

**Synergy Cyber Charter School
Revised 2013 Cyber Charter School Application**

Background

Pursuant to the Charter School Law (CSL), 24 P.S. §§ 17-1701-A – 17-1751-A, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (“Department”) has the authority and responsibility to receive, review and act on applications for the establishment of a cyber charter school. A cyber charter school applicant must submit its application to the Department by October 1 of the school year preceding the school year in which the applicant proposes to commence operation. After submission of an application, the Department is required to hold at least one public hearing and grant or deny the application within 120 days of its receipt. A cyber charter school has a one-time opportunity to revise and resubmit a denied application to the Department. To allow sufficient time for the Department to review the revised application, the revised application must be received by the Department at least 120 days prior to the original proposed opening date for the cyber charter school.

The Synergy Cyber Charter School (Synergy) timely submitted an application to operate a cyber charter school (Application). The Department provided 30 days notice of a public hearing held on November 21, 2013. The Department issued a decision to deny Synergy’s Application on January 23, 2014 (January 23, 2014 Decision). Synergy timely submitted a revised application on May 2, 2014 (Revised Application).

Decision

Based on a thorough review, the Department denies Synergy’s Revised Application. Deficiencies were identified in the following areas:

- Application Requirements
- Governance
- Sustainable Support
- Use of Physical Facilities
- Technology
- Special Education
- English as a Second Language
- Finance
- Professional Development/Teacher Induction

A cyber charter applicant must demonstrate: sustainable support for the cyber charter school plan by teachers, parents or guardians and students; the capability, in terms of support and planning, to provide comprehensive learning experiences to students under the charter; that the programs outlined in the application will enable students to meet the academic standards under 22 Pa. Code Ch. 4; that the application meets the requirements of section 1747-A of the CSL; and, the extent to which the cyber charter school may serve as a model for other public schools. Synergy failed to provide sufficient information to demonstrate that its Revised Application should be granted.

I. The applicant failed to comply with application requirements.

(a) *The applicant failed to provide sufficient information regarding the suspension and expulsion of pupils.*

A cyber charter applicant must include procedures that the school will use regarding the suspension or expulsion of pupils.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy failed to sufficiently address the suspension and expulsion of students, including the type of conduct that warrants suspension or expulsion.

Synergy included a Discipline Policy in its Revised Application; however, the Department identified deficiencies with this policy. Synergy cites to section 1317 of the Public School Code regarding authority over students attending school and going to and from their homes to school. However, cyber charter schools are not subject to this provision of the Public School Code. In addition, the policy contains provisions from Wakisha Charter School's 2013-2014 Family Handbook, such as lunchroom procedures and discipline measures of detention, Saturday Academy, and in-school suspension. These provisions are suitable for the operations of a brick and mortar school, but not for a cyber school. The policy also prohibits parents from stopping their child's teacher outside of the school building or going to the classroom to discuss a concern, which are also indicative of policies for a brick and mortar school. Finally, the policy provides Wakisha Charter School's telephone number as the telephone number to Synergy's main office that should be used to leave a message with a teacher.

(b) *The applicant failed to provide sufficient information regarding involvement of community groups.*

A cyber charter applicant must provide information on the manner in which community groups are involved in the charter school planning process.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy failed to explain how the community would assist in planning and implementing programs.

In its Revised Application, Synergy included a letter that was going to be sent to a number of organizations to introduce the school and request the organizations' support. However, the letter requests the organizations' assistance with student recruitment, not with educational programs, such as internships, community service, career fairs, classes or field trips. Thus, this form letter asking for assistance with student recruitment does not provide information about the manner in which community groups are involved in the charter school planning process.

II. The applicant failed to submit sufficient evidence of proper governance and of the necessary support and planning to provide a comprehensive learning experience to students.

