

Commission discusses proposed rule changes by the State Board of Education, and approves several important commission documents, including charter school application review rubric and evaluation criteria.

**BY WILL CLARK**  
WSSDA RESEARCH ANALYST

Members of the Charter School Commission met in Everett last week for their sixth official meeting. The commission took public comments and discussed proposed rules from the State Board of Education. Most of the meeting involved review and approval of several important commission documents, covered in detail below.

Commissioners have worked in and out of subcommittees over the past several months to craft the commission's formative documents. These include the notice of intent for charter applicants, the commission's strategic vision, RFP evaluator descriptions, the commission's proposed rules, the evaluation rubric for application review, and charter contract language. Much of this work culminated at the recent meeting, where documents were adopted by the commission.

Approval of the criteria to evaluate charter school applicants was perhaps the most important work at the meeting. This involved two interconnected documents. The first was the proposed rules that will form a final part of the commission's state regulations. The second was a rubric, the evaluation form and criteria that will be used by commissioners to rate charter school applicants.

### **Proposed rules from the Washington State Board of Education**

Commissioner's reviewed some recently proposed charter school rules from the Washington State Board of Education (SBE). The [rules](#) cover the annual report that charter authorizers are required to submit to the SBE. The proposed rule changes:

- Set a due date of November 1 for the annual authorizer reports, starting in 2014.
- Require the SBE to develop and post a standard form for submitting authorizer reports.
- Require an executive summary and certain additional information about charter authorizers and their charter portfolios in the reports.
- Add detail and clarity on required information on the performance of operating charter schools overseen by the authorizer, including the academic progress of each school based on authorizer's performance framework.

William Haft of NACSA briefly discussed the tenuous relationship between NACSA, the commission, and the SBE. He said that sometimes his work with both parties is independent, while sometimes it overlaps. Haft said the proposed rules from the SBE were thoughtful and well-crafted, and based on best practices research. But he cautioned that the commission should still have questions about accountability and performance under the proposed rules, and mentioned that machinery for enforcement is still being reviewed and approved.

Haft had three major suggestions for the rules. First, he said the commission should look into additional accountability measures above and beyond state requirements. This involves creating a meaningful way to compare and evaluate school practices that lend well to comparison. He called for organizational performance rules dealing with health and safety, financial reviews, and other measures. Haft also expressed concern about reporting dates for achievement and auditing data. He suggested moving the date forward from November 1<sup>st</sup> to allow reporting of the most up-to-date information, which is usually released in October.

Lastly, Haft suggested a language change in the SBE Charter School reporting rules for additional, non-required indicators of academic performance. These are rules that charter authorizers choose to include in their performance framework to augment external evaluations.

These rules will be reviewed in a public hearing by the State Board of Education at ESD 105 in Yakima on September 11. Chair Sundquist is planning to attend the hearing and testify on behalf of the commission.

### **Review of commission documents**

The commission's Notice of Intent was the first major document under review. The [notice](#) will provide the public and the commission information about applicants, including the name of each non-profit applicant and a description of the proposed school. Commission Chair Steve Sundquist stated that the notice is preferred but not required by commissioners or charter school law. Likewise, the commission is not required to publish these online, but has chosen to do so to increase public transparency.

The commission then reviewed and approved its [strategic vision](#), before moving on to Request for Proposal considerations. According to this [document](#), the commission would like five-to- six reviewers on each evaluation team, with an absolute minimum of four. The composition of an ideal evaluation team will include a lead, a national reviewer, a local reviewer, a community reviewer and a charter school commission member. William Haft of NACSA explained the positions generally in this way:

- A national reviewer should have a full understanding of charters and educational trends nationally.
- The “local” in the local reviewer is more of a relative term. This reviewer should have substantive technical expertise and knowledge of the region, but not necessarily be intimate with each individual county or school district where a charter applicant resides.
- The community reviewer does not need to have the expertise of a local reviewer, but should have a firm understanding of how a new school might influence the area where it will open.

Haft said that the most important part of an evaluation team is that it has the overall qualifications and experience to rate every aspect of an application. To raise the level of engagement and involvement in the review process, and ultimately to raise the quality of the review, reviewers should be compensated for their time. Though a team lead will put in more time during any given review because of organizational duties, other members of an evaluation team should expect the following commitment:

- Roughly 6-8 hours for each individual review
- A team debrief that could be half a day
- Interviews that could take a full day

### **Commission rules and evaluation criteria**

After the RFP team overview, commissioners spent a great deal of time hashing out precise language in their proposed rules. The commission solicited [public comment](#) for their rules, and this was reviewed as commissioners made their final changes. The rules must blend clearly and cohesively with their evaluation



---

rubric, which was also under review. Changes often centered on language revisions, focusing on when to elaborate beyond what's clearly required by state law.

In reviewing the [evaluation rubric](#) for charter applicants, commissioners took great pains to make sure that changes to the proposed rules were reflected appropriately. It was an arduous process, and commissioners fully reviewed both documents, going through each page of the rubric and the rules to make sure they synched. They openly deliberated language and content preferences as they moved along. During breaks, a subcommittee drafted language to address concerns raised during review of the proposed rules and rubric. These language amendments were added and the documents were adopted by the end of the meeting.

The last major item reviewed by the commission was their charter contract document. The commission ran through all of the contract provisions on auditing requirements, staffing and employment conditions, budgets, student enrollment, attrition documentation, unions, insurance, and general provisions.

There was much discussion about unions, because of potential circumstances that could arise in individual schools. Individual employees within a charter won't be able to join an existing union, but they'll be able to form one in their own school. Commissioners discussed the options that union members might have after forming, and how they would be allowed to maneuver under state law. The contract itself was not formalized during this session. Based on its deadlines, the commission has at least one more meeting to review and approve the document.

The next full meeting of the commission is scheduled for Thursday, September 12, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Libby Center in Spokane.