

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION – TOPIC SUMMARY

Topic: Southwest Charter School Request for Charter Renewal (State Sponsored Charter School)

Date: March 7-8, 2013

Staff/Office: Margaret Bates/Educational Improvement and Innovation & Anne Gurnee/SWCS

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

ISSUE BEFORE THE BOARD:

The Southwest Charter School requests a renewal of the charter agreement with the State Board of Education for 10 years.

BACKGROUND:

Southwest Charter School (SWCS) is one of four Oregon State Board of Education sponsored Charter Schools. Approved for sponsorship in April 2007, SWCS opened in September 2007. The school is currently in its sixth year of operation.

The State Board of Education received official written request from the SWCS charter board for renewal of the charter contract pursuant to ORS 338.065. This request is to renew the charter contract for 10 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.

ORS 338.065 stipulates:

(3)(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.

(4)(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 10 days after the public hearing, the sponsor shall notify the public charter school governing body of the sponsor’s intent about the renewal of the charter.

SWCS is located in Portland Public School District and serves 200 students, grades K-8. The purpose of the school is to provide a small school option, encouraging exploration of the natural world and involvement in the local community through the arts and sciences.

Over the last three Oregon Report Cards, SWCS has earned the following ratings: Outstanding (2009-10), Outstanding (2010-11), and Satisfactory (2011-12). The chart below shows the percentage of students that met or exceeded the state standards on OAKS in reading, mathematics, and science over the last three years. Circled scores indicate SWCS exceeded the district and state average that year.

	2009-10			2010-11			2011-12		
	SWCS	PPS	State	SWCS	PPS	State	SWCS	PPS	State
Reading % Students Met or Exceeded	83	84	79	83	85	81	78	76	72
Mathematics % Students Met or Exceeded	83	82	78	60	68	63	64	69	69
Science % Students Met or Exceeded	71	74	74	78	76	74	90	73	69

The charter school has met all obligations and requirements stated in the negotiated and approved charter agreement. ODE staff met regularly with SWCS administrative staff to ensure the school was in compliance with all state and federal laws.

Municipal audits from 2009-10, 2010-11, and 2011-12 conducted by Pauly, Rogers and Co., PC., noted matters involving the internal control structure and its operation. They considered these matters to be significant deficiencies for each of the three years.

POLICY QUESTIONS:

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

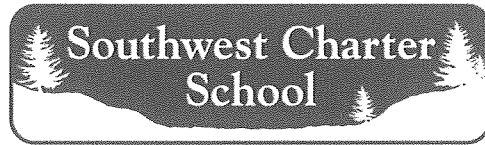
(6)(a) The sponsor shall base the charter renewal decision on a good faith evaluation of whether the public charter school:

- (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.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The Superintendent and ODE staff recommend the State Board of Education approve the Southwest Charter School request for renewal for 10 years.

Attachment A – The Southwest Charter School Written Request for Renewal



January 10, 2013

Dr. Susan Inman
Director of Learning Opportunities, Options and Support
Oregon Department of Education
255 Capitol St. NE
Salem, OR 97310

Dear Dr. Inman:

On behalf of the Southwest Charter School (SWCS) Board of Directors, I respectfully request a renewal of our charter agreement with the Oregon Department of Education. Our board voted unanimously on December 13, 2012 to pursue renewal with ODE for a term of ten years. SWCS first opened its doors in the fall of 2007 with 30 students and has had steady growth every year since. We outgrew our original building two years ago and moved to our present location which has enabled us to grow to our current enrollment of 200 students, a number near our capacity.

We have begun long-term strategic planning for the organization focused on school improvement principles and practices. Southwest Charter School continues to make excellent and measurable progress toward the pursuit of our mission and goals as proposed in our original charter application. In 2011, we updated our mission and vision statements to reflect more closely the core purpose of our school. Our mission is:

To provide a creative learning environment where students develop a sense of place and become stewards of the natural world and active citizens within our community.

Our revised vision:

Our vision is to look beyond classroom walls. We believe that healthy communities are created by engaged, informed & compassionate citizens. Through service, integrated curriculum and experiential learning, we provide opportunities for our students to actively build relationships locally, inspiring them to become catalysts of change in a global community.

Our school's reputation continues to grow throughout the Portland area. We have had significant waiting list growth over recent years, growing from 125 at the beginning of the 2010/2011 to over 200 students at the beginning of 2011/2012. Many parents are willing to transport their student a tremendous distance to access the type of education found at SWCS which features small classroom size, committed teachers and staff, and a highly involved parental presence.

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Moving into our current building in March 2011 placed us squarely in the newly developed South Waterfront district. Our school is one block from the Portland Streetcar tracks which are currently in a rapid state of expansion all over the city, including the first new bridge across the Willamette River in over 40 years. The school's proximity to the urban city center, diverse socioeconomic housing, and public transportation has helped increase our number of students from diverse backgrounds. Our total number of non-white students grew from 16.4% in 2010/2011 to 19.9% in 2011/2012.

Along with the new location and larger student body, we have continued to implement more professional development for our teachers including training in the arts, project-based learning, math instruction and other topics. As a full staff, we learned more about writing instruction and developed a whole-school vision and plan for writing instruction and an improved writing curriculum using the 6-traits of writing.

Due to our close connection to both the urban hub of the city as well as some of its natural areas along the river, our location allows us to utilize our place based approach to actively engage our children and improve student achievement. By helping students develop a closer connection with the community in which they live and creating an appreciation for the natural world, our teachers cultivate an environment that encourages active and committed citizens. For the second year in a row, our 7th/8th grade students won the statewide Project Citizen project which asks students to study a community problem and present a policy-based solution.

I urge you to renew your sponsorship of Southwest Charter School. We are proud of our school, and we are committed to making further progress toward our dream of creating a school that serves the City of Portland and the surrounding region in unique, meaningful and innovative ways.

Respectfully,



Aaron D. Britton
President, Southwest Charter School Board of Directors

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