

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION – TOPIC SUMMARY

Topic: Sauvie Island Academy Charter School Waiver Request

Date: January 21, 2016

Staff/Office: Cindy Hunt & Kate Pattison, Office of the Deputy Superintendent

Action Requested: Informational Only First Reading Adoption/Consent
Agenda

ISSUE BEFORE THE BOARD: Review waiver for enrollment priority to be given to children of charter school employees and students who reside on Sauvie Island.

BACKGROUND: Sauvie Island Academy is a K-8 charter school sponsored by the Scappoose School District and located about 12 miles from downtown Scappoose. The school had 214 students in 2013-14. It is uniquely located on the 26,000 acre Sauvie Island, at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers. The island reaches into two counties and most of the acreage is either farmland or wildlife refuge. There are approximately 600 families living on the island or nearby houseboats. The community spans the socio-economic scale, including generational farms, families on houseboats, and newer high-income residents attracted by the island’s beauty. Parents and community members formed the charter school in order to preserve access to public education on the island in the event this rural school would be closed under current economic pressures.

In 2012, the Board approved a similar waiver allowing enrollment priority for children of charter school employees, founders, and residents of the island. In 2014, Sauvie Island Academy requested the waiver continue through the new charter contract. The State Board began asking many questions about public charter school waivers and began a rigorous discussion on issues around ethics, equity, and the waiver request procedure itself. This discussion concluded in a separate work session on April 2014. In order to support the operation of the charter schools requesting waivers and provide time for a thorough discussion, the State Board approved the 2014 request only for the 2015-16 school year.

Following the work session and discussion on public charter school waivers in 2014, the State Board approved an updated procedure that includes an equity lens to help guide charter schools in addressing the criteria in ORS 338.025.

The Sauvie Island Academy waiver request complies with the requirements in the process published by the Department. The Scappoose School District has been notified of the request and does not have any objections. When evaluating the request against the criteria in statute, the Department considered the information included in the letter and the information in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school report cards. This request was before the board for a first read on December 10, 2015.

Does the Sauvie Island Academy waiver request to grant priority enrollment to students of staff and residents of the island enhance the equitable access by underserved families to the public education of their choice and extend the equitable access to public support by all students? The Department concludes that providing this waiver, island residents (some of whom are migrant families) may have better access to a neighborhood school of their

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choice. The school is the only elementary school in the community and is designed to serve the local community. Based on the nature of public charter school enrollment requiring an application and lottery, providing a geographic priority allows students and families without knowledge of the processes or transportation to the surrounding area greater access to this public charter school. Additionally, the public charter school has generally performed at least slightly better than the district in reading, math, and science on the state assessments for Hispanic/Latino students. This waiver may provide greater access to students whose native language is not English and for economically disadvantaged students.

Does the Sauvie Island Academy waiver request to grant priority enrollment to students of staff and residents of the island promote the development of programs by providers and permit high quality programs of unusual cost? The Department concludes that providing this waiver supports the school in achieving its mission to be a community school rooted in the island ecosystem, offering a place-based program. By allowing the children of staff to have priority enrollment, the public charter school may be more successful in recruiting and retaining qualified staff who align with the mission. Retention of effective staff can directly support improved student outcomes. Since the school will ensure it is a small percentage of the students who will benefit from this priority, the potential unintended consequences are limited.

POLICY QUESTIONS:

- Are there any specific data the board wants to consider if the Sauvie Island Academy is approved for the waiver and returns in the future with a similar request?

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The Department recommends approving the waiver request for the duration of the current charter contract with the expectation that the charter school will:

- include enrollment priority as a benefit for staff in the employee contract or other employment agreements, and
- maintain records and data related to the charter school application, lottery, and enrollment processes.

EFFECT OF YES VOTE: (if applicable) The Sauvie Island Academy will be allowed to continue their practice of giving priority enrollment to students staff and island residents for the remainder of the charter contract.

EFFECT OF NO VOTE: (if applicable) The Sauvie Island Academy will not be allowed to continue their practice of giving priority enrollment to students of staff and island residents.