and how to use data to inform instruction;
- A commitment to active learning through a Skills-Forward Focus and designing lessons with effective feedback;
- An understanding of charter budgets - the submitted budget is very detailed and comprehensive; and
- Documented success of Academica operating successful charter schools in Florida.

Challenges

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

- Lacks community support/interest at this time;
- Provides no evidence that families have an interest in enrolling their students in the charter school; and
- Needs to secure facilities.

Average Reviewer Score

The average reviewer score for Quest Forward Cedar Rapids is 63.52 with a range of 63-67. 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: Mike Brown, Ray Ravaglia, Kat Fuente, Frankie Mestre Department: Janet Boyd, Barbara Ohlund, Stacie Stokes | November 30, 2023 8:00 am - 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 Quest Forward’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: Mike Brown, Ray Ravaglia, Kat Fuente, Frankie Mestre Department: Janet Boyd, Stacie Stokes | November 30, 2023 6:00 pm - 7:00 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=11R9DiMrRsNhClpfHFnjwQnZEoMCFVnGO |

Recommendation

Quest Forward Cedar Rapids received an average score of 63.52 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.