

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION – TOPIC SUMMARY

Topic: The Four Rivers Community School Request for Charter Renewal (State Sponsored Charter School) & Public Hearing

Date: June 25, 2015

Staff/Office: Kate Pattison/Office of Learning; Chelle Robins/Four Rivers Community School Director

Action Requested: Informational Only Adoption Later Adoption Adoption/Consent Agenda

ISSUE BEFORE THE BOARD:

The Four Rivers Community School requests a renewal of the charter agreement with the State Board of Education for 10 years.

BACKGROUND:

The Four Rivers Community School is one of four Oregon State Board of Education sponsored charter schools. Four Rivers Community School originally opened in September 2003 and has successfully operated in Oregon as the longest running state sponsored charter school. The school is currently in its twelfth year of operation, serving about 250 students in grades K-8 as a model dual language immersion school in Malheur County. The vision of the school is build generations of biliterate and culturally engaged learners who envision a future of possibilities.

Based on data published in the 2013-14 Oregon Report Card for the Four Rivers Community School (reporting on 252 students), the school serves 75 % Hispanic/Latino, 23% White, and 2% Black/African American. Of the students, 41% are English Learners, 76% are economical disadvantaged, and 9% of students have an IEP. Fifty-two percent of Four Rivers Community School staff are Latina/o and 69% of teaching staff have a master’s degree.

The State Board of Education received official written request from Four Rivers Community School for renewal of the charter contract pursuant to ORS 338.065. This is Four Rivers Community School’s fourth request to renew their charter contract and if renewed, the term must be five to ten years. This request requires the State Board of Education, as the sponsor of the charter school, to hold a public hearing to receive comment regarding the school prior to voting.

ORS 338.065 stipulates:

- (4)(a) The initial charter shall be in effect for a period of not more than five years and shall be renewed upon the authorization of the sponsor using the process established under this section.
- (b) The first renewal of a charter shall be for the same time period as the initial charter.
- (c) Subsequent renewals of a charter shall be for a minimum of five years but may not exceed 10 years.
- (5)(a) The renewal of a charter shall use the process required by this section.
- (b) The public charter school governing body shall submit a written renewal request to the sponsor for consideration at least 180 days prior to the expiration of the charter.
- (c) Within 45 days after receiving a written renewal request from a public charter school governing body, the sponsor shall hold a public hearing regarding the request for renewal.
- (d) Within 30 days after the public hearing, the sponsor shall approve the renewal of the charter or state in writing the reasons for denying the renewal of the charter.

And:

- (8)(a) The sponsor shall base the charter renewal decision on a good faith evaluation of whether the public charter school:
 - (A) Is in compliance with this chapter and all other applicable state and federal laws;
 - (B) Is in compliance with the charter of the public charter school;
 - (C) Is meeting or working toward meeting the student performance goals and agreements specified in the charter or any other written agreements between the sponsor and the public charter school governing body;
 - (D) Is fiscally stable and has used the sound financial management system described in the proposal submitted under ORS 338.045 and incorporated into the written charter under this section; and
 - (E) Is in compliance with any renewal criteria specified in the charter of the public charter school.
- (b) The sponsor shall base the renewal evaluation described in paragraph (a) of this subsection primarily on a review of the public charter school’s annual performance reports, annual audit of accounts and annual site visit and review as required by ORS 338.095 and any other information mutually agreed upon by the public charter school governing body and the sponsor.

