

NEIL ABERCROMBIE
GOVERNOR



CATHERINE PAYNE
CHAIRPERSON

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION
(‘AHA KULA HO‘ĀMANA)
1111 Bishop Street, Suite 516, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Tel: 586-3775 Fax: 586-3776

INFORMATIONAL SUBMITTAL

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TO: Mitch D’Olier, Chairperson
Applications Committee

FROM: Tom Hutton, Executive Director

AGENDA ITEM: Discussion on Decision-Making Stage of the Application Cycle and
Commissioner Questions Regarding Current Charter School Applications

I. DESCRIPTION

Information on the decision-making stage of the current application cycle and answers to Commissioner questions regarding current charter school applications.

II. DECISION-MAKING STAGE

While it is the Evaluation Team’s duty to evaluate and develop a recommendation on each application for a new charter school, the Commission is solely responsible for deciding whether to approve or deny each application. It is important for Commissioners to keep in mind, as the authorizer, that the purpose of the application process is to approve only high-quality charter applications and deny those that do not meet the high standards set forth in Request for Applications (“RFA”) and criteria. Importantly, the purpose of the application process is not to assist applicants in refining and finalizing their proposals; this is one of the fundamental reasons for not accepting and considering new information that was not originally a part of the application, as will be discussed further later in this submittal.

The rigor and seriousness of the application process is evidenced with the amount of time that the Evaluation Teams have dedicated to the thorough and careful evaluation of applications and that other staff members have dedicated to review of the resulting materials produced by the Evaluation Teams and applicants. The two Evaluation Teams comprised six Commission staff members and four external evaluators. Additionally, Operations staff has been involved in managing the process

from its inception and has developed recommendations on each application after a thoughtful review of all relevant materials.

The Evaluation Teams developed Recommendation Reports, which recommend approval or denial of applications. Each applicant had an opportunity to provide a written response (“Applicant Response”) to its Recommendation Report, and the Evaluation Teams had an opportunity to provide a written rebuttal (“Evaluation Team Rebuttal”) to any Applicant Response. The Recommendation Report, Applicant Response, and Evaluation Team Rebuttal form the Recommendation Packet.

Staff Recommendation. In developing the recommendations to the Committee, staff has been mindful of the application evaluation process and scope of the Commission, as set forth in the RFA: “The Commission’s Application Committee will consider the Recommendation Packet and public hearing testimony and make a recommendation to the full Commission regarding approval or denial of each application. At its General Business Meeting, the Commission will consider the Recommendation Packet, public hearing testimony, and the recommendations of the Commission’s Application Committee and decide whether to approve or deny each application. The Commission will not review applications or interview applicants but will rely on the Evaluation Team’s review and recommendations as to these elements.”

While the Recommendation Report, Applicant Response, and Evaluation Team Rebuttal cover a variety of issues, staff has attempted to focus on the few issues that appear to be the most significant and would have the biggest impact on an applicant’s ability to successfully start and operate a high-quality charter school. The omission of an issue from the staff’s review is not meant to indicate that the staff believes that the issue was resolved one way or another, only that it is not a major point of contention or is not a critical point that warrants further analysis in the submittal. For each key point, staff reaches a conclusion for the Committee’s and Commission’s consideration, but at a minimum, the inclusion of these points in the submittal are intended to draw out the key points for an approval or denial of the application.

Scope of Commissioner Review. Applicants were advised at the beginning of the application process that the application should be a complete and accurate depiction of their proposed plan, and that no new information would be accepted at later stages in the application process. Responses to Requests for Clarification and answers given during the capacity interview needed to be clarifications, not new information. This is done because if applicants are constantly making significant changes to their plan during the application process, it makes it difficult for Evaluation Teams to provide a holistic review of the applicant’s overall plan.

The RFA states, “The Commission shall disregard any new information or information that differs from what the applicant provided in its Narrative Proposal. For example, if the applicant submits new or different information in its public hearing testimony or Applicant Response, the Commission will not consider this information in making its decision. Commission staff and the Evaluation Team will provide the Commission with guidance on what information is considered new or different from the applicant’s Narrative Proposal.”

Because this was what was communicated to all applicants, and applicants submitted their application with this understanding, Commissioners should not consider new information that was not originally a part of the application in their review and decision-making. New information is specifically flagged in the Evaluation Team Rebuttal and, where relevant, is noted in the staff

submittal. Commissioners can consider whether the Evaluation Team has an adequate basis for denial of an application. This includes considerations like whether the Evaluation Team gave enough weight to certain aspects of the application or whether applicant's response points out significant information that the Evaluation Team overlooked.

III. COMMISSIONER QUESTIONS

Staff asked Commissioners to submit questions relating to the applications in advance that may require staff research. To ensure public deliberation, the questions and answers are shared in this submittal.

“Why [are] the evaluation [results] for North Shore [Middle School] so different from last year? [The applicant] met the standard in most areas last year, but none this year.”

The current RFA and process are different from previous application cycles; therefore, the application for North Shore Middle School cannot be judged on nor compared to the application or evaluation results from the previous cycle. Staff communicated this to all applicants early in the process. With that said, it is possible that with the increased rigor of the application, criteria, and process the Evaluation Team found deficiencies in the proposal not previously identified, contributing to more areas not meeting the standard for approval.

“Is there a public charter Montessori school anywhere else in the country?”

Yes, there are several states with public charter schools that use the Montessori approach. A brief search found that least eight states, including Arizona, California, Oregon, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, New Hampshire, and South Carolina, have Montessori charter schools. While some of these schools from the sample size run private preschool programs, the preschool programs are separate from the charter school, and some of the private preschool programs are tuition-free. However, none of the schools identified give admissions preference to students with previous Montessori experience, and some that run a separate private preschool program even explicitly state in their admissions policies that enrollment in the private program does not afford preference for admission into the charter school.

“What does the California data on student achievement look like for the other two iLEAD schools?”

iLEAD Development operates two charter schools in California, iLEAD Santa Clarita Valley International (“SCVI”) and iLEAD Lancaster. iLEAD Development's first school, iLEAD SCVI has performed lower than district and state averages overall. The Academic Performance Index ranking indicated that iLEAD SCVI performed in the bottom 30% of all California public schools and in the bottom 20% of all comparable public schools in 2012-13. Further, iLEAD SCVI's scores indicate a lack of growth.

Because iLEAD Lancaster opened in 2012, data is limited regarding its academic performance. The available data indicates that iLEAD Lancaster performs lower than district and state averages in all areas, except English language arts when compared to district schools.

“Are there strong educators involved in the North Shore [Middle School] effort?”

Proposed school leader Dali Pyzel is the only applicant group member with experience in the K-12 setting. Monique Mironesco has experience teaching, developing online courses, and curriculum development; however, that experience is in post-secondary education.