



State Public Charter School Commission 2013 Recommendation Report

Charter Application for
IMAG Academy

Submitted by
IMAG Academy

Evaluation Team

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Introduction

In 2012, the Hawaii State Legislature passed Act 130, replacing the state’s previous charter school law, Hawaii Revised Statutes (“HRS”) Chapter 302B, with our new law, codified as HRS Chapter 302D. Act 130 instituted a rigorous, transparent accountability system that at the same time honors the autonomy and local decision-making of Hawaii’s charter schools. The law created the State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”), assigned it statewide chartering jurisdiction and authority, and directed it to enter into State Public Charter School Contracts (“Charter Contract”) with every existing charter school and every newly approved charter school applicant.

The 2013 Request for Applications and the resulting evaluation process are rigorous, thorough, transparent, and demanding. The process is meant to ensure that charter school operators possess the capacity to implement sound strategies, practices, and methodologies. Successful applicants will clearly demonstrate high levels of expertise in the areas of education, school finance, administration, and management as well as high expectations for excellence in professional standards and student achievement.

Evaluation Process

The Commission has worked with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (“NACSA”) to develop the new charter school application evaluation process. NACSA provided its advice and expertise in creating standardized evaluation forms, providing evaluator training, and assisting with the assembly of the evaluation teams to help ensure that the Commission implements the national best practices, policies, and standards needed to authorize high-performing charter schools. The highlights of the process are as follows:

Proposal Evaluation. The evaluation teams conducted individual and group assessments of completed applications. The Commission’s Operations staff conducted a completeness check to ensure evaluation teams only reviewed complete submissions.

Request for Clarification. After the initial review, the evaluation teams identified any areas of the application that required clarification. Applicants had the opportunity to respond to the evaluation teams’ Request for Clarification in writing to address these issues.

External Financial Review. An external review by Charter School Business Management Inc. was conducted to answer several critical questions relating to the financial information submitted by applicants. Evaluation teams could consider these reviews when drafting their evaluation.

Capacity Interview. After reviewing each response to the Request for Clarification, the evaluation teams conducted an in-person or virtual assessment of the applicant’s capacity.

Consensus Judgment. The evaluation teams came to consensus regarding whether to recommend the application for approval or denial.

The duty of the evaluation teams is to recommend approval or denial of each application based on its merits. The Commission’s Operations staff is charged with reviewing this recommendation report, the testimony at public hearings, and other information obtained during the application process in making their final recommendation to the Commission. The authority and responsibility to decide whether to approve or deny each application rests with the Commissioners.

Report Contents

This Recommendation Report includes the following:

Proposal Overview

Basic information about the proposed school as presented in the application.

Recommendation

An overall judgment regarding whether the proposal meets the criteria for approval.

Evaluation

Analysis of the proposal based on four primary areas of plan development and the capacity of the applicant to execute the plan as presented:

1. Academic Plan
2. Organizational Plan
3. Financial Plan
4. Evidence of Capacity

Rating Characteristics

Rating	Characteristics
Meets the Standard	The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It addresses the topic with specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation; presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; and inspires confidence in the applicant's capacity to carry out the plan effectively.
Does Not Meet the Standard	The response meets the criteria in some respects but has substantial gaps, lacks detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.
Falls Far Below the Standard	The response is wholly undeveloped or significantly incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant's ability to carry it out.

Proposal Overview

Proposed School Name

IMAG Academy

Applicant Name

IMAG Academy

Mission and Vision

Mission: Our mission as a K-12 public charter school is to provide a small, family-like environment to prepare mindful citizens capable in excelling in college, career and life through creating a continuum of experiences where the strengths and potential of the individual and community can flourish.

Vision: IMAG Academies are community resources raising generations of innovative, mindful, accepting, and giving citizens grounded in their knowledge and capabilities to create and sustain successful and peace-filled communities. An Academy would provide youth the permission to dream, environment to thrive, confidence to succeed, skills to act and the expectation to create a collaborative and peace-filled society!

Geographical Area

Waipahu complex, which spans six square miles from Leeward Community College to the entrance of Ewa

Enrollment Summary

Grade Level	Number of Students					
	Year 1 2015	Year 2 2016	Year 3 2017	Year 4 2018	Year 5 2019	Capacity 2020
K	60	60	60	60	60	60
1	0	60	60	60	60	60
2	0	0	60	60	60	60
3	0	0	0	75	75	75
4	75	75	75	75	75	75
5	50	75	75	75	75	75
6	50	50	75	75	75	75
7	0	50	50	75	75	75
8	0	0	50	50	75	75
9	0	0	0	50	50	75
10	0	0	0	0	50	75
11	0	0	0	0	0	75
12	0	0	0	0	0	75
Totals	235	370	505	655	730	930

Executive Summary

IMAG Academy

Recommendation

Deny

Summary Analysis

Although the IMAG Academy application presents interesting possibilities for education in the Leeward area, the application does not meet the criteria for approval because sections of the proposal are not fully developed or aligned to reflect a comprehensive plan for a viable school.

