



State Public Charter School Commission 2014 Initial Proposal Recommendation Report

Charter Application for
Acorn Montessori Charter School

Academic Performance Evaluators
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Introduction

In 2012, the Hawaii State Legislature passed a new charter school law, which instituted a rigorous, transparent accountability system that at the same time honors the autonomy and local decision-making of Hawaii's charter schools. The law created the State Public Charter School Commission ("Commission"), assigned it statewide chartering jurisdiction and authority, and directed it to enter into State Public Charter School Contracts ("Charter Contract") with every existing charter school and every newly approved charter school applicant.

The 2014 Request for Proposals ("RFP") and the evaluation process are rigorous and demanding. The process is meant to ensure that prospective schools have a plan with a high likelihood of success and operators that possess the capacity to implement sound strategies, practices, and methodologies.

Initial Proposal Evaluation Process

The Commission examined feedback from its 2013 Application Cycle and researched the application processes from several states to develop a new, multiphase charter school application evaluation process. This recommendation report reflects only the evaluation results from the Initial Proposal phase.

Academic performance evaluators reviewed Initial Proposals, which focus on the academic plan portion of the application, against the minimum quality thresholds contained within the Initial Proposal Evaluation Criteria.

The duty of the evaluators is to recommend whether each applicant should, based on its Initial Proposal, proceed to the Final Application phase or withdraw voluntarily from the current application cycle. The authority and responsibility to decide the Commission's official recommendation to each applicant rests with the Commissioners. Ultimately, each applicant elects whether to proceed to submit a Final Application or withdraw voluntarily from the current application cycle.

Report Contents

Initial Proposal Overview

Basic information about the proposed school as presented in the Initial Proposal.

Recommendation

An overall judgment regarding whether the Initial Proposal meets the minimum quality thresholds.

Evaluation

Analysis of the Initial Proposal is based on five primary areas of the academic plan as presented: (1) Curriculum and Instructional Design; (2) School Calendar, Schedule, and Staff Structure; (3) School Culture; (4) Special Populations and At-Risk Students; and (5) Academic Plan Capacity.

Using the Initial Proposal Evaluation Thresholds, evaluators identify responses that do not meet the minimum quality threshold and deemed them "Substantially Inadequate." A response is "Substantially Inadequate" if it: (1) fails to address the RFP requirements or criteria for approval; (2) presents unreasonable plans or ideas; (3) lacks essential information; or (4) raises significant concerns about the applicant's capacity.

If an Initial Proposal does not receive a "Substantially Inadequate" rating in any of the five primary areas of the academic plans, evaluators will recommend that the applicant proceed to completing and submitting a Final Application.

Initial Proposal Overview

Proposed School Name

Acorn Montessori Charter School

Mission and Vision

Mission: Acorn Montessori Charter School Kona will provide a high quality data driven education through a combination of Common Core curriculum and Montessori Principles including kinesthetic learning, technology, and small group direct instruction. This ensures students will master all content. Acorn strives to enhance that motivation through an exploration of learning through he senses. Students will be captivated by the hands on instruction, while utilizing state of the art approved and current curriculum including Common Core. Acorn will offer the community a place where highly qualified dedicated teachers engage students, families, and the community and thrive in education and character.

Vision: Acorn Montessori Charter School Kona will provide a high quality education through a combination of Common Core curriculum and Montessori Principals such as kinesthetic learning and small group direct instruction in collaborative learning groups. Students will enjoy learning and be captivated by the hands on instruction, while utilizing state of the art approved and current curriculum including Common core aligned McGraw Hill Treasures which covers language arts and reading, and Common Core aligned Houghton Mifflin Go Math. Acorn is outcome based, where our students grow substantially in their academic performance based on striveHI and meet or exceed the state standards. Our vision is to see every student, regardless of economic status, past education experiences, and test scores, grow academically and become excited to learn and motivated to succeed. This will be accomplished through the use of evidence based curriculum and small group direct instruction. These groups will work collaboratively to learn new materials and engage in hands on instruction. Teachers will provide information orally, through projects, and interactive lessons. Acorn will provide special education for both high and low performing students through leveled instruction that pushes students at all levels to succeed in addition to special education services.

Geographic Location

Acorn has two possible locations on the Big Island of Hawaii. The first, Kahaluu-Keauhou to South Captain Cook: Currently, there are few public or Charter School options in Kahaluu-Keauhou to South Captain Cook. The closest public school to Kahaluu-Keauhou, Kahakai Elementary School is located in Kailua Kona. Kahakai Elementary school is in the bottom 17% of schools in Hawaii, with its students standardized test scores falling below the state average. The public schools in South Captain cook reported that on average 66 to 92.2% of their students received free and reduced lunches. Many of the private schools in these areas have long wait lists and are expensive.