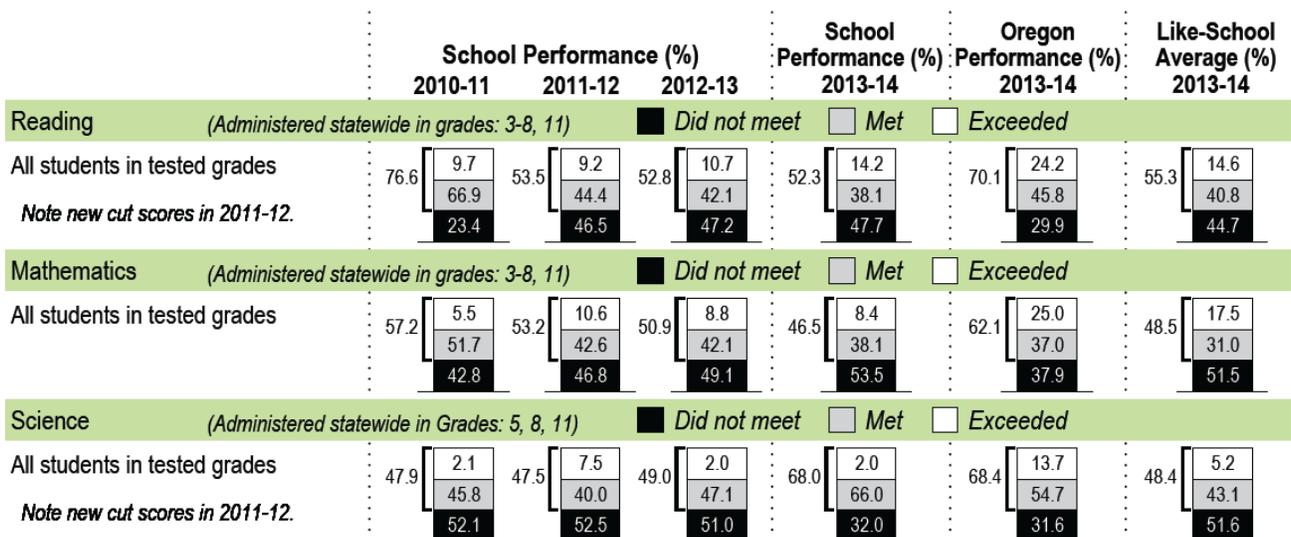
Oregon Department of Education (ODE) staff have visited the school and met with school leadership many times over the last four years. The school received a formal visit each year and school leadership met with ODE each year at director meetings. During these visits, ODE staff observed the school’s academic program, organizational effectiveness, and reviewed the financial health of the school. As part of the ongoing oversight and accountability, the school has participated in formal visits, required trainings, and submitted reports to ODE. The information gathered from the visits and reports, presented in three categories (academic performance, organizational performance, and fiscal performance), serve as the foundation for staff recommendation regarding the renewal of this school.

Academic Performance:

When we evaluate the performance of the Four Rivers Community School, it is essential that we understand the dual language program and school’s model for instruction. Students in kindergarten are immersed in Spanish language instruction 90% of the time and English language instruction 10% of the time. Students in grades 1-8 receive 50/50 immersion in Spanish/English language instruction with native literacy in grades K-2. Students are instructed and assessed in Spanish and English in each content area. It is also critical for the academic performance of the school to be evaluated with an understanding of the student demographics of the school as compared to the performance of similar students in Oregon.

