

Madrone Trail Public Charter School

Madrone Trail Public Charter School
3070 Ross Lane
Central Point, OR 97502
541/842-3657

April, 2014

Dear State Board of Education,

Madrone Trail Public Charter School is a K-8 school sponsored by the Medford School District with a total enrollment of 230 students. MTPCS is completing its 7th year of operation this 2013-2014 school year. The MTCS Board of Directors successfully completed negotiations for a 5 year renewed contract.

Waiver Request

1. The ORS law to be waived:

We are requesting to waive ORS 338.125 (3)(b). MTPCS presently gives priority for admission to students who (A) were enrolled in the school in the prior year; (B) siblings of students enrolled in the school the prior year; (C) children of staff. We are requesting a waiver so that we can add an additional category of students—students who are transferring from private or public Waldorf inspired schools or students who were enrolled in a Waldorf homeschool program. This category would follow the above categories, with in-district students in this category having priority over out-of- district applicants. See appendix A for the proposed policy.

2. The specific reason(s) the charter school is seeking the waiver and any other relevant information:

After six years of operation, we have found that curriculum continuity is highly advantageous to both the charter school and entering/transferring students. A precedent for granting an enrollment priority for students who have previous Waldorf education experience for the purpose of curriculum continuity exists in some Waldorf public charter schools in California. Due to the unique nature of the Waldorf inspired approach to education, the issue of providing *continuity of curriculum and teaching methods* is vitally important for the following reasons:

- The Waldorf curriculum differs from the curriculum in traditional public schools regarding the question of **when** various curriculum subjects are taught. The Waldorf curriculum does not align grade to grade, or subject to subject, with the core standards.

By the end of 8 grades, the entire core standard curriculum is covered, however there is substantial variability regarding the timing between the two approaches throughout the 8 grades. This is especially the case in kindergarten, first, second, and third grade.

- The Waldorf approach is significantly different to the traditional approach regarding the question of **how**, or in regard to teaching methods. The Waldorf main lesson block, specialty classes (foreign language, handwork, eurythmy, and string instruments), accountability methods, homework philosophy, etc. are all components of a progressively developing integrated curriculum. The method works best when the various parts are experienced in the planned sequence and in their totality.

3. The Impact the waiver will have on the school:

Presently, MTPCS has wait lists for kindergarten, first, second, and third grade. The requested waiver would provide an opportunity to include more students in the charter school with previous Waldorf education experience in these grades. The impact on the school would be to strengthen the development of the Waldorf inspired program. The waiver would not presently have an effect on enrollment in the upper grades because they do not have wait lists. We have found, however, that families who enroll specifically due to a commitment to a Waldorf inspired education are more likely to stay enrolled through the upper grades. The impact would therefore help with retention of students. In time, if there are wait lists for upper grades, an enrollment preference that would help to provide curriculum continuity would be crucial, both for the students and the school programs.

4. Evidence that the sponsor has been notified as required under OAR 581-020-0341.

See appendix B. Letter from Phil Long Superintendent.

5. How the waiver will promote the development of programs by providers, or enhances the equitable access by underserved families to the public education of their choice, or extends the equitable access to public support by all students, or permits high quality programs of unusual cost (OAR 338.025; OAR 581-020-0341)

The impact on the kindergarten program would be significant due to the fact that the vast majority of children entering the MTPCS kindergarten have attended preschool prior to enrollment in the charter school. The two previous kindergarten teachers, who left MTPCS for teaching positions in other schools, have stated that one of the reasons they left was due to the difficulties involved in developing a Waldorf kindergarten program with many children transferring from preschools with various different approaches without the benefit of having at least a handful of children who previously attended Waldorf preschool as part of the mix. A core group of children who attended Waldorf inspired preschool programs serve as a catalyst for the rest of the children and helps to “anchor” the various components of the program.

The MTPCS kindergarten has a maximum class size of 20 students. The first grade has a class size of 25 to 30 students. Families who do not make it into the kindergarten still have a chance of enrolling in first grade due to the fact that the kindergarten class that is moving up to first grade does not fill all the available spaces.

Families who have had their children enrolled in a Waldorf kindergarten homeschool study course, or who have sent their children to a Waldorf kindergarten program, have an especially pressing need for curriculum continuity. The Waldorf kindergarten program does not provide formal academic instruction—it is play based with a focus on oral language development. Choosing a Waldorf kindergarten program is therefore a major crossroads decision because switching from a Waldorf kindergarten to a traditional academic public school first grade is a problematic transition. An enrollment priority for these students not only helps the children, but also strengthens the charter school program.

