

October 26, 2015

Members, Oregon State Board of Education
255 Capitol St. NE
Salem, OR 97310

Dear State Board of Education Members:

Coburg Community Charter School (CCCS) respectfully requests that you waive ORS 338.125-- which requires, "selection for admission to a charter school be through an equitable lottery." The request is made pursuant to ORS 338.025 and OAR 581-020-0341
We would like to request the following at this time:

Waiver Renewal Request: CCCS requests the renewal of the 2012 and 2014 waivers that have allowed CCCS to maintain up to 50% of total enrollment for priority placement of students who reside within the attendance boundary for the former Coburg Elementary School. CCCS requests that this waiver be granted through the remaining length of its charter contract.

Background

Coburg Community Charter School's proposal was approved by the Eugene School District 4j School Board on February 2, 2011. CCCS currently has a three year charter with District 4j beginning in the 2014-15 school year. CCCS is located in the rural city of Coburg, Oregon. Coburg is separated from the city of Eugene and the nearest "neighborhood" school by several miles of farmland and a river. The only routes to Eugene are the Interstate and an unlit two lane county road with above average truck traffic and no designated bike lanes.

There has been a school in the city of Coburg since 1865. District 4j annexed the Coburg School District in the 1960s and has overseen an elementary school in Coburg since that time. Due to budget issues, District 4j elected to close Coburg Elementary School as of the end of the 2010-11 school year. Community members rallied to create a charter school for the city of Coburg and the surrounding community. CCCS won approval due in no small part to the overwhelming support of community members. That support will allow CCCS to continue the legacy of local education in the small city of Coburg. CCCS is leasing the former Coburg Elementary School building from District 4j. A previously approved waiver gave priority enrollment to students that were students of the former Coburg Elementary School at the time of its closure. We seek to continue CCCS's connection to its community by providing the opportunity for local families to receive this established level of priority enrollment.

Coburg Community Charter School is strongly anchored by its community. The involvement of the community in the school and the school in the community is an integral part of the school's curriculum and identity. CCCS is not a charter school born out of a particular pedagogy. At its core is the vision of a small community-driven school where students are welcomed and valued as important members of a wider community. The continued

success of the school is in the hands and hearts of its community members. It would be detrimental to the future of CCCS and to the children of the Coburg area if local families were denied enrollment.

If student enrollment from within the attendance boundary of the former Coburg Elementary School falls below 50 percent of the total enrollment of the school, we ask that students who reside within the boundary be given priority in the lottery until their numbers reach 50 percent of the total enrollment. Once returning students and their siblings are enrolled the overall percentage of total projected enrollment would be calculated. We would then determine the number of new students from within the former Coburg Elementary attendance boundary who would be given priority in the lottery for that year. After those priority slots have been filled, the lottery would continue to fill the other remaining slots with in-district students followed by out-of-district students. This would allow the community that helped to create CCCS, and will continue to support it in the future, more secured access to the school while also providing an educational option for students from within our sponsoring district as well as students from neighboring districts.

In the last three years since the 50% priority waiver has been in place CCCS has been able to place almost all local families seeking enrollment while still serving as an educational option to families of our sponsoring district. The loss of Coburg Elementary left local families with no neighborhood school option. The ability of CCCS to provide a local schooling option for families is crucial to our community and to our mission. Attending the alternative public school for the children of Coburg is a lengthy bus ride to and from a school that is virtually inaccessible to them during non-school times. These challenges are the reason that our charter was approved unanimously by the board of our sponsoring district.

The definition of “equity” may need to be broadened in evaluating the program at CCCS. The degree of racial and ethnic diversity of the students who come from the Coburg community does not differ markedly from that of the larger Eugene community. Ironically, the economic diversity of CCCS decreases as the percentage of non-Coburg students attending it increases. For CCCS, the question of equitable access really comes down to who can make the time and resource commitment to go through the application process in a timely manner and provided transportation to and from the school on a daily basis. This generally translates to a group of families in a secure socio-economic position seeking a certain type of educational experience for their family. The “fairness” of the lottery system often works against the smaller numbers of local families seeking access to a school in their community that would allow their student to have a short, safe, and possibly independent commute to school, welcomes their involvement in school activities, and provides a network of families to rely upon for additional support. Without some sort of priority in place, local families will be less represented due to the sheer numbers of suburban families with the resources to make educational choices from the full menu our sponsoring district has to offer.

We at CCCS realize that charter education is a valuable asset for any district and should be available to all students in that district and even those in other districts if space allows. That is why we have capped our priority request of 50% of total enrollment. This enables the school to serve the whole district while still maintaining its connection to its community and keeping true to its mission as a community school. The 50% priority provides the opportunity for at-risk families that live locally to have access to an educational experience that creates strong ties to students and values each student and their potential to succeed. It also gives students of local families the opportunity to prolong and strengthen relationships with their peers that will follow them once they exit our program in the eighth grade. These relationships will help them bridge some of the difficulties often faced by rural students integrating into a very different social and economic structure at the public high school that serves families in our community. This in turn will increase the likelihood for graduation and hopefully encourage further study in the future.

Stakeholders from all parts of the local community were involved in the creation of CCCS. Town hall meetings were the foundation of the school’s development, and informed how its mission was shaped. A lot of effort was put into educating the various groups in the Coburg area about the creation of the charter school and concerns

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raised in those discussions were incorporated into the school's design. Translational services were available to non-English speaking families at informational events and registration nights. Working families' concerns over before and after school care were addressed. Our all-day Kindergarten program was originally intended to be a flexible program which allowed families the option of opting out of the afternoon if needed. The CCCS board is very accessible and has been responsive to the changing needs of various stakeholder groups.

CCCS collects data regarding the race, ethnicity, language background, general economic situation, and area of residence of all our enrolled students. This data is used to measure the percentage of Coburg area students enrolled, indicate students who may be at-risk for hunger or homelessness, and inform the means of school to home communication. While data may provide a snapshot of our school's population, it is really the diligence of our teachers, parents and the administrative team which insures information crucial to each student's success is an important part of the daily experience of learning at CCCS.

CCCS is continuing to seek and support professional learning opportunities for staff and board members. Our board recently participated in a training session through the Non Profit Association of Oregon in part to assist with inclusive and sound practices for board recruitment. Classroom teachers participate in ongoing professional development offered both at the school and at various institutes. Our middle school team successfully completed the *Summer Ag Institute* last summer offered through Oregon State University. Similarly, our middle school program is developing an agricultural program that will give students hands-on experience in the various aspects of agriculture, science, business, conservation, marketing, and food production. This program supports students who plan to pursue higher education goals and those interested in a more vocational option in the future. CCCS holds the education of the whole child as one of its core values. In order to accomplish this all aspects of each individual must be considered, including cultural backgrounds and barriers.

The ability of CCCS to support underserved students in our community is contingent upon the stability and continuation of this waiver. We have spent years educating our community on the requirements of enrollment placed on a charter school by state law. If we lose the waiver it will be incredibly difficult to regain the trust of those we have sought to serve as those families are typically underrepresented in charter education in our area.

In conclusion, it is the hope of all those at CCCS that the ODE Board will renew its support of this waiver which allows our school to continue to serve families left without a local public school option, provide an educational experience that connects all our students to a vibrant and supportive community inside and outside the walls of our school building, and maintain the CCCS mission as a community-immersion school.

Your consideration is greatly appreciated.

Respectfully Submitted,
Janel Mcpherson
Coburg Community Charter School Board President

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