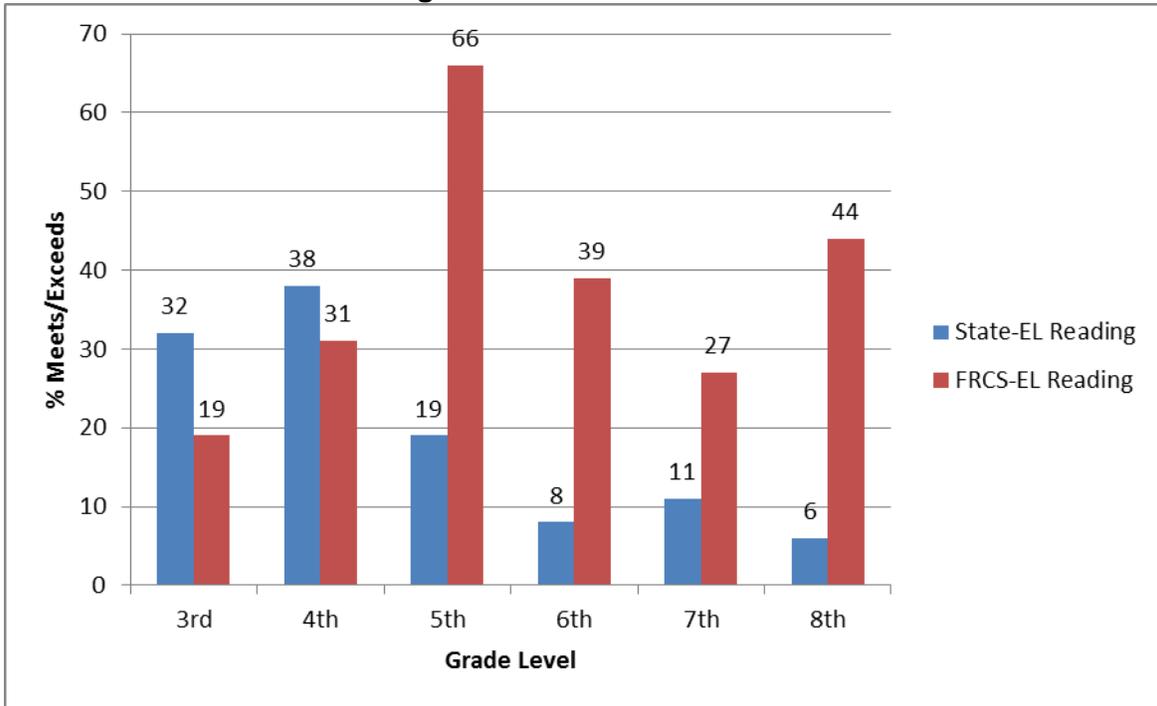
Preliminary Findings from Year one of the Oregon Dual Language Collaborative Evaluation			
Comparison Group	% Hispanic	% Economical Disadvantaged	% English Learner
Four Rivers Community School, Ontario	78%	76%	44%
Oregon (statewide)	22%	54%	10%

In 2013-14, Four Rivers Community School was rated as a Level 3 and rated “Above Average” when compared to elementary schools with similar student demographics. Overall, the school performed below the state average in reading and mathematics, but performed about the same as the state average in science.

