



A Note for Completing the Mission Statement and Educational Approach Charter Agreement Amendment Application

Overview

This application is for a school seeking approval from the DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) to amend its mission statement. Material mission statement changes include adding or removing components of the mission, such as the target population, the educational focus, the school's aims, and the needs it seeks to fill. Immaterial changes are revisions in syntax.

This application is also for a school seeking approval from DC PCSB to amend the educational approach (i.e., educational philosophy, instructional methods, curricula) articulated in its charter application and agreement. DC PCSB staff will evaluate whether the proposed educational approach is consistent with the school's proposed mission and with its goals and academic achievement expectations (goals). A school need only amend its educational approach when a change in curriculum or instructional methods results in a change in the mission or goals.¹

- A school seeking an **immaterial change** to its mission statement need only **complete questions 1 and 2** of this charter agreement amendment application.
- A school seeking a **material change** to its mission statement need only **complete questions 1 – 5** of this charter agreement amendment application.
- A school seeking a **material change** to its **mission statement** and a **modified educational approach** must **complete** this charter agreement amendment **application in its entirety**.

Standard for Approval

DC PCSB staff will generally recommend that its Board approve mission statement changes provided that the proposed mission statement identifies the school's target population (the "who"), its educational philosophy or focus (the "how"), and its general aims or what educational needs it will fill (the "why"). Additionally, the proposed mission must be inclusive of all students, including students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged and at-risk students, and students above or below grade level. The school must demonstrate that its proposed

¹ See the goals charter agreement amendment applications here: <https://bit.ly/3pMAXTX>.

mission is supported by the school's curriculum, instruction, and school day. Finally, the school must demonstrate that its students,² staff, and families support the proposed mission statement.

DC PCSB staff will generally recommend that its Board approve educational approach changes provided they are aligned with the school's proposed mission and goals. DC PCSB staff also expect the proposed changes to enable inclusive programming for all students, including students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged and at-risk students, and students above or below grade level. Finally, the school must demonstrate that its staff, students,³ and families support the proposed educational approach.

Submission Deadline

Per DC PCSB's *Charter Agreement Amendment Petition Submission Policy*,⁴ a school must submit its mission amendment application no later than April 1 before the school year in which the proposed changes are to be implemented. Likewise, a school seeking both a mission statement and an educational approach amendment must submit its application no later than April 1 before the school year in which the proposed changes are to be implemented.

Contact

Before completing the application, please contact Melodi Sampson at msampson@dcpcsb.org to discuss the proposed change. Please also contact Melodi Sampson if you have general questions about the charter agreement amendment process.

² Demonstrating student support for the proposed mission is only required for schools enrolling young adult and adult students.

³ Demonstrating student support for the proposed educational approach is only required for schools enrolling young adult and adult students.

⁴ See the *Charter Agreement Amendment Petition Submission Policy* here: <https://bit.ly/34ORPBZ>.

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY (LEA) NAME:

BOARD CHAIR NAME:

SUBMISSION DATE:

SUBJECT (choose one):

☒ Mission Statement Amendment Request

☐ Mission Statement and Educational Approach Amendment Request

SCHOOL BACKGROUND AND PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Campus name(s): Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School

Year(s) opened: 2016

Grades served: PK3 – Grade 6

Year the school will undergo its next charter review or renewal: SY24-25

Proposal summary: Breakthrough Montessori seeks to amend its mission statement to specify the target population (“diverse families in Washington DC”) and to improve syntax (change “program” to “education”).

Year the school plans to adopt the proposed changes: 2025-26

When did the school’s board approve the proposed changes? February 8, 2024

Please attach minutes from the meeting and vote results.

MISSION STATEMENT

- 1. In the table below, write the school’s current and proposed mission statements.**

Current Mission Statement	Proposed Mission Statement
To provide families in Washington DC with a fully-implemented, public Montessori program that enables children to develop within themselves the power to shape their lives and the world around them.	To provide diverse families in Washington DC with a fully-implemented, public Montessori education that enables children to develop within themselves the power to shape their lives and the world around them.

- 2. What is the school’s rationale for changing its mission statement?**

Feedback collected from Breakthrough faculty shows that affiliation with our mission is one of our school's strengths. Focus groups conducted by EdOps concluded that: "Generally, staff value the mission and equity focus of the organization. Numerous staff noted that they came to Breakthrough because of the mission and the diverse population of students and staff." The same report also notes that "The Montessori program and particularly the public Montessori nature of Breakthrough drew many of the staff to the school and keeps them excited to be here."

