

## MEMORANDUM

To: Washington State Board of Education  
From: Chris Korsmo, Commission Chair and Legislative Committee Chair  
Date: January 10, 2022  
RE: Authorization of Additional Charter Public Schools

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### Purpose

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the Washington State Board of Education (SBE) the Washington State Charter School Commission's (Commission) updated legislative priorities and the authorization of additional charter public schools.

### Background

Washington State's Charter School Commission (Commission) is an independent state agency. It was formed with the mission of creating a rigorous and comprehensive process for qualified non-profits who wish to open a charter public school. The agency also monitors and provides oversight, holding schools accountable to high standards of quality. The Commission strives to achieve equity in outcomes, developing a system to expand opportunities for students who have been underserved, and ensuring the highest standards of accountability and oversight for charter public schools.

**Charter public schools provide education choices for families seeking opportunities that best empower their children to learn and thrive.** Like all public schools, they are open to all students, tuition-free, publicly-funded, staffed by certified teachers and held accountable to state and national standards. The charter public school approach is student-centric, not system-centric. Charter public schools can reimagine education in a way that is personalized for the families they serve and that holds adults accountable for student performance.

Charter public schools have additional requirements beyond those of traditional public schools in that they are held accountable for showing improved student achievement according to the terms of a contract. A difference between charter public schools and traditional public schools is that if a charter public school does not serve kids effectively is identified quickly and can be closed if not remedied.

The charter public school sector is at a point in its life-cycle that student outcomes can be examined proving that charter public schools in Washington work. As public education continues to evolve, charter public schools can play a critical part in ensuring that families throughout the state have a high-quality public-school option available to them.

In 2020-21 (the most recent data available), with nearly 3,500 students enrolled in 12 charter public schools, 60 percent identify as students of color, as compared to 49 percent statewide. 58 percent of the students come from low-income households, as compared to 47 percent statewide. Rates of students with disabilities and English language learners are similar to statewide averages. There are 16 operating charter public schools in the 2021-22 school year, with two of these schools operating under district authorization by Spokane Public Schools.

## Extending the Authorization Window

The Commission adopted the 2022 legislative priorities at the October Commission meeting. The second priority is to **amend the Charter School Act (RCW 28A.710) to allow more time for charter schools to be established.**

*Why extend the authorizing window?*

**Charter public schools seek equity.** The Commission has built upon the Charter School Act’s focus on serving students who have been and are currently underserved by developing and adopting an Educational Equity policy that commits the Commission to authorize only high-quality and equity focused charter public schools. By implementing this policy, the Commission is committing to only authorizing charter public schools designed to mitigate systemic barriers to improve access to students while demonstrating a financial and organizational model that maintains the school’s financial viability and compliance with all legal requirements. Educational justice is a hallmark for how the Commission has and will continue to authorize charter public schools. If this past year has taught us anything it is that our public school system needs more schools that focus on educational justice and by extending the authorizing window, Washington is opening the door to this possibility.

**Provide students and communities opportunities for new and improved public education options.** The charter public school sector in Washington has overcome two Supreme Court lawsuits and is finally on stable footing. This stable footing may explain the increased interest from communities through Washington (Bellingham, Bremerton, Pullman, Renton, Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, Walla Walla, and Wenatchee) to start charter public schools; additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more families are looking for public school options. Therefore, allowing more time for charter public schools to be established provides all families more innovative and educational justice focused public school options.

## Recommendation

RCW 28A.710.250 states that the SBE, in collaboration with the Commission, shall submit a recommendation regarding whether or not the legislature should authorize the establishment of additional charter public schools. The Commission strongly supports the extensions of the authorization window to authorize the establishment of additional high quality charter public schools.