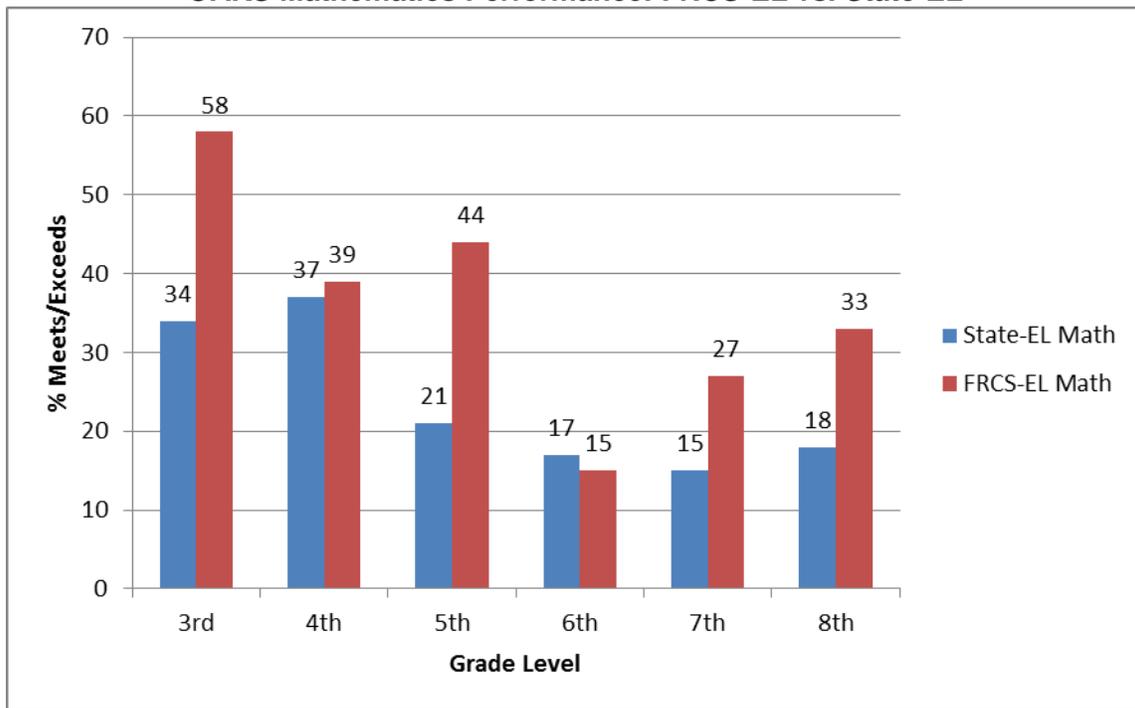


Over the last four years, the Department has been in conversation with FRCS regarding the performance of the school, and looks at subgroup data to understand the school’s performance. Considering that the school’s student demographics are much different than the state’s demographics, the Department looks closely at the performance of students who have been identified as English Learners (EL). In 2013-14 FRCS EL students outperformed the state in grades 5-8. This is consistent with the expectations of a dual language model and demonstrates FRCS is meeting the needs of students who are developing English proficiency.