While faculty and family members demonstrate a high level of commitment to the school's mission, the precise wording of the statement has not been revisited since Breakthrough's charter application was written in 2015. During the 2022-23 school year, Breakthrough embarked on a year-long strategic alignment process with the goal of creating a 5-year strategic plan. We determined that thoughtful reflection on our mission statement would be the anchor of this process. Strategic alignment, while led by the Board of Trustees, included staff, families, and external stakeholders, and allowed us to answer the following questions:

1. What is our shared vision as a school community?
2. How does Breakthrough's performance demonstrate progress towards achieving our mission?
3. What changes to our structure, policies, and/or practices would yield improved outcomes for Breakthrough students?
4. What are Breakthrough's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats?
5. What are our goals for the next five years?
6. What are the highest-leverage activities to achieve these goals?

The strategic alignment process included focus groups with faculty, surveys with faculty and families, and in-depth interviews with stakeholders. The results yielded two recommendations for our mission statement:

1. **Replace the word "program" with "education" to improve clarity, avoid jargon, and clearly communicate to stakeholders and the public that we are school.** Through this change, we do not seek to change the meaning, spirit, or intention of the original mission statement. Rather, we seek clarity as education is the *raison d'être* of our program.
2. **Add the word "diverse" as a descriptor for the family community our school seeks to serve.** Breakthrough's commitment to cultivating a diverse family community has been central to the school's ethos from the beginning. Our charter application reads: "In addition to providing fully implemented public Montessori education to greater numbers of DC families, we are equally committed to closing the opportunity gap in the district. We aim to achieve this goal by making, by design, Breakthrough Montessori PCS a racially and economically diverse school. Our premise, built on a large body of research suggesting that socioeconomic and racial integration provide significant educational benefits for all students is that schools that intentionally seek to reduce racial and economic isolation create powerful communities of choice, in which school structure and culture support rigor, relevance, and inclusivity for all." In the school's second year (2017-18), families and faculty came together to articulate this commitment to diversity in Breakthrough's Equity Statement of Values, which says: "we serve not just the whole child but the whole family. We welcome all families and partner with them to create a robust network of support. We listen to – and honor- each person's narrative." By adding the word "diverse" to our mission, we seek to elevate a core commitment the school has fostered since its founding.

3. Describe the school's philosophy for educating students. Include how the school ensures all students—including students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged and at-risk students, and students above or below grade level—benefit from the proposed mission statement and the school's educational philosophy.

Breakthrough implements the Montessori philosophy and curriculum for primary and elementary education. Montessori pedagogy offers highly structured, student-centered education, characterized by personalized, hands-on learning. All aspects of Breakthrough Montessori--from the curriculum to teachers' preparation to the design of the classroom--support the developmental needs of children. Students receive lessons individually or in small groups with their teacher and work independently with manipulative materials that enable them to master concepts in language, science, math, etc. Teachers carefully observe students, track progress, and invite them to receive new lessons when they are ready. Students move through the curriculum at their own pace, and the presentation of new concepts follows the child's developmental needs rather than a predetermined timetable.

Breakthrough classrooms are meticulously designed to support independence and offer students a carefully sequenced array of materials that engage all the senses and encourage self-guided discoveries. Our mixed-age classrooms host students in three-year cycles. A child begins as a member of the youngest cohort in the room, benefitting from the example set by older children. Over three years, a child builds trusting relationships with teachers and becomes a leader for younger peers.

Montessori instruction is, by design, entirely differentiated and individualized. Students with disabilities are welcomed into our classrooms and learn alongside their peers, using concrete materials to explore new concepts and practice them until mastery is achieved. In our classrooms, students with disabilities are able to work independently or in small groups with non-disabled peers. They receive instruction from general education teachers, as well as special education teachers (as necessary). Supports for students with disabilities integrate well into a classroom environment where all students are progressing through an individual work plan, and where all students have freedom of choice and movement.

Likewise, students who receive English language supports benefit from a Montessori environment where they can work alongside their peers on differentiated lessons and materials that meet their precise needs. Montessori language lessons provide explicit, sequential instruction in phonics. Montessori classrooms are language-rich environments with materials that support written and oral expression and comprehension. Breakthrough further provides individual and small-group support for English language learners through our EL program that synergizes Montessori curriculum with evidence-based practices in English language education. Breakthrough has a robust family

engagement strategy that ensures written transition and oral interpretation in the preferred languages of our family community.