- (a) The applicant did not submit sufficient evidence that it will be governed and enter into agreements in compliance with applicable legal requirements.*

A cyber charter applicant must comply with federal and state laws relating to the operation of a charter school and nonprofit entity, including those prohibiting conflicts of interest and creating duties and responsibilities for members of the board of trustees, administrators and employees.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy failed to provide lease arrangements associated with its administrative office. An executed lease was not required, but information about proposed facilities, such as letters of intent, documentation concerning the ownership of potential properties or any lease arrangements associated with the office.

In its Revised Application, Synergy included a letter of intent to lease facilities at 222 Keswick Avenue, Glenside, PA 19038. However, the letter of intent indicated that this space is owned by numerous LLC entities of which Michael Whisman and Ryan Schumm are individual investors. In the Revised Application, Michael Whisman is identified as a Synergy "team leader" and his resume is included in Appendix C. Michael Whisman is also the founder and one-half of the leadership team of Charter Choices, Inc. Ryan Schumm is the other half of the leadership team of Charter Choices, Inc. Charter Choices, Inc. is the entity with which Synergy is contracting to provide financial services. Thus, the Department is concerned about the potential conflict of interest created by Michael Whisman being a "team leader" of Synergy, a founder and leader of Charter Choices, Inc., and an investor in the facility to be used as Synergy's administrative office. The Department is also concerned about the potential conflict of interest created by Ryan Schumm, who is a leader of Charter Choices, Inc. and an investor in the facility to be used as Synergy's administrative office.

In addition, Synergy stated in its Revised Application that the school's founders will not serve on the board and that no one who participated in the development of the school will become a board member or contractor to the school absent a competitive process defined and executed by the board. However, Synergy failed to provide an explanation of the competitive process and to produce any information to demonstrate that it followed a competitive process prior to entering into an agreement with Charter Choices, Inc. In addition, Synergy failed to provide information to demonstrate that it will follow a competitive process prior to entering into a lease for its facilities.

III. The applicant failed to submit evidence that it has the demonstrated, sustainable support for the cyber charter school plan and the necessary support and planning to provide a comprehensive learning experience to students.

A cyber charter applicant must submit evidence that it has the demonstrated, sustainable support for the cyber charter school plan and the necessary support and planning to provide a comprehensive learning experience to students. "[S]ustainable support means support sufficient

to sustain and maintain the proposed charter school as an on-going entity.” *In Re: Ronald H. Brown Charter School*, CAB 1999-1, p. 18. The indicia of support are to be measured in the aggregate rather than by individual categories. *Id.* The Department looks for letters or other indications of support from teachers, parents or guardians and students submitted with the application.

The Department’s January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy only included a copy of a petition of support with 35 signatures for its cyber charter school plan, which failed to demonstrate support for the cyber charter school plan and necessary support and planning to provide a comprehensive learning experience to students.

In its Revised Application, Synergy stated that it has compiled a group of individuals who are life-long educators, advocates for choice in education, and service providers who have been involved with the charter school community since the inception in 1997. However, Synergy did not specify the number of individuals within this group, identify the individuals themselves, or produce any evidence of their support. Synergy also suggested that the petition of support that it submitted with its Application demonstrates more support than the 35 parents who signed the petition when counting the children of these parents. With Synergy’s first year enrollment anticipated to be 325 students, one petition of support that contains signatures of 35 parents who have a total of 65 children does not demonstrate sustainable support for the cyber charter school plan and the necessary support and planning to provide a comprehensive learning experience for students.

IV. The applicant failed to provide sufficient information to establish that it will operate as a cyber charter school and use physical school facilities in a proper manner.

A cyber charter school must be able to function and provide all curriculum and instruction to all of its students without the need for students to attend any physical facility designated by the cyber charter school. A cyber charter school may only use a physical facility as an administrative office or as a resource center for providing no more than supplemental services to students and shall provide equitable access to such services for all students enrolled in the school. The cyber charter school must also be able to demonstrate the ability to enroll students from across the state and provide all services to those students in a materially consistent way, regardless of where they reside.

The Department’s January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy was not clear as to whether the school will properly utilize physical facilities to provide students with supplementary services.

