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RECOMMENDATION SUBMITTAL

DATE: August 4, 2015

TO: Mitch D’Olier, Chairperson Applications Committee

FROM: Tom Hutton, Executive Director

AGENDA ITEM: Action on Application Process and 2015-2016 Application Cycle Timeline

I. DESCRIPTION

Applications Committee recommendation to adopt a single-phase application process and the revised proposed general timeline for the 2015-2016 application cycle.

II. AUTHORITY

Charter School Applications: Pursuant to §302D-5(a), Hawaii Revised Statutes, “[a]uthorizers are responsible for executing the following essential powers and duties: . . . (1) Soliciting and evaluating charter applications; (2) Approving quality charter applications that meet identified educational needs and promote a diversity of educational choices; [and] (3) Declining to approve weak or inadequate charter applications[.]”

III. BACKGROUND

At its June 18, 2015 general business meeting, the Commission adopted a general timeline for the 2015-2016 application cycle, as proposed by staff. The timeline is based on a two-phased application process similar to the process used during the 2014-2015 application cycle. However, after further analysis of feedback received from evaluators and the Hawaii Public Charter School Network, staff is recommending returning to a single-phased process, as a couple of major issues arose.

First, the two-phased process’s emphasis on the academic plan appears to have had the undesirable effect of applicants composing academic plans without fully considering the financial or organizational impacts. The Commission created a two-phased process that focuses on the academic plan in the first phase to encourage applicants to design plans primarily around their academic visions, rather than predominantly financial or organizational considerations, but it still

required applicants to holistically analyze all aspects of the application when devising academic plans. In actuality, applicants instead appeared to design academic plans before working through financial or organizational challenges.

Second, allowing applicants to amend their Initial Proposals makes evaluating the application more difficult, did not result in better quality applications, and even made some applications more confusing. The purpose of the Initial Proposal amendment is to allow applicants the ability to refine academic plans that already met the Initial Proposal threshold criteria as applicants finalize the details of their organizational and financial plans. Applicants instead used the amendment in attempts to rectify more significant issues identified in the Initial Proposal evaluation or to make other substantial changes to the educational program, which resulted in insufficient or incoherent academic plans.

IV. DECISION MAKING STATEMENT

While the two-phased process has proven to save time and resources for some applicants, the problems described above make some aspects of how the process played out counterproductive.

Including parts of the financial and organizational plans in the Initial Proposal could possibly mitigate some of the holistic design issues with the academic plan, but it would likely require more Commission time and resources than even a single-phase process and go against one of the fundamental reasons for implementing a two-phased process. As the two-phased process currently stands, some applicants and the Commission save time and resources when applicants whose Initial Proposals do not meet the minimum quality thresholds drop out of the cycle, as there are fewer applications that require a full evaluation. The current two-phased process demands more time only of academic performance staff than a single-phase process. However, adding financial and organization components to the Initial Proposal would require the involvement of more performance staff in the first phase evaluations in addition to Final Application evaluations.

Further, staff does not see a way to sufficiently address the issues caused by allowing an amendment. Expanding content or length of the amendment or allowing the application to be resubmitted would be inappropriate as the application process is not intended to help applicants refine their applications, and the Commission is prohibited by law from providing technical assistance to applicants.

Ultimately, staff believes it is more important to implement an applications process that is more likely to produce higher quality, more coherent applications than a process that saves time and resources. Therefore, staff recommends that the Commission return to a single-phase application process and proposes the revised general timeline attached as **Exhibit A**. The proposed timeline still includes an earlier release of the Request for Proposals and provides applicants with more time to develop an application than either of the previous two cycles. Importantly, this timeline mostly avoids significant overlap with other major Commission projects and processes. Further, having final decisions on applications in July adds one more month to the start-up period, which the previous two-phased process shortened.

V. RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation to the Committee:

“Moved to recommend to the Commission that the Commission:

1. **Adopt a single-phase application process;**
2. **Adopt the revised general application timeline for the 2015-2016 charter application cycle, as presented in the submittal dated August 4, 2015; and**
3. **Authorize staff to finalize the details of the process and timeline for future approval by the Commission.”**

Exhibit A
Revised 2015-2016 Application Cycle Estimated Timeline

Mid-September 2015	Pre-Request for Proposals (“RFP”) Orientation
Mid-September 2015	Release of RFP
Late September 2015	RFP Orientation
Mid-October 2015	Deadline for prospective applicants to submit Intent to Apply Packets
Late October 2015	Prospective applicants are notified of their eligibility to submit an application
Late January 2016	Deadline for eligible applicants to submit applications
Early February 2016	Applicants receive notifications of completeness
Early February 2016	Deadline for applicants to submit missing information (if applicable)
Early February to Mid-March 2016	Application initial evaluation window
Mid-March 2016	Evaluation Team interviews applicants
Early April 2016	Requests for Clarification are distributed to applicants
Early April 2016	Deadline for applicants to submit responses to Requests for Clarification
Mid-May 2016	Commission holds public hearing on charter school applications
Mid-May 2016	Applicants receive Recommendation Reports
Early June 2016	Deadline for applicants to submit written responses to Recommendation Reports
Late June 2016	Application Committee Meeting on application decisions
Mid-July 2016	Commission General Business Meeting on final application decisions
Mid-July 2016	Applicants are notified of the Commission’s decision
July 2016 to July 2017	New charter school start-up period for approved applications
July 2017	Opening of new charter school