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WASHINGTON STATE'S CHARTER COMMISSION ADDS ONE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL TO ITS ROSTER

Second round of applications produces one additional charter. One charter school to open in 2016

Olympia, WA – Having just completed its second round of evaluations in twelve months, the Washington State Charter School Commission (the Commission) announced today that one application has been approved to open as a public charter school in Washington. The approved charter shows an unwavering commitment to serve some of Washington's most at-risk students, and to provide those students with a high-quality, 21st century education.

“Our application process is one of the most rigorous in the nation. We congratulate Green Dot for meeting our standards and gaining our approval.” said Commission Chair, Steve Sundquist. “The Commission has, with the help of local and national entities, constructed an equitable and rigorous evaluation process. For the charter that has received approval in this round, the Commission believes the organization has a robust educational model, a serious plan for and commitment to engaging the community they intend to serve, and , and a sound organizational structure. All three components must come together in order to optimally serve Washington State's most at-risk students. For the charters not approved in this round, we thank you for all time and effort that you put into the application process and applaud your sincere desire to help those students and families.”

Despite the challenges of starting a new state agency, the second round of charter applications came immediately upon the heels of the first. Not surprisingly, only four organizations submitted applications to the Commission:

- **Bilingual Charter Academy (NEW APPLICANT):** a community-based organization led by an educator with over twenty-years of bilingual and bicultural education experience, hoping to establish a bilingual school in Clark County.
- **Charter Schools of Sunnyside (RETURNING APPLICANT):** a parent-led, community-based organization hoping to bring blended learning to a small community in the Yakima Valley.
- **The Ducere Group (RETURNING APPLICANT),** a parent-led, community-based organization hoping to offer a fully-inclusive, blended learning option for students in Pierce County.

- **Green Dot Public Schools (PREVIOUSLY APPROVED APPLICANT ESTABLISHING NEW SCHOOL):** a national charter school operator currently serving some of California and Tennessee’s most at-risk communities, hoping to expand its services to South Seattle.

Only one of the applicants met the rigorous standards that have been set by the Commission. The approved school will be managed in Washington, with a focus on meeting the unique needs of the state’s students. The school will be held to the same levels of student achievement and accountability as Washington’s traditional public schools. All charter schools in the state are free and open to all students with an emphasis on providing high-performing options to those underserved by the current system.

The charter school applicants that have been approved today include:

- **Green Dot Public Schools Washington State: Seattle Middle School, South Seattle**
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 and Memphis, Tenn. The Commission noted in recommendations that Green Dot has rigorous curriculum and instructional design, coupled with a strong track record in closing the achievement gap. It places an emphasis on college preparatory work and will be underscoring the real world relevance of the classroom experience by providing students with the opportunity for STEM internships with local companies.

The Charter school applicant that did not receive approval today include:

- **Bilingual Charter Academy, Clark County**
Bilingual Charter Academy, led by veteran Clark County educator, Yelena Ovdienko, was designed to offer a strong academic program in which all students would become bilingual and culturally competent. The Commission was very pleased to see a strong community turnout for the school at its public forum in Vancouver, pointing towards a definite need and desire for public school options in Clark County. Bilingual Charter Academy was encouraged to assess various budget shortcomings, as well as strengthen its leadership team, and apply again in a future application cycle.
- **The Ducere Group: The Village Academy, Pierce County**
The Ducere Group was founded by Calyn Holdaway with a belief that all children, regardless of their learning or physical challenges, have a basic right to be integrated into fully inclusive schools. It was with this vision that The Ducere Group submitted an application for The Village Academy, a school designed to provide a high-quality education to both traditional and nontraditional learners. The Village Academy has an emphasis on creating a culture of honor and acceptance for every child while holding students to high academic expectations. The Commission applauds the Ducere Group for

their commitment to students with special needs, but notes that further planning is required to truly meet the needs of students who require additional assistance and individualized instruction. The Commission encouraged the reapplication of this applicant.

➤ **Charter Schools of Sunnyside: Sunnyside Charter Academy, Sunnyside**

Charter Schools of Sunnyside was founded by Sunnyside, WA residents Brittany Weaver and Erin Martin to provide a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum that would empower students to strive for academic excellence. The school had a strong instructional model and sound financials, but lacked meaningful community outreach and engagement with at-risk students and their families. The Commission encouraged Sunnyside to develop a deeper sense of cultural competency and to apply in the future, advocating that the school's board become further representative of the Sunnyside, WA community, and to develop a deeper sense of cultural competency in its community outreach program.

The Commission's evaluation process 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 hosted four public forums that 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. The Commission has, with this round included, authorized six schools for opening in 2015, and one school for opening in 2016. Washington State's first charter school, First Place Scholars in South Seattle, opened on September 3, 2014. First Place Scholars is a Washington State Charter School Commission authorized school.

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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