While the application offers some interesting ideas for its proposed school, many of those ideas remain conceptual without an implementation plan. The application does not contain an actual academic plan and instead details the goals of various “task force” groups to create and implement academic and curricular plans, including developing the proposed school into an International Baccalaureate school. Further, while the application contains details like board bylaws and procurement policies, there is little evidence that the applicant group has done fundamental things, like soliciting and receiving community input and support. The intended location and ideal facility for the proposed school is unclear, and the applicant interview suggested that the location could possibly be entirely different than what is stated in the application.

Lastly, there are gaps in the proposed financial plan, a clear lack of financial expertise, and limited expertise in the organizational and academic areas.

Summary of Section Ratings

Opening and maintaining a successful, high-performing charter school depends on having a complete, coherent plan and identifying highly capable individuals to execute that plan. It is not an endeavor for which strengths in some areas can compensate for material weakness in others.

Therefore, in order to receive a recommendation for approval, the application must Meet the Standard in all areas.

Academic Plan

Fall Far Below the Standard

Financial Plan

Fall Far Below the Standard

Organizational Plan

Fall Far Below the Standard

Evidence of Capacity

Fall Far Below the Standard

Academic Plan

IMAG Academy

Rating

Fall Far Below the Standard

Plan Summary

IMAG Academy proposes to open a charter school in the Waipahu-Pearl City area that will serve grades K, 4, 5, and 6 at its opening. No details of the school's academic plan were provided because the plan is still in a conceptual phase. Currently, the school intends to implement various frameworks into its academic plan, including International Baccalaureate ("IB") (an international education program focused on creating intercultural understanding) and Conscious Discipline (a social and emotional development framework), with an added V-BASE (Value Added Business, Arts, Science, and Engineering) component. The school also envisions its academic plan co-existing with and reinforcing IMAG culture (which values innovation, mindfulness, acceptance, and giving), while also incorporating Common Core State Standards and national standards in its delivery.

Analysis

The academic plan falls far below the standard for approval because of it fails to describe the curriculum or a plan to develop curriculum, has no plan for alignment with Common Core State Standards and plans for implementation, and coherency.

The applicant does not propose curriculum or have a plan to develop curriculum, other than to develop an application to the IB program. Because IB is not a comprehensive curriculum, the plan to apply for IB designation does not satisfy this section. The application should have included a description of what it intends to submit to the IB for its initial application. The absence of this description made it impossible for the Evaluation Team to determine exactly what was being offered in this academic plan. Also, if the school can only identify itself as an IB applicant after April of 2015, this would give the proposed school very little time to market itself, which will likely affect the proposed school's ability to effectively recruit students. In addition, the application did not include a contingency or transitional plan should the IB application be delayed or not approved.

The applicant failed to adequately explain its responsibility to align its curriculum with Common Core standards as part of the State's performance system. It states that it is interested in aligning its own standards with Common Core and national education standards, but does not explain how this alignment would occur or how it would ensure academic success in students and positive results for mandated statewide assessments.

Conceptually, it is difficult to understand how the applicant will incorporate all of the aforementioned programs into an academic plan. It is difficult to develop a new curriculum, which this applicant will have to do, and the Evaluation Team is apprehensive about the applicant's capacity, competency, and whether the applicant has sufficient time to create the curriculum it describes. Further, the applicant failed to provide examples of schools that employ the proposed model and any evidence of success.

Overall, the application is missing clear explanations of how the school's proposed academic plan (which will incorporate IB and Conscious Discipline with a V-BASE component into the IMAG culture) will translate into a developed curriculum that will meet state requirements for public education while providing an alternative educational opportunity to the regular public school system.

Organizational Plan

IMAG Academy

Rating

Fall Far Below the Standard

Plan Summary

The proposed school's organizational plan establishes a governing board that will be relied upon to not only govern the proposed school but to also create a rewarding and engaging learning and teaching environment. No implementation plan has been proposed for facilities and operations, but a number of task forces have been assigned various tasks toward developing the plan for the proposed school and implementation of these plans. The responsibilities prescribed by these task forces will be shared among a handful of founding group members. The applicant has cited a number of possible sites for the school - Waipahu, Ewa, Pearl City, and Waikele – and has not identified any specific facilities that will accommodate its plans for expansion.

