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SC Dept of Education Receives $15M Charter School Start Up Grant

South Carolina one of eight states awarded.

Educators, parents and community leaders considering starting new public charter schools as an option to address students’ academic needs in their communities celebrated this week when it was announce that the SC Department of Education was awarded a $15 million grant for the planning and implementation of new charter schools in South Carolina. Charter committees will be able to apply to the SC Department of Education in a competitive process after they have an approved charter school application.

The U.S. Department of Education announced this week that new grants totaling more than $157 million through the Charter School Program (CSP) will help fund the creation and expansion of public charter schools. Of the 27 states that applied, South Carolina was one of 8 chosen to receive funding. Of the $157 million, South Carolina is slated to receive $15,218,801 in funding with a total recommended funding amount of $30,437,602. This funding will enable SC to run state-level grant competitions to support new and expanded public charter schools.

“With State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman’s leadership, the SCDE team has developed a plan for high quality new charter school development for the next 5 years. This grant has the potential to positively impact the lives of thousands of children across the state. It has a focused priority on districts where students have the most to gain. It is exciting for SC to be recognized for the advances we have made in our law around charter school accountability and new school development,” stated Mary Carmichael, executive director of the Public Charter School Alliance of SC.

One contributing factor to the growth of high-quality public charter schools in South Carolina is the new school incubator work done by the Public Charter School Alliance of South Carolina (The Alliance). The Alliance meets with startup charter planning groups and guides them through the application and pre-operating process. For schools looking to open in 2017-2018, the Letter of Intent to is due to sponsoring districts on November 3, 2015. There are only 4 months left until applications are due for the 2017-2018 applicants on February 1, 2016. The Alliance will work with startup charter groups to make certain these deadlines are met with applications focusing on the needs in their communities, documenting widespread public engagement, and innovating with educational programs and flexibility allowed with the charter model.

A free webinar series for Charter Starters launches on October 8th at 4:00pm. Webinars continue throughout the process to guide planning groups with to-do lists of necessary items for the application process. The Alliance also offers a StartUp Incubator, which is an intense coaching, training, and technical assistance program to help community members navigate the “How’s”, “Why’s”, When’s”, and questions about starting a charter school. Signing up for the incubator includes a free initial planning group consultation and capacity audit.
The SC Department of Education is planning a technical assistance training on October 27 to cover the new charter school application for 2017-18 schools.

The Public Charter School Alliance of SC is hosting its 15th Annual Public Charter School Conference on November 16th – 18th in Columbia. Of particular interest to new school startup, there will be sessions on governance, budgeting, operations, facilities, risk management, effective communication, strategic planning, student achievement data, the new math curriculum, advocacy, and much more. We will have two workshops specifically for new schools where you can ask questions about the planning year and start up and folks just beginning the process can ask questions of you and your experiences in writing a charter application.

More information about opening a new school, the grant, and training events can be found at the Public Charter School Alliance of SC website: www.SCCharterSchools.org.

About Public Charter Schools
Charter schools are public schools that are allowed the freedom to be more innovative while being held accountable for approving student achievement. Charter schools are tuition-free and open to all students, space permitting. South Carolina public charter schools will serve nearly 30,000 students in South Carolina in 68 schools in the 2015 – 2016 school year.

About the Public Charter School Alliance of South Carolina
The Public Charter School Alliance of South Carolina’s mission is to strengthen public education for South Carolina students by supporting and advocating for high quality public charter schools.

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