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Rainier Valley Leadership Academy Expands to Grades K-5

Washington State Charter School Commission Approves Expansion Application with Conditions
Rainier Valley Leadership Academy, a charter public school, has served the community as a middle school and high school since 2017

Olympia, WA – The Washington State Charter School Commission (Commission) is pleased to announce approval for Rainier Valley Leadership Academy (RVLA) to expand to grades K-5 beginning with Kindergarten in the 2023-24 school year. One of 16 charter public schools in Washington State, RVLA has served students grades 6-12 since 2017. The Commission’s approval of RVLA’s application to expand comes with conditions, following a rigorous application review process that included meeting established eligibility requirements, submitting a detailed application with 11 sections, and numerous meetings with Commission staff.

“Charter public schools, like all public schools in our state, are tuition-free non-profits, non-sectarian and accessible to all students,” **said Chris Korsmo, Chair of the Washington State Charter School Commission.** “Charter public schools are held to a higher degree of accountability than their peers in the traditional public school system and with that accountability comes greater flexibility in serving students in their communities. There is a dedicated community of students and families that attend Rainier Valley Leadership Academy, and we urge their ongoing commitment to strengthening student outcomes at their school. In addition to students in grades 6-12 who already attend RVLA, the Commission approved expansion to grades K-5, with conditions which enable the school to proceed within a specific set of expectations that are being monitored and must be addressed.”

The approval for RVLA’s expansion is contingent on conditions set by the Commission including:

- Demonstrating funding of the expansion to the satisfaction of the Commission by March 31, 2023.
 - Submitting to the Commission curricular scope and sequence and detailed unit/project lesson plans for Kindergarten for the first half of school year by July 1, 2023.
 - Submitting to the Commission updates/additions to all school policies and/or student or employee handbooks by July 1, 2023
 - Pre-opening site visit by July 15, 2023
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Should it meet all the established requirements of the expansion and its charter, RVLA will be evaluated by the Commission in its typical evaluation cycle for reauthorization. Every charter public school in the state is monitored regularly throughout the year. Additionally, on a two- to five-year cycle, each school must be assessed by the Commission to ensure it is still meeting the needs of the students in its community, and the conditions of its charter contract. A charter public school that falls irreparably short of meeting its requirements can be closed.

The urgency to meet the needs of all students in Washington’s education system intensified amid disruptions to student learning during the pandemic. In approving RVLA’s conditional expansion, the Commission acknowledges these disruptions to academic outcomes at RVLA while also adhering to principles of rigorous oversight for charter public schools. Data reviewed by Commission staff during the application process for RVLA’s expansion underscored its challenges are far from unique. Nonetheless, the school’s culture, anti-racist curriculum, and academic response plan signal that RVLA can make the needed academic growth at the secondary level in coming years. Specifically, RVLA’s work to further support students’ academic outcomes includes:

- Adoption of Wired for Reading and Fear No Numbers, programs designed to bolster the content knowledge of math and English teachers and the Instructional Assistants through professional development;
- Increasing supports for small-group instruction;
- Partnering with third-party organizations for after-school math tutoring; and,
- Starting an elementary school as one method to close the academic opportunity gaps they are seeing at the secondary level. Multiple letters from community and family members speak to this need.

Over the last three years, despite pandemic-related challenges, RVLA has improved the middle and high school culture. Qualitative reports reveal that students, families, and community members are overwhelmingly invested in the anti-racist mission of the school and that overall, students are increasingly engaged and invested in the RVLA program.

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.