OAKS Reading Performance: FRCS-EL vs. State-EL

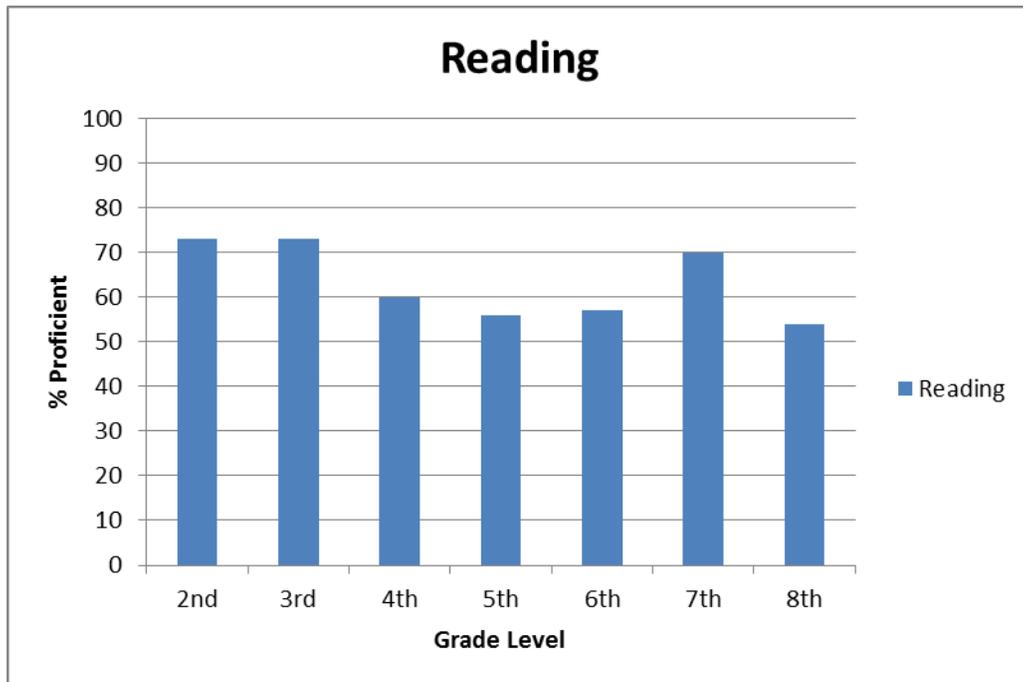


OAKS Mathematics Performance: FRCS-EL vs. State-EL

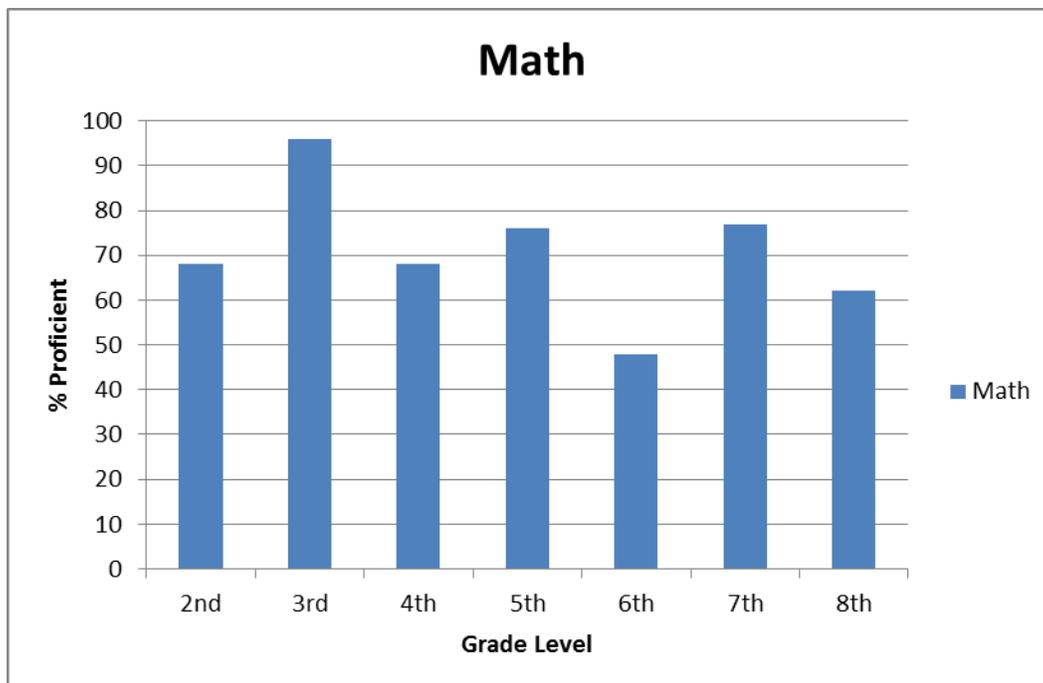


The Department and the State Board have encouraged charter schools to contribute alternate measures of student success to the discussion on the school's performance and effectiveness in achieving its mission. The Four Rivers Community School has administered the Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments throughout the duration of the charter contract and submitted the data from last year's assessments. These assessments are aligned to the Common Core State Standards and are nationally normed. This year (2014-15), the students at FRCS performed well and we look forward to seeing the school's performance on the Smarter Balanced Assessments from the 2014-15 school year.

Spring 2014 Four Rivers Community School Reading Achievement in English (MAPS)

