

# Princeton Charter School

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## **PRINCETON CHARTER SCHOOL ANNOUNCES ACCESS AND EQUITY PLAN; SEEKS NJDOE APPROVAL OF WEIGHTED LOTTERY AND ADDITION OF 76 SEATS TO MAKE KINDERGARTEN THE ENTRANCE YEAR FOR ALL OF ITS STUDENTS — ESTABLISHING TWO UNIFORM SECTIONS AT EACH GRADE LEVEL**

PRINCETON, NJ - December 2, 2016 –The Board of Trustees of Princeton Charter School (PCS) petitioned the New Jersey Department of Education yesterday to implement a weighted lottery that would give an 2:1 advantage to economically disadvantaged students, coupled with a request to expand from one class to two classes in grades K-2, adding 76 new seats at the K-8 school, which is currently authorized to educate 348 children. This proposal accomplishes three key goals:

- To increase access for economically disadvantaged students,
- To establish Kindergarten as the starting point for all students,
- To help address the unanticipated spike in public school demand in Princeton.

As part of its proposed expansion, the school announced complementary initiatives to increase its support of students to make sure that every child is poised to succeed from the moment that he or she enters the school.

Head of School Larry Patton commented that, “The timing now is perfect for Princeton Charter School to expand and to develop a plan to serve more economically disadvantaged students: The New Jersey Department of Education approved weighted lotteries in December 2015 and the town is experiencing a significant spike in enrollment due to new residential developments coming online.”

Paul Josephson, President of the Board of Trustees, commented, “This plan is a win-win for all Princeton taxpayers: we can address a recent spike in local enrollment due to new housing developments. At the same time, we can improve access to a top notch, vigorous

curriculum for all regardless of means by giving families who qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch a much greater chance of being selected through the lottery.”

Head of School Lawrence Patton said, “PCS serves a very diverse, international community of students. Based on Median Student Growth Percentile (MSGP) scores released by the New Jersey Department of Education, Princeton Charter students experience truly outstanding growth at all levels. Our MSGP for Math places us at the 100 percentile of our Peer Group and 99 percentile in the state for rate of growth of all students. Our Growth in Language Arts places us at the 94 percentile for our peer groups and 89th percentile for the state. Combined, these scores place us at the 97th percentile and the 94th percentile for peer and statewide comparisons. In other words, Princeton Charter outperforms 94% of the schools in the state and 97% of the schools in our peer group in terms of the rate of student growth compared to similar students in other schools. This measure does not only gauge the high performers, it gauges the growth of all students. We are extremely proud of our students and teachers in accomplishing these remarkable growth indicators, and we want to make sure we are providing this sort of education for all Princeton families.”

Lawrence Patton continued, “Student support is integral to our success. PCS offers a unique K-8 model so that students, teachers, and families come to know one another over the course of nine years. We have an after-school program (free to those who qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch) staffed by certified teachers that is open until 6:00pm — a great boon to working parents. Throughout the school day, students and teachers work together during study halls and reading periods to make sure that every student succeeds. We also have a summer academic program to provide additional instruction and continuity of learning during the summer months. As we think about the future, we are considering ways to further our already strong support of all students. That is one of the reasons we want all of our students to start in kindergarten.”

PCS’s mission, set forth in its charter, is founded on a commitment to closing the achievement gap for all students. Amanda Rose, Vice-President of the Board of Trustees, notes that, “PCS’s mission includes a directive to address the fact that socioeconomic differences contribute to an achievement gap among economically disadvantaged students. The school’s founders, all parents and teachers from Princeton, were adamant that choice in education should not be limited to those with the financial resources to pay for private school. They were motivated by evidence that the achievement gap for economically disadvantaged students increased as time in school increased. Their goal more than 20 years ago, as ours is today, is to provide an education that helps address the achievement gap for those students.”

Board President Josephson said, “Despite extensive community outreach, we recognize that economically disadvantaged families have been underrepresented in our school compared to Princeton as a whole. Consistent with our mission to address the fact that socioeconomic differences contribute to an achievement gap, and our obligation to seek the enrollment of a cross section of the community to the maximum extent practical, we developed this proposal to address this disparity.”

If approved, the phased implementation plan would take effect as of September 2017. The school would implement the weighted lottery in spring 2017 and expand the Kindergarten and Grade 1 class for the 2017-18 academic year, and add the Grade 2 expansion in the 2018-19 academic year.

The school’s multi-pronged, integrated approach is specifically designed to meaningfully increase the number of economically disadvantaged students at PCS:

- Implementing a weighted lottery will double the chances of economically disadvantaged students gaining admission through the school’s lottery.
- By adding a second section of students in grades K-2, the school would significantly increase the chances economically disadvantaged students gaining admission in Kindergarten and beginning their academic career in PCS’s curriculum from the beginning. Instead of the 19 spots presently available in Kindergarten, the school expects to offer 30 seats.
- Increased enrollment will allow the school to fund additional support services for all students, whether they be classified as English Language Learners (ELL), are receiving Special Education services, or are simply in need of some additional help to succeed at the highest levels.
- PCS is currently exploring the development of Personalized Student Plans for entering students to assess each student’s needs and family resources to ensure that PCS is providing appropriate support services for each and every student who enrolls.
- The school begins its study of World Language in Kindergarten, a core element of its charter. Students currently learn French. But the school is considering adding Spanish as well.
- As the community becomes aware of the supports that will exist from the very beginning of a student’s academic career, the school will be a more attractive learning environment for all families, especially those confronting economic challenges, and thereby increase the participation of these families in our lottery.

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Princeton Charter School is a public school authorized and overseen by the New Jersey Department of Education pursuant to the Charter School Program Act of 1996. The school, whose charter was granted in 1997, was one of the original charter schools in New Jersey. It has an outstanding record of student achievement and has a reputation in the community for its commitment to its curriculum. Its lottery is highly competitive, with over 70 applicants seeking 19 new Kindergarten seats each year. Its Board consists of nine parents elected by the parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school. Its charter was renewed earlier in 2016 for five years.