In its Revised Application, Synergy stated that the school will have arrangements whereby students will be able to visit the local library or intermediate unit (IU) that is closest to the student’s home to the extent that there will be a need for students to visit a physical facility. Synergy failed to explain the types of needs that may warrant students visiting local libraries or IUs for the Department to verify that the school will use physical facilities for only supplemental services. In addition, Synergy did not provide any evidence that it made any preliminary contact

with libraries or IUs to ascertain whether such facilities would be available for providing supplemental services.

Synergy also stated that all students in the school would have comparable access to these physical facilities. However, students must be provided equitable access to the services being provided at physical facilities—not the physical facilities themselves—to ensure students who cannot or chose not to go to the physical facilities have equitable access to the supplemental services being provided at the physical facilities. Synergy’s statement in its Revised Application is not evidence that Synergy’s students will have comparable access to services.

V. The applicant failed to provide sufficient information to demonstrate compliance with technology requirements applicable to and necessarily part of the operation of a cyber charter school.

A cyber charter applicant must demonstrate compliance with technology requirements applicable to and necessarily part of the operation of a cyber charter school.

(a) The applicant failed to provide a damage/repair policy that addresses procedures and financial responsibility.

A cyber charter school is required to provide each student enrolled with all equipment necessary for the student’s participation in the school, including a computer, monitor and printer. In order to ensure a continued, comprehensive learning experience for its students, a cyber charter school must have policies and procedures to address the financial responsibilities and procedures for the quick and convenient repair and/or replacement of equipment that has been damaged or stolen.

The Department’s January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy failed to include any policies regarding financial responsibility for damaged and stolen equipment.

In its Revised Application, although Synergy stated that the school’s budget assumes a 50% replacement of student computers each year, Synergy did not explain whether the school and/or parents would be financially responsible for damaged and stolen equipment and to what extent.

VI. The applicant failed to demonstrate that it was prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

A cyber charter school must comply with federal and state requirements applicable to educating students with disabilities. A cyber charter applicant must describe the provision of education and related services to students with disabilities.

(a) The applicant failed to demonstrate that it has reasonable knowledge of the requirements for providing special education programs and services.

A cyber charter applicant must have a general understanding of the special education program design, process, service delivery and implementation. A cyber charter applicant must demonstrate the ability to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) by having written

policies and procedures, or a narrative that reasonably address the implementation of federal and state special education requirements.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy failed to demonstrate an understanding of the process and implementation associated with each stage of a special education program. In addition, the Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy failed to submit policies and procedures in key areas of special education to demonstrate a working knowledge of how special education operates and how Synergy will implement these requirements within its program.

In its Revised Application, Synergy incorporated the Philadelphia School District Office of Specialized Services' Procedure Manual to demonstrate its understanding of the process and implementation associated with each stage of a special education program. Because the Procedure Manual contains policies and procedures for a brick and mortar school, it fails to address special education processes and implementation in a cyber environment. Synergy did not provide any other information to explain how it plans to operate a special education program within a cyber environment. In addition, Synergy also failed to include policies and procedures or a narrative addressing key areas of a special education program, including intensive interagency approach, graduation and dropout.

(b) The applicant failed to demonstrate that it has sufficient resources established across the state to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

A cyber charter school is required to accept students who reside anywhere within the Commonwealth and provide all necessary services to those students. A cyber charter applicant must identify all actual or potential service providers that will or may provide special education or related services to children with disabilities along with the services to be provided, pricing, location, transportation and qualifications.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy failed to identify specific potential or actual service providers and the services to be offered, pricing, location and transportation associated with these providers.

In its Revised Application, Synergy explained that the school will consider engaging an IU or the services of an approved private school to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Synergy included the Department's Directory of Approved Private Schools and Chartered Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (Directory) to provide information about the specific services to be offered, the time the services are available and the cost. Synergy also explained that Charter Choices, Inc., the organization that will provide Synergy with financial services, currently represents six cyber charter schools in the Commonwealth and has the information regarding potential providers, pricing, location and transportation, when needed by Synergy. However, Synergy did not provide any information about the IUs that may or will provide special education or related services to its special education students, including the services to be offered, pricing, location, transportation and qualifications. The Directory does not include any information about pricing, location, transportation and qualifications. Synergy did not identify potential or actual transportation service providers along with pricing and the types of transportation arrangements.

