

For Immediate Release:
Friday, May 22, 2015

Contact:
Joshua Halsey
Joshua.halsey@charterschool.wa.gov
(360) 725-5511

TWO NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS SUBMIT PROPOSALS TO LEAD PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IN WASHINGTON STATE

State Charter Authorizer to Review Third Round of Applications

Olympia, WA – The Washington State Charter School Commission (the Commission) announced today that two non-profit organizations have submitted proposals in the third round of applications to open high-quality public charter schools in the state of Washington. Each applicant was asked to put forth an innovative, rigorous, and culturally responsive plan to meet the needs of the students they intend to serve. The Commission has invited applicants whose proposals met preliminary completeness requirements to continue in the application process. Those applicants are (nonprofit name, school name, location):

- Innovation Schools, Willow Public School, Walla Walla
- Summit Public Schools, Summit Public School: Seattle #2, South Seattle

The Commission initiated this third round of applications on February 13, 2015. They will now call on expert evaluators from Washington state and around the country to analyze the proposals.

“This round of applications represents a bold step for the Commission. Along with managing all steps of the application process, the Commission has made substantial changes to how it evaluates the cultural inclusivity and responsiveness of applications,” said Steve Sundquist, the Commission’s Chair. “We believe these changes not only set a high bar for applicants in the communities they intend to serve, but also for the charter sector in Washington as well as the nation.”

The Commission has approved eight charter schools to date. First Place Scholars in Seattle opened Fall 2014, and is currently the only operating charter school in Washington. Six more Commission-authorized

schools will open Fall 2015, all in the Seattle/Tacoma metro area; and Green Dot Seattle, will open Fall 2016. Washington state law allows for up to forty charter schools to open from 2014-2019.

The applications will be thoroughly evaluated to determine the organizational, academic, and financial capacity of each applicant team. The evaluation process includes an in-person interview with the schools' founding team and public forums for public input. The Commission will pass final resolutions of approval or denial for each application at its August 13 meeting at South Seattle Community College's Georgetown Campus.

The Commission's 2015 application round clarifies expectations for the cultural inclusivity and responsiveness of applications. In December 2014, the Commission engaged with Melia LaCour, Director of Equity in Education for Puget Sound Educational Service District, to clarify expectations and develop language to address an applicant's cultural competence, cultural relevance, and cultural inclusivity.

"The Commission values cultural responsiveness and recognized the need to clarify their expectations in this area. I believe they are beginning the process of clarifying their understanding of what it means to practice cultural responsiveness," Ms. LaCour states. "By challenging applicants to address the cultural inclusivity and responsiveness of their models, the Commission has initiated a thought-provoking conversation about culture and education in the charter and traditional public school sector. They should be commended for this."

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://charterschool.wa.gov/>

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