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Commission Leadership Transition

Commissioners thank outgoing E.D. Jessica de Barros for her leadership since February 2022

Commission-led hiring process well underway to identify next permanent executive director

Olympia, WA – The Washington State Charter School Commission (Commission) continued a hiring process to identify a new executive director following the departure of current leader Jessica de Barros on September 5. In a letter distributed on June 12, de Barros notified Commissioners, charter public school leaders, lawmakers and community members of her intent to move on from the Commission after supporting a leadership transition process for the agency through the pandemic, working to strengthen capability and resources within the agency and its staff, endeavoring to establish stronger channels of communications from the agency to its community, and providing a steady hand at raising awareness of and adherence to the system of accountability governing charter public schools. A search has been underway and the Commission will make an announcement with appropriate updates as that process continues. Marcus Harden, deputy director of the Commission with 24 years’ experience in public education, will serve as its interim leader beginning September 6.

“Under Jessica’s leadership, our agency has expanded our capacity, deepened our partnerships with our peer state agencies, collaborated with lawmakers and strengthened our oversight of charter public schools in Washington,” said **Commission Chair Christine Varela**. “As charter public schools welcome students back to their classrooms for the 2024-25 school year, our agency continues in its commitment to upholding the interests of students as we diligently pursue a seamless leadership transition. Jessica’s leadership in collaborating with community members to develop a new Strategic Plan, which we expect to adopt later this year, will be instrumental for future leaders of our Commission as we pursue our mission to provide oversight and accountability for high-quality charter public schools where children learn and thrive.”

Varela concluded: “We thank Jessica for her service to the Commission and we wish her continued success in her future endeavors. We are fortunate that in his role as interim executive director, Marcus’s experience and leadership will ensure continuity in service for the communities we serve.”

In her June 12 note on her upcoming transition, **de Barros wrote:** “Most significantly for me, the voices of families and students were amplified during my tenure. My thanks extend to those who reached out as advocates for their students. Your engagement helped inform systems my team and I built to be open to family feedback – taking action that includes new processes for gathering family voices as the Commission makes renewal and other decisions about schools, and for students and families of charter public schools to resolve concerns. I’m deeply grateful to have worked alongside families, community members and educators committed to successful futures for Washington’s charter public school students.”

Under de Barros leadership, the Commission:

- Deepened its staff expertise, recruiting and/or retaining a Deputy Director, Director of Operations, Director of School Quality & Accountability, two Oversight Managers, an Executive Assistant, and a new Technical Assistance Manager
- Led a Strategic Planning process to guide the Commission on behalf of those it serves
- Launched regular engagement with education leaders in the Legislature
- Implemented legislation and new rules to provide a new system for engaging with parents, teachers and others charter public school families with additional channels to ask questions, express concerns and ask for support
- Ensured consistency in the Commission’s commitment to equity in education
- Collaborated with peer state agencies (OSPI, State Board of Education, Auditor’s Office)
- Launched new efforts to expand resources for local school leaders
- Renewed five school charters and approved expansion for two schools.
- Advocated successfully in support of equitable funding for charter public school students
- Invested in transparency, responding to approximately 50 Public Records Requests, providing an estimated 3,500 documents.
- Oversaw nine Corrective Action Plans to help schools maintain compliance under their charters
- Conducted approximately 75 school visits by Commission staff, a regular oversight effort of charter public schools

The Washington State Charter School Commission is an independent state agency and the [main authorizer](#) of charter public schools. It was formed with the mission of creating a rigorous and comprehensive proposal process for qualified non-profits who wish to open a charter public school. The agency also monitors and provides oversight holding schools and charter public school boards accountable to high standards of quality. The Commission was formed following the passage of Initiative 1240 by state voters in 2012, which created the charter public school system in our state. In Washington, all charter public schools are tuition-free, non-sectarian, open to all students, publicly-funded, staffed by certified teachers, and held accountable to the same state and national standards as

traditional public schools.

To learn more about the Commission, its responsibilities and charter public schools in Washington, please visit our website: <https://charterschool.wa.gov>

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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