MEMO

TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM: Colt Gill, Director

DATE: June 17, 2019

SUBJECT: Charter School Admissions Waiver Request Recommendations

Introduction and Intent of Public Charter Schools:
The Oregon Legislature created public charter school opportunities explicitly as, “...a legitimate avenue for parents, educators and community members to take responsible risks to create new, innovative and more flexible ways of educating children within the public school system... where research and development of new learning opportunities are actively pursued... It is the intent that public charter schools may serve as models and catalysts for the improvement of other public schools and the public school system. The goals of public charter schools shall be to:

1. Increase student learning and achievement;
2. Increase choices of learning opportunities for students;
3. Better meet individual student academic needs and interests;
4. Build stronger working relationships among educators, parents and other community members;
5. Encourage the use of different and innovative learning methods;
6. Provide opportunities in small learning environments for flexibility and innovation, which may be applied, if proven effective, to other public schools;
7. Create new professional opportunities for teachers;
8. Establish additional forms of accountability for schools; and
9. Create innovative measurement tools.” (ORS 338.015)

To assist in innovation the Legislature allowed public charter schools to request certain waivers that, “...the State Board of Education may grant if the waiver promotes the development of programs by providers, enhances the equitable access by underserved families to the public education of their choice, extends the equitable access to public support by all students or permits high quality programs of unusual cost.” (ORS 338.025). The State Board of Education previously voted to prioritize the equity analysis.

Consideration of Waiver Requests:
The waiver requests from Alliance Charter Academy, Dallas Community Charter School, Hope Chinese Charter School Mountain View Academy Charter School, and Woodland Charter School do not appear to enhance the equitable access by underserved families to the public education of their choice.

Each of the waiver requests create some sort of priority admission process in a public school. Depending on the school the priority admissions go to children and/or grandchildren of employees and/or founders of the schools.

In reviewing the most recent “At-A-Glance” Profiles for these schools, each school’s student body is more racially and ethnically diverse than its teaching staff.
Although this may not be true in every case, it would not appear that providing a waiver to prioritize the admission of children and grandchildren of staff has or would in the future enhance the equitable access by underserved families to the public education of their choice. In fact, the admission of children and grandchildren of staff could have the impact of reducing access by underserved families as available slots may be taken by the children of staff members.

Mountain View Academy may be an exception to this statement, as they have identified one grandchild (currently 3 years-old) and possible future student is a person of color. As the school serves K-8 students, this child will not be eligible to enroll this fall.

Further, creating a priority admission process for staff of a public school raises certain ethics concerns, as the public employee is receiving a perceived, potential, or real benefit that is not available to the general public. Should these waiver requests be granted, this ethics concern would need to be appropriately addressed by the employer and employee.

**Recommendation of Waiver Requests:**
In review of the considerations discussed in this memo, I recommend denial of these waiver requests.