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WASHINGTON STATE'S FIRST CHARTER SCHOOL OPENS ITS DOORS TO 96 STUDENTS

First Place Charter School Holds First Day of Classes September 3, 2014

Seattle, WA – On September 3, 2014, First Place will make history and build upon its mission of “hope, home, and education for every child, one family at a time” as it opens the doors to Washington State’s first charter school, First Place Scholars Charter School located in Seattle’s Central District. The Washington State Charter School Commission (the Commission) is confident that First Place is prepared for this momentous first day of classes, and to serve the 96 students who have enrolled over the last five months.

For 25 years, First Place has continuously expanded its services and programs to provide education, family support services, health and mental health services, and housing to South Seattle’s youth and families suffering from multiple traumas. Before her time on the Commission, former Commissioner, Dr. Doreen Cato, devoted herself to the administration of both the social and the educational services offered by First Place. Her efforts and achievements became the foundation of First Place, producing strong outcomes in both sets of services. Dr. Cato’s vision has been kept alive by a devoted board, staff, and a host of volunteers.

“A dream that began over 25 years ago is finally being realized,” said Dr. Cato. “The integrated set of services that First Place will continue to offer as a public charter school ensures that some of Washington State’s most at-risk students are provided a high-quality education.”

Taking an extraordinary step in the evolution of the organization, First Place submitted a proposal on November 22, 2013 to the Washington State Charter School Commission’s (the Commission) inaugural Request for Proposals (RFP) for public charter schools. After a thorough evaluation process, which included vetting by independent education, organizational, and finance experts from across the nation, First Place became one of the seven public charter schools to be approved by the Commission on January 30, 2014.

“What we saw in First Place’s proposal was the know-how, experience and ingenuity to serve a population who has consistently fallen through the cracks when it comes to education,” said Commission Chair, Steve Sundquist. “This is what the charter school system in Washington was designed to look like: innovative schools led by passionate leaders, created for unique, at-risk populations.”

On July 2, 2014 First Place announced the hiring of Evie Taylor-Livingston as First Place Scholars' school leader. Mrs. Taylor-Livingston possesses over a decade of experience as a K-12 school administrator, leading staff of culturally diverse and high poverty schools to develop and implement education strategies catered toward the schools' at-risk populations. First Place's board of directors has made it clear that they plan to utilize Mrs. Taylor-Livingston's depth of experience to accelerate the academic growth of all of First Place Scholars' students.

Mrs. Taylor Livingston states that she is dedicated to ensuring that, "The scholars who enter the doors of First Place Scholars Charter School are empowered to become what they were created to become, mobilized to achieve what they have been designed to do, and dedicated to bringing with them their peers, family members and friends along this journey of new discoveries and extraordinary achievements."

The Commission applauds First Place's tireless efforts in the months between approval and opening. With a truncated timeline, First Place has moved forward at an unrelenting rate, hiring teachers and staff to provide a customized curriculum to a student population in need of many additional supports.

"Charter schools represent a new option for Washington State's students," notes Commission Executive Director, Joshua Halsey. "First Place Scholars' mission and vision aligns not only with the Commission's values, but with the intent Washington's charter school law. I am excited to continue to support and monitor First Place as it takes the big step of serving students through a public charter school setting."

The demand for such a unique school in the Central District is readily apparent. In the 2012-13 school year, while First Place still operated as a private elementary, the school saw 97% of students receiving free/reduced lunches and 67% of students homeless at the beginning of the year. At the same time, the non-profit organization behind First Place deployed more than a 100 volunteers who contributed 3,400 hours of service to those most in need in the community. The Commission looks forward to the coming years as First Place Scholars grows its student population, offering a high-quality education opportunity to the Central District.

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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