The waiver would also enhance access to students within the category of MTPCS's core target population. In recent years, the Medford School District has had a decrease of school aged children residing in the district, and at the same time, an increase in homeschooling. The MSD was concerned that approving the MTPCS proposal would have an adverse impact on the district's dwindling enrollment problems by pulling a few students out from a number of scattered classes, but not enough from one class or school to warrant a decrease in services that the district would need to provide.

Prior to the approval of the MTPCS charter proposal, the founders conducted a survey of parents attending the various outreach events being held to familiarize the public with the proposed charter school. Of the approximately 60 families surveyed, 96% favored a Waldorf inspired charter school over homeschooling and traditional district schools. The survey also showed that these 96% of respondents would choose homeschooling or private schools over the district schools if the charter alternative were not available. A major justification for approval to grant a charter to MTPCS was that it "would bring in new students who would not have attended public schools without this alternative choice and will bring back former students who have left the district." (P.19 MTPCS charter proposal.)

There is only one private Waldorf school in the area and it is out of district and it has wait lists. Many families cannot afford the private school's tuition even if spaces were available. Due to a lack of access to a public education of their choice, in this case a Waldorf inspired education, there are families who are homeschooling out of necessity rather than preference. An enrollment preference for these families would help to bring more families into the public school system, which is the stated purpose of our charter school, and provide them with the support of curriculum continuity. It would strengthen school programs by increasing enrollment of families who are committed to the mission of the school and whose children are already accommodated to the curriculum and teaching methods.

6. Whether the sponsoring school district supports the law waiver request.
See appendix B. Letter from Phil Long Superintendent.



Office of the Superintendent

Medford School District 549C

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April 15, 2014

Mr. Dan Beck, President of the Board
Madrone Trail Public Charter School
3070 Ross Lane
Medford, Oregon 97502

Dear Mr. Beck,

I appreciated the opportunity to meet with Madrone Trail PCS Board Member Dr. Lorraine McDonald and school supporter Gesine Abraham this past Monday to learn more about your decision to apply for a waiver with ODE in regards to priority enrollment for children with a Waldorf background. Julie Evans, our Director of Elementary Education and Charter School Liaison, participated in the meeting as well. We appreciate the open communication regarding this matter as well as the perspective of these two original founders of the school.

Dr. McDonald shared that the success of Madrone Trail PCS over the past seven years has caused some enrollment challenges. Due to the contractual limit of one class per grade level, the school is experiencing waiting lists in grades K-4. Some families in the community who are committed to Waldorf-style education are not able to get into the school because other non-Waldorf educated students register to enroll ahead of them. These wait-listed Waldorf families are choosing to use Waldorf homeschool materials rather than enroll in the regular public school program. Consequently, placement slots for families who clearly are willing to commit to the methodology of Waldorf-inspired education are being filled with other students who require retraining in order to be successful in the Waldorf philosophy and methodology of learning.

Dr. McDonald also noted that having greater concentrations of students whose preschool experience used Waldorf-methodology actually helps the remaining non-Waldorf prepared students assimilate into the classroom. This in turn makes the classes function more in harmony with the Waldorf-styled classroom program. She explained that the waiver would provide a way to serve families who have a demonstrated passion for the Waldorf learning experience to access the charter school more directly.

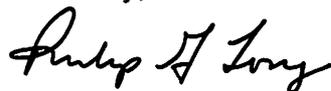
I voiced the district concern regarding equitable access for all students to the charter school. This is an interest the district has not only for Madrone Trail PCS, but for the other two charter schools within the district. Associated with the equity issue, is the concern that having a preferential application process that advantages students whose

parents provided private Waldorf preschool or Waldorf homeschool curriculum might put families that can afford the private Waldorf preschool (or the homeschool curriculum) ahead of interested parents who cannot afford this. That type of priority for enrollment could be construed as preferential based on income.

We briefly explored the option of allowing an additional class at each grade level but recognized the school has facilities limitations and would need to pursue a major capital funding program in order to provide the additional classrooms such action would require. One additional option would be to increase the class size limit above 25.

All of us agreed on the merit of having families that intentionally desire a Waldorf-inspired education to have access to one. As a district, however, we remain concerned about equitable access. We appreciate the communication in regards to this waiver application. We will look to the Oregon Department of Education to determine whether this request is permissible under the law. Please let us know once a determination is made by the state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Phil Long". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P".

Dr. Phil Long, Superintendent
Medford School District