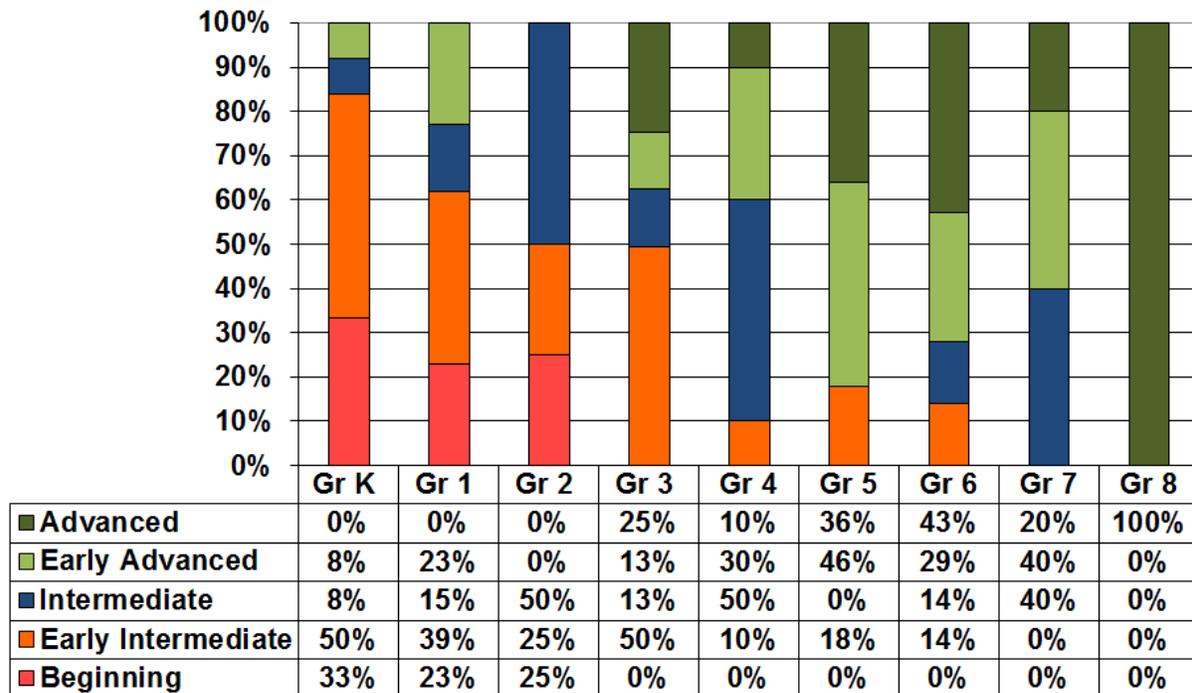


Spring 2014 Four Rivers Community School Math Achievement in English (MAPS)



Four Rivers is exiting English Learners. As demonstrated in the chart below, FRCS is successfully supporting students in developing their English language proficiency and making progress at each grade level.

Percentage of Students at each level of ELPA by Grade Level – Overall Proficiency



Between 2011 and 2014, students completing **eighth grade** took the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) for Spanish Language credits. Of the 71 students who took the CLEP, 85% received credit for college level coursework: 34% received 12 credits of college-level coursework and 51% scored well enough to earn 24 credits of college-level coursework.

In 2015, Four Rivers was nominated and received the Exemplary Reading Program award from the international Reading Association. The Oregon association affiliate sent two representatives to the school in January for a site visit and the school was soon after selected for the award.

Four Rivers has continued to work with students who have completed eighth grade. Through a variety of outreach efforts, including the recently hired Graduate Advisor, the school counsels former FRCS students throughout high school to ensure they are successful, graduate, and go onto college. This year, the first class of FRCS students will graduate from high school. 100% of their students will graduate and have applied at institutions of higher education.

Next year, three students who completed eighth grade at FRCS will be enrolled in the Allied Health Program at Ontario High School through Treasure Valley Community College. These students competed through a highly competitive process for five spots. Students will complete high school with their certified nursing assistant (CNA) certificate.

Four River’s students go on to be leaders in their communities. Next year, Ontario High School’s Senior Class President will be a former FRCS student.

Operational:

Four Rivers has established very strong operational practices that serve students, families, staff, and the community. The following narrative will highlight areas of growth and compliance related to the operation of the school including the education program, governance, school environment, and contractual obligations.

Education Program

The education program and innovative cornerstone of FRCS is a Dual-Language Immersion model where students receive at least 50% of their instruction in Spanish. Students in kindergarten receive 90% of their instruction in Spanish and 10% in

English. Grades 1-8 receive instruction in a 50/50 split with English and Spanish language. Four Rivers has described their instructional practices as follows:

As a two-way dual-language immersion program, our students spend one week in full Spanish immersion and one week in full English immersion. All of the academic areas are taught through each language without translation. Typically, by the time students spend 5-7 years in a two-way immersion program they are fully bi-literate (reading, writing, and speaking in both languages).

This has been observed through our formal and informal site visits over the term of the current charter contract. The school successfully recruits and retains highly qualified, Spanish-speaking teachers, many of whose native language is Spanish. Their commitment to the dual-language model is evident in their staff and student demographics. As research and evidence shows, maintaining a high % of native Spanish language students and staff helps the model’s effectiveness.