In addition, the Directory indicates that the approved private schools do not serve children with all types of disabilities, as defined in the federal regulation. Because of the lack of information regarding the types of special education services that IUs may or will provide to the school, it is unclear whether Synergy has a plan to meet all other special needs that the approved private schools do not serve. Finally, Synergy failed to provide any information to demonstrate that potential or actual service providers are available and willing to provide services to Synergy's students and that their pricing scheme fits into the school's projected special education budget.

As a statewide charter school, Synergy would be required to accept students from across the entire state. However, Synergy has not demonstrated that the school has sufficient resources established across the state to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy failed to address transition planning and the resources that it has established to address post-secondary education, employment and independent living.

In its Revised Application, Synergy included the federal and state transition guidelines, but failed to explain how it will implement and monitor student internships and job shadowing, how it will address college visits and career days statewide, and what resources it will dedicate to life skills and independent living transition.

- (c) *The applicant failed to demonstrate that it has allocated sufficient special education teacher and support staff resources to meet the needs of students with disabilities.*

A cyber charter applicant must demonstrate an adequate allocation of special education and related services personnel to meet the needs of the projected special education student population.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy failed to provide student-to-teacher ratios to demonstrate the school's adequacy of special education personnel.

In its Revised Application, Synergy's budget assumes 46 special education students, two full-time special education teachers and four learning coaches. Based on these assumptions, Synergy's special education teachers will have 23 special education students on his or her caseload. As stated in the January 23, 2014 Decision, although cyber charter schools are not subject to Chapter 14 of the Pennsylvania regulations, the Department typically evaluates the adequacy of special education personnel by comparing student-to-teacher ratios to the caseload chart in the Pennsylvania regulations. One special education teacher having a caseload of 23 special education students is adequate for delivering most of the itinerant special education supports and services. However, this caseload is not adequate for special education teachers delivering supplemental and full time special education support and services. In addition, although Synergy stated that the school will adopt appropriate staffing levels in accordance with the registration of students who require these services, Synergy did not provide an assurance that it will adopt staffing levels using the statutory caseload maximums as a guideline.

(d) The applicant failed to demonstrate that it has a continuum of placement options available to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

A cyber charter applicant must demonstrate that a continuum of alternative placements will be available to meet the needs of students with disabilities for special education and related services.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy failed to explain the alternative placements that will be made available to students with a disability.

In its Revised Application, Synergy responded to this deficiency by including the Pennsylvania early intervention regulations. However, a response about early intervention is not responsive to a deficiency regarding the continuum of placement options. Early intervention is a program that provides support and services to families with children from birth to age five with development delay disabilities, whereas the continuum of placement options are alternative places where FAPE can be delivered in the event that FAPE cannot be delivered in the regular classroom with the use of supplementary aids and services. Synergy also quoted the Department's Basic Education Circular titled Placement Options for Special Education to explain the types of alternative placements that it will make available to students with a disability. However, Synergy failed to demonstrate that it has developed at least some potential or actual local capacity to provide services to students who require more than inclusion in the general education classroom. Synergy also failed to demonstrate a general understanding of the respective responsibilities of a cyber charter school and alternative placement providers.

VII. The applicant failed to provide sufficient evidence of an English as a Second Language Program.

An effective English as a Second Language (ESL) Program is required to facilitate a student's achievement of English proficiency and the academic standards under 22 Pa. Code § 4.12. Programs under this section shall include appropriate bilingual-bicultural or ESL instruction. In addition, the Department's Basic Education Circular, *Educating Students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and English Language Learners (ELL)*, 22 Pa. Code § 4.26, states that each local education agency (LEA) must have a written Language Instructional Program that addresses key components, including a process for identification, placement, exit, and post-exit monitoring; instructional model used; curriculum aligned to PA standards; and administration of annual proficiency and academic assessments.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy failed to sufficiently and accurately address key components of a written Language Instructional Program, including identification, placement, instructional model, planned instruction, teacher and staff, related services, assessments, and exit and post-exit monitoring.