The applicant does not intend to provide transportation services and in-house food service but is seeking to contract with a certified food provider.

Analysis

The organizational plan falls far below the standard for approval due in large part to the gaps in planning pertaining to the location and facility.

The lack of proposed facilities for the school within the application is problematic as it is an integral component in the establishment of a charter school. While finding and maintaining a facility is a systemic challenge for charter schools, the applicant's proposed school sites did not inspire confidence with the Evaluation Team during the interview. A lack of clarity and focus on the facility makes an assessment of the proposed organizational plan difficult. The applicant listed proposed sites in Waipahu, Ewa, and Waikele, each which would result in different student populations surrounding the school. For example, the target population in the Waipahu area mentioned in the application includes 60% Free and Reduced Lunch ("FRL") eligible students. However, if the facility was located in the Waikele area, that percentage of FRL students is 38%. The applicant did not sufficiently explain how it would serve the demographics in Ewa or Waikele should it be unable to obtain a facility in Waipahu, the preferred geographic location as stated in the application.

Another possible area of concern is food service. The absence of food service would be an issue in the Waipahu area due to the large number of FRL students. However, if the school was in the Waikele area, not providing food service would be much less of a concern. Again, the uncertainty surrounding the school's location and facility makes it very difficult to assess the proposed school's organizational plan.

In addition, there is no evidence of community involvement and "buy-in" for the proposed school in any of these communities despite the proposed school's assertion that "community engagement is a part of our DNA and is inherent in our IMAG and IB culture."

Financial Plan

IMAG Academy

Rating

Fall Far Below the Standard

Plan Summary

The proposed school's financial plan looks to ensure that funds are managed in a way that will assure a high degree of asset protection. The applicant intends to follow accounting policies and procedures that comply with generally accepted accounting principles. Procurement of goods and services will be conducted by the business manager, subject to the approval of the school director and governing board. Projected revenue for Year 1 is based on a projected enrollment of 235 students; by Year 5, the applicant projects enrollment at 730 students. The applicant has identified that its immediate goal is to find a board member with financial expertise to assist with projections and financial operational processes.

Analysis

The financial plan falls far below the standard for approval because the plan is not practicable. The applicant relies solely on grants for funding its start-up year, but was unable to provide any evidence that it had even researched any grants. The grant assumptions used to develop the application was based on a school in Los Angeles, yet the application does not address the disparity between the California and Hawaii school systems. Additionally, the applicant proposes to have a teacher/adult to student ratio of approximately 1:13, which is unlikely at current funding levels. The lack of certainty regarding proposed facility, as described in the organizational section, hampers any real cost analysis of the preliminary budgets. Moreover, it is unclear whether the budget provided is based on maximum projected enrollment, which raises issues regarding viability should enrollment not meet projections and the applicant's budget does not include a contingency plan in the event actual costs vary negatively or enrollment falls below projections.

Another pressing concern is that neither the application group nor proposed governing board possesses the financial expertise necessary for opening and running a school. The applicant explained that an additional person would be joining the applicant group's financial committee and that this will be helpful because of this person's business degree and experience as a small business owner. The applicant points to this person as evidence of financial capacity. If the applicant truly recognizes the importance of a financial expert, this role would have been filled prior to the creation and submission of a budget. Instead, current plans project that the financial person would not start until July 2015, which is when the school itself is projected to open.

Evidence of Capacity

IMAG Academy

Rating

Fall Far Below the Standard

Plan Summary

The current founding board is comprised of four members and each is assigned to at least six of seven task forces responsible for the duties associated with the planning, the opening of the school, and implementation of the organizational, financial, and academic plans.

Three members of this applicant group were present for the capacity interview - Sheila Buyukacar, Momi Akana, and Cheryl Cudiamat. Two other potential governing board members were listed in the application but were not present at the interview.

Ms. Buyukacar is the intended school leader, has a background in working with non-profits and has worked as an educational consultant for adult and youth leadership in Colorado and as a substitute teacher in the Central District area (Waipahu).

Ms. Akana is currently the executive director of a non-profit Keiki O’Ka Aina Learning Centers and has experience as a founding board member of Voyager Charter School. She will serve as a governing board member during and after the start-up period.

Ms. Cudiamat is listed as an adviser in the application, but intends to serve in a support role to Ms. Akana managing the fiscal responsibilities during the start-up period.

