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FOUR (4) NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS SUBMIT PROPOSALS TO LEAD PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IN WASHINGTON STATE

*State Charter Authorizer to Review Second Round of Proposals for High-Quality
Public Charters to Improve Educational Outcomes for At-Risk Students*

Olympia, WA – The Charter School Commission (the Commission) announced today that four (4) non-profit organizations have submitted proposals in the second round of applications to open high-quality public charter schools in the state of Washington. Each applicant was asked to put forth a comprehensive and rigorous plan to meet the needs of the student population they wish to serve. Proposals were due by 5:00 PM on July 15th.

On January 30, 2014, the Commission approved seven high-quality charter schools focused on meeting the needs of at-risk students. One of the approved charter schools, First Place, will open this fall, serving children in Seattle. The remainder plan to open in the fall of 2015. Washington state law allows for up to eight charter schools to open per year, with spots not filled one year being carried to subsequent years. This rollover provision of the law will allow for a further eight new charter schools to open in 2015.

The Commission initiated its second Request for Proposals (RFP) process on April 15, 2014, inviting non-profit organizations from across the state and nation to submit their proposals. The Commission will again implement an in-depth, multi-pronged evaluation process, calling on expert evaluators from Washington State and around the country to analyze the proposals, with the goal of recommending only those proposals likely to improve educational outcomes for at-risk students. The Commission has received proposals from the following organizations (organization, school name, location):

- Bilingual Charter Academy, Bilingual Charter Academy, Clark County
- Charter Schools of Sunnyside, Sunnyside Charter Academy, Sunnyside
- The Ducere Group, The Village Academy, Pierce County
- Green Dot Public Schools Washington State, Seattle Charter School, South Seattle

“We are thrilled to see sustained interest in this second round on the heels of what was clearly an intense and comprehensive first round application and evaluation process. These applicants are fully aware of what is expected and are stepping up to the rigors of this process,” said Joshua Halsey, the Commission’s Executive Director. “We look forward to evaluating these applications and hearing from the communities they hope to serve to determine their readiness to serve Washington State students.”

The Commission welcomes new and returning applicants in their efforts to demonstrate how they intend to create thriving, high-quality public charter schools. Over the next week, the Commission will review the proposals to ensure that all necessary materials have been submitted. Once the proposals have been vetted for completeness, they will be turned over to the Commission's evaluators for substantive evaluation. The evaluators will apply their expertise in student achievement/performance, school finance, and school operations/governance to the review of the proposals. The evaluators then will conduct in-person interviews with the schools' founding teams. The evaluators will finally produce a recommendation of approval or denial for each proposal to the Commission on October 3, 2014. During the drafting of recommendations, the Commission will host public forums in the first three weeks of September. These public forums are opportunities for applicants, families and interested citizens to engage directly with the Commission.

"We are pleased to see four non-profit organizations have committed the time and energy to develop applications designed to address the educational needs of at-risk students," said Steve Sundquist, Commission Chair. "The Commission prides itself on a rigorous application process, and we are hopeful that the applications are both innovative and of the highest quality."

The Commission will approve resolutions of approval or denial for each proposal at its October 9, 2014 public meeting in Yakima.

"The Charter School Commission has demonstrated its commitment to a transparent, high quality process to ensure that only the highest quality charter schools are approved," said Ben Rarick, Executive Director of the Washington State Board of Education. "High-quality schools start with high-quality authorizing. We are strongly impressed that the Commission is meeting that standard."

On September 23, 2013, the Commission released its first RFP, and on January 30, 2014 the Commission approved seven charter schools:

- Excel Public Charter School, a grades 6-12 college preparatory school focused on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), scheduled to open in fall 2015 in Kent.
- First Place Scholars Charter School, a grades K-5 school designed to educate and stabilize students living in poverty and with multiple traumas, including homelessness, scheduled to open in fall 2014 in Seattle.
- Rainier Prep, a college preparatory grades 5-8 school whose goal is to ensure that every scholar attending its campus will be ready to serve as a leader in their community, scheduled to open in fall 2015 in South Seattle.
- SOAR Academy, a grades K-8 school designed to provide students with a rigorous, engaging, and personalized educational experience, scheduled to open fall 2015 in Tacoma.

- Summit Public Schools (Olympus & Sierra), a Charter Management Organization (CMO) currently serving the San Francisco Bay Area boasting ninety-six percent of graduates' acceptance to at least one four-year college or university, scheduled to open two high schools in fall 2015 in Tacoma (Sierra) and South Seattle (Olympus).
- Green Dot Public Schools, a Charter Management Organization (CMO) currently serving more than 10,000 students in Los Angeles, purposefully located in some of the most underserved neighborhoods, scheduled to open Washington State Charter Middle School #1 in fall 2015 in Tacoma.

The Commission is committed to ensuring that these schools will deliver an outstanding education to some of Washington's most underserved communities, and foster further innovation throughout the state as a whole.

Charter schools are independent public schools operated by non-profit organizations that are allowed more flexibility to be innovative with their educational program and are held accountable for improved student achievement. Broadly, charters must adhere to the same state learning standards, accountability goals, health, safety, and non-discrimination laws, must hire certificated teachers, must follow generally accepted accounting principles and are subject to state financial audits. They are free and open to all students.

About Washington State's Charter School Commission

Washington State's Charter School Commission was formed with the mission of creating a rigorous and comprehensive proposal process and to hold charters accountable to high standards of quality. The Commission is an independent state agency that exists to authorize and oversee high quality public charter schools throughout Washington with an emphasis on schools designed to expand opportunities for at-risk students, providing leadership and oversight that is consistent with national principles and standards of charter school authorizers and the provisions of Washington's charter school law. For more information, visit:

<http://www.governor.wa.gov/issues/education/commission/>.

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