In its Revised Application, Synergy incorporated the Harrisburg City School District's ESL Program Description to explain the type of instruction and the educational theory that supports the instructional model for its ESL program. Because the ESL Program Description pertains to a brick and mortar school, it fails to address ESL processes and program implementation in a cyber

environment. Synergy did not provide any other information to explain how it plans to operate an ESL program within a cyber environment.

In addition, Synergy failed to adequately discuss planned instruction for middle school and high school in its Revised Application. Synergy stated that teachers will be responsible for modifying and adapting ESL instruction and assessment and that the ESL teacher will provide the appropriate accommodations and modifications. In addition, Synergy made a conclusory statement that its curriculum will be based on the PA English Language Proficiency Standards (PA ELPS) using the ESL Instructional Framework K-5 and ESL Instructional Framework 6-12. However, Synergy failed to identify who will develop and provide ESL curriculum, including material and activities and the estimated instructional time to be devoted to achieving the academic standards. Synergy also failed to explain how it will ensure that there is a relationship between ESL course objectives and the PA ELPS.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision also identified that Synergy failed to include more than one ESL certified teacher in its budget.

In its Revised Application, Synergy failed to address this deficiency in its revised budget. Rather than planning and budgeting in accordance with the school's anticipated student demographics, which Synergy believes will be a large number of recent immigrants, Synergy stated that the number of ESL certified teachers that will be employed by the school will be made on an ongoing basis based upon the needs of the students that enroll in the school.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision also identified that Synergy failed to budget for translation/interpretation services in its budget.

In its Revised Application, Synergy stated that this service was included in the budget in the Application. The Department is unable to verify this statement because the supplemental schedule of expenses, particularly the list of Contracted Services, include 13 different services, none of which are identified as being for translation services or appear to be broad enough to include translation services. Translation services would presumably be included under line item 2000 Support Services; however, none of the corresponding sub-line items are identified as being for translation services.

VIII. The applicant failed to demonstrate the necessary financial support and planning.

(a) The applicant failed to provide sufficient evidence of start-up funding and expenditures.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy's budget did not show start-up revenues, even though Synergy provided a letter evidencing Meridian Bank's interest in extending a line of credit to the school to ensure the school can meet expenses.

Synergy failed to address this deficiency in its Revised Application. Synergy submitted a revised budget on PDE form 2028 that includes \$5,000 per year in line item 5100-800 Debt Service—Interest. However, there are no corresponding amounts included in line item 5100-900

Debt Service—Principal or 9000 Revenue—Other Financing Sources. If Synergy were to obtain a line of credit, Synergy would be responsible for making principal and interest payments on the line of credit and would be receiving revenue from the line of credit. Thus, the revised budget should identify these amounts.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy did not clearly identify start-up expenditures in its budget, as it only included one line item that was higher in year one than in subsequent years.

Synergy failed to address this deficiency in its Revised Application. Synergy's revised budget includes only one line item that is significantly higher in year one than in subsequent years, which is line item 1100-700 Regular Instruction—Property—Technology. Technology is not the only start-up cost that a cyber charter school will incur when opening a new cyber charter school. A cyber charter school will incur other start-up costs, including the security deposit and office furniture for an administrative office, site preparation of the administrative office, student and staff recruitment, and coordination of background checks for staff. These start-up costs would presumably be included under the Administration and Operation and Maintenance line items, thus these line items should be higher in year one than in subsequent years. However, these line items do not reflect these start-up costs as the amounts in year two increase from year one by only a 3% inflation rate.

