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WASHINGTON STATE'S CHARTER COMMISSION AUTHORIZES 7 PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS TO OPEN

Commission confident that approved applicants will create high-quality public schools serving those students most in need

Olympia, WA – Washington State's Charter School Commission (the Commission) today announced that, for the first time, the Commission has approved 7 out of an original nineteen applications to open public charter schools in Washington. Of these approved charter applicants, one is projected to begin serving Washington students in 2014 with six to begin serving students in 2015. The charters approved today all feature a strong commitment to student achievement and preparing students for college acceptance, with all of the applicants demonstrating a passionate dedication to Washington communities.

“The Commission congratulates the rich variety of educators and community groups – many of them with strong connections to Washington communities - who comprise our first approvals to open public charter schools,” said Steve Sundquist, Charter School Commission Chair. “We are excited about and confident in all of these approved operators. We engaged in one of the most rigorous approval processes in the country and believe these innovative schools will build upon proven models and best practice in the field as it relates to serving at-risk youth.”

The Commission received proposals from educators with track records of student success, including several longtime Washington State public school principals, community-based organizations and national charter school networks. All of the approved schools in Washington State will be managed in Washington – with a focus on meeting the unique needs of the state's students – and will be held accountable for improving student achievement with goals of increasing college acceptance. All charter schools in the state will be free and open to all students with an emphasis on providing high-performing options to those underserved by the current system.

“The Commission would also like to thank our partners, including the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, for assistance with our process of selecting those schools which have met the demanding high bar of state and national standards of excellence,” added Sundquist.

The charter school applicants that have been approved today include:

- **Excel Public Charter School, Kent:** Excel was formed by a Washington State team led by Adel Sefrioui (Executive Director, STEP Ahead) and will grow to serve grades 6-12. Excel Public Charter School will provide all students an academically rigorous, science,

technology, engineering, and math (STEM) focused, college preparatory program that will help them achieve both academic and personal success in college and career. Additionally, there will be opportunities for high school students to complete STEM internships with local companies.

- **First Place Scholars Charter School, Seattle:** First Place currently operates a private school serving students facing trauma. They will be utilizing their experience to re-launch as a public charter school educating and stabilizing students living in poverty and with multiple traumas, including homelessness. The school's mission will focus on helping students to rise above their personal circumstances, accelerate academically and prepare for college and career.
- **Rainier Prep, South Seattle:** Rainier Prep was formed by a Washington-based team led by veteran educator Maggie O'Sullivan, who was a teacher for six years and has served as a principal in Federal Way since 2004. Rainier Prep's mission is to enroll every graduating eighth grade student into a college prep high school program, to prepare every scholar to excel at a four-year college, and, ultimately, to ensure that every scholar is ready to serve as a leader in their community.
- **SOAR Academy, Tacoma:** SOAR Academy was formed by a Washington-based team led by veteran educator Kristina Bellamy-McClain, has worked in public education for 13 years, most recently as a principal in Seattle. SOAR will offer a small, intimate, classroom-based, personalized environment. SOAR's mission is to provide students with a rigorous, engaging, and personalized educational experience, preparing them to become productive members of a diverse, global society and equipping them academically and socially for success in and through high school, college, and beyond.
- **Summit Public Schools – Olympus (Tacoma) and Sierra (South Seattle):** Summit Public Schools currently serves approximately 1,600 students from diverse communities in six schools located in the San Francisco Bay Area. Ninety-six percent of Summit students are accepted to at least one four-year college or university, with graduates on track to complete college at double the national average. The Commission has noted Summit's educational model in its recommendations, including its rigorous courses, creative teaching models, high-levels of school involvement and participation and a defined path to success for students.
- **Washington State Charter Middle School #1 (Green Dot Public Schools), Tacoma:** Green Dot Public Schools was founded in 1999 in direct response to the poor state of public high schools in the Los Angeles area. Green Dot schools are purposefully located in some of California's most underserved neighborhoods and its student population is largely minority and low-income. Today, Green Dot currently serves more than 10,000 students in the Los Angeles area with plans to expand to Memphis, Tenn. The Commission noted in recommendations that Green Dot has strong curriculum and instructional design, with an emphasis on college preparatory work.

The Commission's evaluation process, managed and informed by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, has included thorough reviews of planned education programs, past student achievement/performance if applicable, school finance, school operations/governance, and in-person interviews with applicants. In addition, the Commission has hosted numerous public forums, which have provided opportunities for applicants, families and interested educators to engage directly with the Commission.

Washington State law allows for up to eight charter schools to be established each year – for a total of 40 charters over five years. Several of the applicants not approved received high marks and were encouraged to take additional time to refine their models and re-apply. All are welcome to resubmit proposals in summer of 2014: letters of intent will be due on June 15, 2014 and applications will be due on July 15th, 2014.

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 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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