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RECOMMENDATION SUBMITTAL

DATE: August 13, 2015

TO: Catherine Payne, Chairperson

FROM: Tom Hutton, Executive Director

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

I. DESCRIPTION

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, attached as **Exhibit A**. 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 focus on the academic plan in the initial phase appears to have had the undesirable effect this cycle of applicants composing academic plans without fully considering the financial or organizational impacts. The Commission focused 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, importantly, it still required applicants

to holistically analyze all aspects of the application when devising their academic plans. In actuality, applicants instead appeared to design and submit academic plans without having sufficiently worked through the related financial or organizational challenges.

Second, allowing applicants to amend their Initial Proposals made evaluating the applications more difficult, did not result in better quality applications, and 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 finalized the details of their organizational and financial plans. Applicants instead attempted to use the amendment 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 did save time and resources for some initial applicants as intended, the unanticipated ways in which the process played out with other applicants proved 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 would 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 than a single-phase process only of the academic performance staff. However, adding financial and organizational 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 address sufficiently 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 for applicants to continue to refine their applications along the way, and the Commission is prohibited from providing technical assistance to applicants. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (“NACSA”) recommends against allowing applicants the opportunity to amend their proposals as it is difficult to make clear distinctions and enforce boundaries for what is allowable, and plans are just as likely to become murkier than clearer. NACSA contends that denied applicants can always try again in another application cycle.

Ultimately, staff believes it is more important to implement an applications process that is more likely to produce higher quality, more coherent applications than to implement one 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 B**. 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. A simplified, approximated side-by-side comparison timeline is attached as **Exhibit C**.

V. **RECOMMENDATION**

“Moved 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

Previously Approved 2015-2016 Application Cycle Estimated Timeline

Mid-September 2015	Pre-Request for Proposals (“RFP”) Orientation
Mid-September 2015	Release of RFP, which calls for applicants to submit an Initial Proposal and a Final Application
Late September 2015	Initial Proposal Orientation
Early October 2015	Deadline for prospective applicants to submit Intent to Apply Packets
Early October 2015	Prospective applicants are notified of their eligibility to submit an Initial Proposal
Mid-November 2015	Deadline for eligible applicants to submit Initial Proposals
Late November 2015	Applicants receive Notifications of Completeness
Late November 2015	Deadline for applicants to submit missing information (if applicable)
Late November – Late December 2015	Initial Proposals review window
Mid-January 2016	Applications Committee Meeting and Commission General Business Meeting on Initial Proposal Recommendation Reports and decision on whether to recommend that the applicant submit a Final Application
Mid-January 2016	Applicants receive Commission’s recommendation on whether to proceed or voluntarily withdraw
Mid-January 2016	Deadline for applicants to submit intentions to proceed
Late January 2016	Final Application Orientation
Early March 2016	Deadline for proceeding applicants to submit Initial Proposal Amendment and Final Applications
Mid-March 2016	Applicants receive Notifications of Completeness
Mid-March 2016	Deadline for applicants to submit missing information (if applicable)
Mid-March to Mid-April 2016	Final Application initial evaluation window
Late April 2016	Evaluation Team interviews applicants
Mid-May 2016	Requests for Clarification are distributed to applicants
Late May 2016	Deadline for applicants to submit Clarification Packets
Early June 2016	Commission holds public hearing on charter school applications
Mid-June 2016	Applicants receive Final Application Recommendation Reports
Early July 2016	Deadline for applicants to submit written responses to Final Application Recommendation Reports
Late July 2016	Application Committee Meeting on Final Application decisions
Mid-August 2016	Commission General Business Meeting on Final Application decisions
Mid-August 2016	Applicants are notified of the Commission’s decision
August 2016 to July 2017	New charter school start-up period for approved applications
July 2017	Opening of new charter school

Exhibit B

Revised Proposed 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

Exhibit C

Side-by-Side of Two-Phased vs. Single-Phase Application Process Timelines

	Sep '15	Oct '15	Nov '15	Dec '15	Jan '16	Feb '16	Mar '16	Apr '16	May '16	Jun '16	Jul '16	Aug '16
Two-Phased Process	RFP → Intent to Apply → Initial Proposal			Evaluation → Decision		Final Applications		Evaluation				Decision
Single-Phase Process	RFP → Intent to Apply → Applications					Evaluation					Decision	

(Note that this comparison timeline is an approximation and is not to scale.)