Because of Synergy's failure to clearly identify start-up costs and due to the inconsistencies between the revised school opening checklist and the revised cash flow projection, as discussed below, the Department was unable to verify whether the \$138,000 initial investment in line item 1100—700 Regular Instruction—Property—Technology in the revised budget was sufficient to cover Synergy's start-up costs.

(b) The applicant failed to provide expenditure estimates that are sufficient, reasonable, and consistent with the rest of the Revised Application.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy's cash flow projections in the Application were inconsistent with the timetable of projected steps and dates leading to the opening of the cyber charter school.

In its Revised Application, inconsistencies still exist between the revised school opening checklist and the revised cash flow projection. Thus, the Department was unable to meaningfully compare these two documents to verify that the school has adequately planned for start-up activities and associated costs. First, Synergy failed to include start-up costs in the revised cash flow projection that Synergy will incur based upon the tasks and activities identified in the revised school opening checklist. More specifically, the revised school opening checklist contains tasks and activities that are to be completed prior to July, yet the revised cash flow projection identifies receipts and disbursements beginning in July. Synergy also failed to include tasks and activities in the revised school opening checklist that are identified as costs incurred in the revised cash flow projection. For example, the revised cash flow projection includes \$9,583 in the site costs and debt service line item for July, but the revised school opening checklist does not contain a task and/or activity related to securing an administrative office, including paying a

security deposit, purchasing office furniture and supplies, making improvements, and installing furniture, telecommunication wiring and systems. Finally, Synergy will have to complete start-up tasks and/or activities prior to opening the school, such as student recruitment and marketing. However, the revised school opening checklist does not include these tasks and/or activities and the revised cash flow projection does not contain disbursements associated with these start-up tasks and/or activities.

(c) The applicant failed to demonstrate the school's ability to manage and oversee finances appropriately.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy did not demonstrate that individuals responsible for finance and accounting functions would be qualified and experienced in charter school finance.

In its Revised Application, Synergy asserted that it demonstrated the school's ability to manage and oversee its finances appropriately in its Application, as Charter Choices, Inc. is the company providing financial services and this company has been involved with the charter movement since its inception. Synergy also stated that the Charter Choices, Inc. employee that will provide services to the school is a Certified Public Accountant, which is consistent with the representation made in provision 1.3 of the Charter Choices Agreement. However, neither the Revised Application nor the revised Charter Choices Agreement provides minimum qualifications and professional experience required of the Charter Choices, Inc. employees who would be assigned financial management or accounting functions on Synergy's behalf.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision also identified that the Charter Choices Agreement requires Synergy to pay a management fee to Charter Choices, Inc. as a percentage of the school's revenue. However, the revised Charter Choices Agreement does not require Charter Choices, Inc. to provide Synergy with a report regarding services provided to enable Synergy to determine whether the services provided were consistent with the fees paid to Charter Choices, Inc.

Synergy failed to address this deficiency in its Revised Application. Rather than insert a reporting provision into the Charter Choices Agreement, Synergy stated that the Charter Choices Agreement specifies its responsibilities, that these responsibilities will be audited by a committee of Synergy and that Synergy has the right to terminate the Charter Choices Agreement for cause, if needed.

(d) The applicant failed to provide evidence of proper internal controls.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that the Charter Choices Agreement failed to define internal controls or discuss how accounting functions would be segregated.

In its Revised Application, Synergy included an Internal Controls Policy that appropriately defined some internal controls. For example, the policy included approval of time worked per employee by the Chief Executive Officer prior to payroll processing by the Business Manager and a three-way match of purchase order, approved packing slip, and approved vendor invoice.

However, there are other controls that should be in place and ways that duties should be segregated, particularly as it relates to accounting and accounts payable functions. For example, the same person or position should not be responsible for both signing checks and reconciling bank statements and for both receiving payments and reconciling bank statements. In addition, the person or position responsible for preparing bank reconciliations should not be able to access blank check stock. Also, blank check stock should be secured. The same person or position should also not be responsible for booking entries to the general ledger and reconciling bank statements.