As a Montessori school, Breakthrough is well-situated to support students both above and below grade level. Lead teachers are trained to deliver 3 years of curriculum, and every classroom is equipped with the materials to do so. Our mixed-age classroom ensure students are able to work at the precise place in the scope and sequence that is challenging and rigorous for them. A second-grade student, for example, who is reading at a third-grade level can join their older peers in the same classroom for more challenging reading materials and lessons. If this same student is still working to master first grade standards in mathematics, those materials are likewise available within the same environment. For students experiencing academic challenges, Breakthrough supports them through a multi-tiered support system (MTSS), which partners with families early to discuss a students' experience, isolate difficulty, identify evidence-based interventions, and collect data in order to track progress. Breakthrough's classrooms are supported by a strong team of interventionists who provide individual and small group support in reading, mathematics, and writing. We also have teams dedicated to mental and social-emotional well-being, as well as behavioral health.

Breakthrough supports students who are economically disadvantaged or at-risk with a variety of support both within and beyond the classroom. Breakthrough ensures families are connected with resources related to housing, transportation, and food security to support students' health, well-being and readiness to learn.

Since 2016, Breakthrough has cultivated a diverse community of families, learners, and educators. Our main method for addressing the needs of all students – including students with disabilities, English language learners, students who are economically disadvantaged and at-risk, and students who are above or below grade level – has been an educational philosophy that focuses on personalized learning and differentiated instruction. Our proposed change to mission statement clarifies this commitment and makes it more visible to our stakeholders and to the public.

4. Will the proposed mission statement impact curricular choices, including resources, assessments, standards, and instructional strategies?

No

If so, complete questions 4a and 4b.

- a. Identify the new curricular choices the school will adopt and provide a rationale for the curricular shift.**

- b. Describe the long-range plan for curriculum implementation and professional development. How will the school ensure implementation fidelity?**

5. How did the school engage its internal community in revising the mission statement? Include evidence demonstrating student, staff, and parent support for the proposed changes.

Breakthrough began the process of strategic alignment at the beginning of the 2022-23 school year. Our school was selected as one of the recipients of pro-bono support from Compass, a non-profit organization that organizes community volunteers with expertise in strategic planning, organizational growth, and other fields. Over the course of the school year, the Compass team conducted in-depth interviews with a representative sample of the faculty and family communities, co-facilitated a listening session with the entire faculty, and conducted faculty and family surveys.

At the end of SY22-23, the Compass team synthesized the data collected, which the school's Board of Trustees then used to create the proposed revision to the mission statement, as well as the school's strategic five-year plan. This work was conducted during SY23-24, and the Board of Trustees voted to amend the mission and adopt the strategic plan on February 8, 2024.

We presented this work to families and faculty at the beginning of the 2024-25 school year to hear their feedback. Faculty reviewed the proposed mission statement on August 9 and August 12, 2024. Families reviewed the proposed change during a coffee hour dialogue with school leaders on September 4. Families and faculty are receptive to the change, and school leaders did not receive feedback indicating concern or disagreement with the proposed change. A number of faculty members commented that they appreciate how the revised mission statement makes explicit the school's commitment to building a diverse community.

EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

6. Describe the school's proposed educational approach and philosophy for educating students.

7. How does this approach differ from the educational philosophy or methods the school articulated in its charter application and/or agreement?

- 8. What is the rationale for the educational shift?**
- 9. How will the proposed educational approach impact curricular choices, including resources, assessments, standards, and instructional strategies?**
- a. Identify the new curricular choices the school will adopt and provide a rationale for the curricular shift, if applicable.**
 - b. Describe the long-range plan for curriculum implementation and/or professional development. How will the school ensure implementation fidelity?**
- 10. How will the school ensure all students—including students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged and at-risk students, and students above or below grade level—benefit from the proposed educational approach?**
- 11. How will the school ensure its proposed educational approach will result in successfully meeting its charter goals and academic achievement expectations?**
- 12. How did the school engage its internal community in redeveloping its educational approach? Include evidence demonstrating staff, student,⁵ and parent support for the proposed changes.**

⁵ Schools that do not enroll young adult and adult students need not demonstrate student support for the proposed changes.

