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CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION SELECTS INTERIM DIRECTOR

Krystal Starwich to serve as interim Executive Director as Commission and community embark on national search process for permanent director.

Commission celebrates seven-year tenure of outgoing Executive Director Joshua Halsey, highlights accomplishments that center student outcomes in Washington's first charter public schools.

Olympia, WA – The Washington State Charter School Commission (Commission) selected Krystal Starwich to serve as interim Executive Director and celebrated the seven-year tenure of outgoing Executive Director Joshua Halsey who has served in that position since the inception of the charter public school system in Washington State. The Commission's selection of Starwich, who had previously served as Deputy Director, is a key milestone in the ongoing national search process – directly informed by community leaders and local education stakeholders – to select a permanent Executive Director for the Commission.

“Nine years after Washington voters supported the establishment of charter public schools, the Commission is embarking upon a search for a new Executive Director to build upon our success and continue to build momentum for the system. Since Krystal Starwich has been serving as the Deputy Director, she is already closely connected to all of the inner workings of the Commission. She has the experience and track record to see us through this transition, including practical familiarity of the regulatory environment and deep, strategic understanding of the system and the drive to support great education outcomes,” **said Dr. Heather Lechner, Commission chair.** “As we continue our search process for a permanent Executive Director, we can help ensure we don't miss a beat as we prepare for a 2021-22 school year that represents getting 'back to school' unlike any year before. We are especially grateful that Krystal and the Commission team will operate through this transition on solid footing as Joshua Halsey's leadership has been steadfast in the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic as well as in his visionary implementation of the first educational equity policy in state government and other systemic improvements to strengthen the future of charter public schools in Washington. The Commission is deeply grateful for Joshua's commitments to standing up the regulated system, and for his countless hours invested in holding our schools to the highest possible standards on behalf of the kids that we all serve.”

“I am honored to serve as the interim Executive Director of the Washington State Charter School

Commission and humbled by the work ahead as we both oversee the search process for a permanent director and prepare the schools in our portfolio for a full return to the classroom in the Fall,” **said Starwich, interim Executive Director.** “The most important thing I can do as interim is ensure that the work of our dedicated staff and Commissioners continues. We can’t afford to lose any momentum during this critical time in public education. I have learned so much in my last four years with the Commission and I will draw upon that experience, the diverse perspectives of Commissioners, the real-time expertise of my colleagues, the on-the-ground work of our school leaders, and the parents who put their trust in our schools to help their kids thrive as we continue to center the needs of students in our charter public schools.”

Before her appointment to Executive Director, Krystal Starwich served as the Deputy Director for the Washington State Charter School Commission where she oversaw both the authorization and oversight activities of the agency. Prior to this role, she served as the Commission’s Director of New School Applications and managed the new school authorization process, which is regarded as one of the strongest in the nation. Starwich started her career in public service at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction where she worked as the state’s first Charter School Program Grant Coordinator.

Prior to joining the Commission, Starwich spent three years providing operations and student support at an independent school in Seattle. She earned her master’s degree in public administration from Seattle University and her bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Washington. Her non-profit professional experience includes legal advocacy for survivors of gender-based violence, fund development, and program coordination.

Alaska born and Pacific Northwest raised, Krystal is a proud product of Washington’s public education system and credits programs like Running Start for her success as a student. She believes that with proper management and rigorous oversight, charter public schools can provide families with a high-quality option to support their students’ learning and development. She is passionate about youth civic engagement and has been a longtime volunteer and board member for the YMCA’s Youth and Government program.

“It has been an honor to serve as the inaugural Executive Director of the Washington State Charter School Commission. This Commission, charter public school leaders and the advocates who support the success and expansion of the system clearly understand the imperative to provide opportunities to all kids, including many who would have struggled in traditional public schools,” **said Halsey, outgoing Executive Director.** “The education system in Washington is stronger because of the option that charter public schools create for students, and for a regulatory framework that establishes accountability, transparency and flexibility ensuring programs that can flex to meet student needs.”

As it embarks upon this transition, Commission highlighted the track-record of Commission and charter public school sector accomplishments during Halsey’s tenure as Executive Director:

- The establishment of a new state agency tasked with the authorization and oversight of charter public schools throughout the state.
- Successful support of ESSB 6194 that re-established Washington’s Charter School Act.
- Support of OSPI in acquiring and then successfully launching a State Educational Agency (SEA) federal Charter School Program (CSP) grant.
- Authorization of 21 charter public schools and successful management of the charter contract surrender of four schools. A difference between charter public schools and traditional public schools is that charter public schools are evaluated regularly and can be closed based on a rigorous

regulatory structure that demands accountability and positive outcomes. While rare, this is a sign that the system is working.

- Development and implementation of a comprehensive charter public school renewal process.
- Development and adoption of an Educational Equity policy, a first for a state agency. The Educational Equity Policy codifies and expands on the Commission's commitment to equity in student outcomes, developing a system to expand opportunities for students who have been underserved, and ensuring the highest standards of accountability and oversight to support student success.
- Development and implementation of two Commission strategic plans.
- Oversight of a system where thriving charter public schools can create more opportunity for students - the expansion this year of Spokane International Academy is one among many examples.

For more information on the search process for a permanent Executive Director, <https://charterschool.wa.gov/about-the-commission/careers/>.

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.

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