In addition, there appears to be only one function within the revised Charter Choices Agreement that mentions segregation of duties, which is that record and process deposits will be appropriately segregated.

IX. The applicant failed to provide evidence of a sufficiently developed professional education plan and teacher induction plan.

(a) *The applicant failed to provide evidence of a sufficiently developed professional education plan.*

A cyber charter applicant must identify the proposed faculty and a professional development plan for the faculty. A cyber charter applicant must have a detailed professional education plan that explains the following: (1) the professional development provider and participants; (2) the assessment of student needs to develop the professional development program; (3) the professional development program; and, (4) the evaluation of the professional development program.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy did not include a detailed Professional Education Plan or information sufficient to address a professional education program in its Application. Synergy only demonstrated an understanding that it must offer a professional education program to its teachers and staff.

In its Revised Application, Synergy included the Department's 2007 Professional Education Guidelines to explain how it will create its plan. However, these guidelines alone do not demonstrate sufficient planning, as they do not address all plan components in detail. Although Synergy stated that professional development offerings would address student learning needs, including academic performance and English-speaking ability, Synergy did not identify the specific type of data that the school would use to determine the degree of these needs in order for the school to select the types of professional development that would adequately address these needs. Synergy stated that the professional development offerings would be based upon research and best practices laid out in the Standards Aligned System and the What Works Clearinghouse. However, Synergy did not provide the names and descriptions of these offerings or any detailed information about the research or best practices to demonstrate that these offerings will be based upon the research or best practices. Synergy included a list of the eligible providers of professional development, such as institutions of higher education and nonprofit organizations, but Synergy failed to identify the names of potential or actual providers.

(b) The applicant failed to provide evidence of a sufficiently developed teacher induction plan.

A cyber charter school applicant must have a detailed Teacher Induction Plan that explains the following: (1) the teacher induction council; (2) the assessment of inductees' needs; (3) the teacher induction program; (4) the oversight and evaluation of the teacher induction program; and (5) recordkeeping.

The Department's January 23, 2014 Decision identified that Synergy did not include a detailed Teacher Induction Plan or information sufficient to address a teacher induction program in its Application. Synergy only demonstrated an understanding that it must offer a teacher induction program to its new teachers.

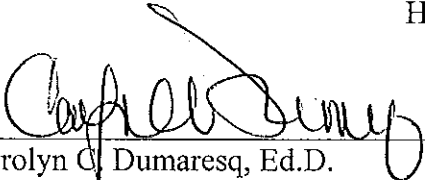
In its Revised Application, Synergy included the Department's 2013 Educator Induction Plan Guidelines to explain how it will create its plan. However, these guidelines alone do not demonstrate sufficient planning, as they do not address all plan components in detail. Although Synergy stated the plan will reflect a mentor relationship between inductees and the induction team, Synergy failed to explain how the mentors will be designated and the process by which they would be selected. Synergy identified the competencies to be developed, but did not list the goals of the induction program. Synergy included the research that the induction activities will be based upon, but did not provide a description of the activities and topics to be covered during the induction program to demonstrate that these activities and topics will be based upon the research. Synergy did not provide a timeline of activities. Synergy did not include a description of the procedures for monitoring and evaluating the induction program or how records of participation and completion of the program will be maintained.

Conclusion

Based on the deficiencies identified above, which were identified in the Department's January 23, 2014 Decision and not addressed or sufficiently corrected in the Revised Application, Synergy's Revised Application is denied.

Synergy may appeal this decision to the State Charter School Appeal Board (CAB) within 30 days of the date of mailing of the decision. 24 P.S. §§ 17-1745-A(f)(4) and 17-1746-A. If Synergy files an appeal with CAB, it shall serve a copy of its appeal on the Department at the following address:

Pennsylvania Department of Education
Office of Chief Counsel
333 Market Street, 9th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333.



Carolyn C. Dumaresq, Ed.D.
Acting Secretary of Education

07-01-14
Date Mailed