

New state-mandated charter school agreement memorandum of understanding signed

New Bedford Public Schools has reached agreement on a memorandum of understanding (MOU), which will accommodate a new, state-mandated Commonwealth charter school in the City of New Bedford as authorized by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on January 22, 2019. The MOU will go into effect once it is approved by the New Bedford School Committee and the Alma del Mar Trustees, which is expected to take place next week.

The new school, Alma del Mar II Charter School, would operate differently from other Commonwealth charter schools in that it will enroll students exclusively from a newly designated neighborhood school attendance zone.

The unique compromise outlined in the MOU was negotiated by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, New Bedford Public Schools, and Alma del Mar. An initial opening is planned for fall 2019 with a total of 200 seats in Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 6. Only students who currently live within the newly designated neighborhood school attendance zone as determined by NBPS would be enrolled.

The former Horatio A. Kempton School building, located at 135 Shawmut Avenue, would be the Alma del Mar II new charter school location. The boundaries are being determined based on the proximity to this school location.

In making the announcement, Superintendent Thomas Anderson emphasized that the decision to increase the number of charter seats in the city rests with the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education based on current law. "The proposed

adjusted boundaries were carefully considered in order to mitigate the impact on the district's neighborhood schools."

Parents of students assigned to the new school at Kempton and who wish to remain in their current school will be able to apply to do so.

"Since the beginning of our discussions about establishing a neighborhood charter school instead of a traditional charter that would draw from a citywide lottery, it has been clear that this arrangement contemplates a fairer way to do charter schools for the first time in Massachusetts – fairer to the City, fairer to taxpayers, and fairer to students in district schools," said Mayor Jon Mitchell. "While the threat of expansion is an unfortunate reality under the Commonwealth's charter school law, which heavily favors expansion, the impacts on the city's finances will be about half of the alternative of 594 charter school seats. As I've said before, the legislature needs to fix the charter school law so that cities with seats available under the charter school 'cap' are not faced with such financially untenable choices."

New Bedford School Committee Vice-Chair, Bruce Oliveira, noted "this has been a difficult and time consuming process to get to this point. I want to commend the Superintendent and his staff for the countless hours they have had to dedicate to this MOU. I do believe the result makes the best of a difficult financial situation for the City and the School District. We will continue to follow all aspects of the agreement closely as we attempt to achieve the best possible opportunities and results for all students."

According to financial projections, at full build-out (school year 2024-2025) of 450 neighborhood based seats under the arrangement laid out in this agreement, the direct cost to New Bedford Public Schools would be \$4,407,975 . Under the alternative of 594 lottery charter school seats, the cost to the school district would be \$8,184,839. City and school

leaders have expressed the serious financial toll that the 594 lottery charter seats would take on school finances, and this cost-saving agreement was reached in order to ease the burden on New Bedford – resulting in a net savings of more than \$4 million.

In addressing the fiscal impact on the district, Superintendent Anderson noted, “There may be a very small number of NBPS staff reassignments, which is consistent with the yearly process when we review individual school enrollment trends and projections. Layoffs are not anticipated and no public schools will close due to this mandate.”

Notification letters have been sent and phone calls are in process to all families which may potentially be impacted. During the last two weeks of March 2019, schools will hold Family Information Sessions for those families affected by the new charter school. In addition to the letters and phone calls, students will bring home flyers with more information regarding their school’s meeting date and time.