The Founding Board acknowledges the absence of a financial expert and has prioritized the effort in identifying and hiring someone to fill this capacity.

Analysis

The capacity of the applicant falls far below the standard for approval. The applicant’s questionable capacity to develop and implement its proposal was evident throughout the application process. While the lead applicant and proposed school leader Ms. Buyukacar, shows drive and passion toward this endeavor, she lacks experience as a school administrator as most of her experience with education came from her employment in Colorado where she was employed as a consultant for adult and youth leadership. The extent to which she has the capability to carry out the plan for opening the proposed school and be an effective school leader is unclear.

Ms. Akana and Ms. Cudiamat were also present for the interview. While both have experience in founding and running non-profit organizations, the Evaluation Team had similar concerns about their capacity to open and run a public charter school.

The Evaluation Team was concerned about overall the applicant group’s capacity when Ms. Akana stated that while Keiki O’Ka Aina was considering being the non-profit for the school, in the interim, it would act as a pass-through agency for the proposed school’s fund raising endeavors. This proposal is problematic as it raises liability concerns for the proposed school, and possibly the State because Keiki O’Ka Aina, which is not the established non-profit organization for IMAG Academy should not be soliciting monies or collecting funds for a not-yet-approved charter school with which it is not in partnership.

In the capacity interview, Ms. Cudiamat was identified as a “key financial advisor” for the school. However, she does not have the necessary financial expertise and experience to manage the financial needs of the school. The experience she relies upon comes by way of her experience as a small business owner.

The evaluators were unable to determine the capacity of all of governing board members because a few did not show up at the capacity interview, although scheduled to appear.

The application does not provide all the information required by the Request for Applications, responses to the Request for Clarification are unclear and inadequate, and the applicant failed to assemble a team capable of answering all questions pertaining to education, organization and finance necessary for the capacity interview. The applicant’s explanation for why some of its members were absent from the interview centered on “difficulties” in managing both current job responsibilities commitments to the proposed school. The Evaluation Team understood this to mean that the absent members prioritized work projects over the capacity interview, which is a critical component of the evaluation.

Evaluator Biographies

Doug Muraoka

Mr. Muraoka is the Commission's Academic Performance Manager. He has extensive experience with educational data and professional development in assessment data analysis. He has several years of experience as a high school teacher and also served as an academic advisor for Hawaii Pacific University. He co-authored a publication on social studies and physical education and has been a guest speaker at numerous engagements. He holds a Master of Education, Curriculum, and Instruction from the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Nikki Trautman Baszynski

Ms. Baszynski is currently working as an attorney as the first Greif Fellow, a fellowship created to fight juvenile human trafficking. Previously she was a founding teacher at the Columbus Collegiate Academy, one of the highest-performing charter schools in Columbus, Ohio, and worked as the school's Strategic Development Coordinator. She has experience as a teacher with Teach for America and has been presented with numerous awards, both during law school and her teaching career.

Ray L'Heureux

Mr. L'Heureux is currently the Assistant Superintendent of the Office of School Facilities and Support Services at the Hawaii Department of Education. He has a 30-year military career with numerous executive positions in strategic and management operations with the United States Pacific Command and Marine Corps. These positions include Special Envoy for the Commanding General Joint POW/MIA at Hickam Air Force Base, Marine Forces Pacific Chief of Staff, and Marine Helicopter Squadron One HMX-1 Commanding Officer (a position which allowed him to personally fly two United States Presidents). He holds an Executive Master of Business Administration from the University of Virginia.

Leila Shar

Ms. Shar is the Commission's Financial Performance Manager. She has over 20 years of experience in financial and operations management, including holding the position of Chief Financial Officer of the Queen's Development Corporation, a subsidiary of the Queen's Health System. In addition to overseeing financial operations, she has developed strategic plans for large Hawaii corporations and managed three large physician office buildings, with responsibilities ranging from oversight of renovations to leasing. She holds a Master in Business from the University of Michigan.

Danny Vasconcellos

Mr. Vasconcellos is the Commission's Organizational Performance Specialist. He previously worked at the State Office of the Auditor as an Analyst where he worked on or lead projects (such as the audit of Hawaii's charter schools and a study of the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board) where he analyzed agency effectiveness and efficiency and identified internal control weaknesses. He also served as a researcher for the Hawaii State Legislature's House Finance Committee and has extensive knowledge of Hawaii's legislative process and funding. He holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Charter School Business Management Inc. (External Financial Review)

CSBM is a firm experienced and focused on financial and organizational consultancy for charter schools. It is based in New York and has extensive nationwide charter school experience.