Governance

Four Rivers is currently governed by a non-profit board of directors made up of 5 members. The board has complied with public meetings laws, producing minutes and giving notice. The board has been responsive to all requests made by ODE over the past four years and participated in the annual site visits. ODE has provided feedback to the board regarding their process for evaluating the executive director and board’s effectiveness. In the last two years, the board has established a strategic plan to move the school forward with its large Family Education Center building project. This plan will provide an opportunity for the board to reflect on its effectiveness and success in achieving its mission.

School Environment

Four Rivers maintains one campus with two primary instructional buildings and the Family Education Center, completed in 2015. One building houses grades K-5, with 7 classrooms, a reading room which serves as a library, an arts and science lab, a support services room, administrative offices, and a multi-purpose room. The other instructional building houses grades 6-8 (referred to as “prep students”) with three classrooms and a central area where students have tables and lockers. In addition, there are athletic fields with an amphitheater.

Students at FRCS experience a structured schedule in resource-rich classrooms with low walls to support openness, community, and exposure to English and Spanish language. Through our observations, we have witnessed students working in large and small groups, using technology, engaging in classroom projects, and using the Spanish language. Teachers and assistants effectively use Smartboards, web-based materials, and other digital media to support their instruction. Students have access to a variety of resources in their classrooms and through the Family Education Center.

Contractual Obligations

In the past four years, FRCS has met the obligations and requirements stated in the negotiated and approved charter agreement. The school is responsive to requests made by the department and maintains regular communication to provide updates on any incidents. As part of the ongoing oversight and accountability, ODE staff monitored the school through annual site visits. These visits are conducted by a team of leaders who observe the school in action and interview focus groups made up of students, teachers, administration, board members, and parents.

Fiscal:

Municipal audits from 2011-12, 2012-13, and 2013-14 conducted by Stephen D. Long, did not note any material weaknesses or deficiencies. Using an internal rubric to analyze the school’s financial performance using near-term and sustainability measures, the school is close to meeting all targets. During this period, the school initiated a successful capital campaign and purchased their building.

Measure	Target	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14
Current Ratio					
current assets / current liabilities	>1.1	5.27	8.85	7.80	9.47
Days Cash					
cash / (total expense/365)	≥60 days	63	129	127	194
Debt Default	Not in Default	No	No	No	No

Total Margin					
net income / total revenue	Positive	10%	10%	1%	54%
Debt to Asset Ratio					
total liabilities / total assets	<0.9	0.60	0.55	0.55	0.42
Cash Flow					
year 2 total cash - year 1 total cash	Positive	(374,553)	(11,003)	98,087	564,653

Information from the 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13, and 2013-14 audits was used to produce chart above. The 2010-11 fiscal year was under the prior contract and was included to show past performance.

POLICY QUESTIONS:

ORS 338.065 requires the board to use the following review criteria as the basis for the decision:

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Four Rivers has met the evaluation criteria in all categories. The student performance of the school is the most significant area for improvement at the school. How does the board want to evaluate the student performance for the school going forward?

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The Deputy Superintendent and ODE staff recommend the State Board of Education approve the Four Rivers Community School contract for 10 years with the following considerations:

- The school will make annual student performance growth in grades 3-8 in reading and mathematics including growth in subgroups.
- The school will identify model-appropriate measures of student academic performance to be included in the evaluation of the school’s annual performance.
- Failure to make growth at the agreed upon rate for all students and subgroups following improvement efforts may lead to a notice of termination.
- The determination regarding academic performance growth will be made using preliminary calculations by ODE on June 30th of each year.
- The first determination will be June 30, 2016 and will be the baseline for all subsequent years of the contract.
- The contract term will be 10 years with an evaluation at year 5 using the renewal criteria and performance framework to determine if the school shall continue.

This is a first reading of the renewal request and ODE staff will bring this item back to the State Board in June for a final decision.

Attachments: The FRCS School Written Request for Renewal, 2013-14 Report Card