Na'alehu: The current public school in Na'alehu is a persistently failing tier one school that is the lowest achieving 5% of title I schools. The community is reaching out for more quality education, with most families (over 60%) feeling that their children are receiving an unsatisfactory education attending the local public schools. The poverty rate in Na'alehu is very high. 91.4% of students in the area qualify free or reduced lunch. Acorn Montessori Charter School mission is to bring quality education to low performing impoverished areas.

Academic Plan Summary

The applicant proposes a K-8 school that will expand to a K-12 school by its fifth year. The proposal consists of four pillars: small group instruction, learning through exploration and investigation, data

driven evidence based curriculum, and accountability in the form of frequent progress monitoring. Each student will be given a weekly contract that will ensure they are organized and on-task. Varied instruction techniques will be used and the proposed school will have a low student-to-teacher ratio and small group instruction and exploration to allow students to progress at different rates.

Enrollment Plan

Grade Level	Number of Students											
	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4		Year 5		Capacity	
	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2022	
Brick & Mortar/ Blended vs. Virtual	B&M/ Blended	Virtual	B&M/ Blended	Virtual	B&M/ Blended	Virtual	B&M/ Blended	Virtual	B&M/ Blended	Virtual	B&M/ Blended	Virtual
K	12		14		18		18		20		20	
1	11		14		18		18		20		20	
2	11		14		18		18		20		20	
3	11		14		15		18		20		20	
4	11		14		15		18		20		20	
5	11		14		15		18		20		20	
6	11		14		15		18		20		20	
7	11		13		15		18		20		20	
8	11		13		15		18		20		20	
9			12		15		18		20		20	
10					12		15		20		20	
11							12		15		20	
12									15		20	
Subtotals	100		122		171		189		230		240	
Totals	100		122		171		189		230		240	

Executive Summary

Acorn Montessori Charter School

Recommendation

Voluntarily Withdraw from the Application Process

Summary Analysis

The evaluators recommend that the applicant voluntarily withdraw from the application process because the responses within the Initial Proposal are “Substantially Inadequate” in meeting the minimum quality threshold in three areas—Curriculum and Instructional Design; School Calendar, Schedule, and Staff Structure; and School Culture.

The most significant missing piece in this Initial Proposal is the academic plan for the proposed school’s high school grades. While the applicant proposes to start serving high school grades in its second year of operation, its academic plan fails to include any kind of an academic plan for high school, including curriculum, graduation criteria, and a daily and weekly schedule. These missing elements, in large part, result in a “Substantially Inadequate” rating for the areas of Curriculum and Instructional Design and School Calendar, Schedule, and Staff Structure.

In the School Culture area, the applicant fails to explain how the student and professional culture will be created, implemented, and maintained and also does not include essential information on basic policies for student discipline, like procedural due process.

The proposal is not “Substantially Inadequate” and met the minimum quality threshold in the areas of Special Populations and At-Risk Students and Academic Plan Capacity. However, the serious deficiencies in the other three areas warrant a strong recommendation that the applicant voluntarily withdraw from the application process this year.

Summary of Threshold Ratings

While applicants have an opportunity to make minor amendments to their academic plans through the Initial Proposal Amendment contained within the Final Application, changes that would need to be made to address minimum quality threshold deficiencies would typically be major amendments.

In order to receive a recommendation to proceed, the Initial Proposal must not be Substantially Inadequate in any of the five primary areas of the academic plan.

1. Curriculum and Instructional Design

Substantially Inadequate

2. School Calendar, Schedule, and Staff Structure

Substantially Inadequate

3. School Culture

Substantially Inadequate

4. Special Populations and At-Risk Students

Not Substantially Inadequate

5. Academic Plan Capacity

Not Substantially Inadequate

Analysis

Threshold 1: Curriculum and Instructional Design

Rating

Substantially Inadequate

A response to this section of the proposal should provide a framework for rigorous, quality instructional design (including a course scope and sequence and curriculum map and/or pacing plan that identifies course outcomes, demonstrates alignment with Common Core State Standards, and illustrates alignment from grade to grade) and a cohesive plan for educating the proposed school’s target population, including appropriate curriculum. If the proposed school plans to serve high school grades, the response should also demonstrate the applicant’s understanding of and commitment to graduation criteria.

The applicant’s response is “Substantially Inadequate” because it does not present a framework for rigorous, quality instructional design or a cohesive education plan and lacks essential information about the applicant’s understanding of and commitment to graduation criteria.

The applicant’s response does not present a framework for rigorous, quality instructional design. For other than fifth grade, there is no course scope and sequence and curriculum map and/or pacing guide that identifies course outcomes or demonstrates alignment with appropriate standards. There is no demonstrated alignment of standards from grade to grade. The applicant states that teacher-created assessments will be aligned to the Arizona College and Career Readiness Standards when there is no justification for the use of Arizona standards.

Further, the response does not present a cohesive plan because while the applicant proposes to open a K-12 school, there is a complete absence of any kind of a plan or curriculum for high school, grades 9-12. Even though the applicant states that the curriculum is fully developed, no curriculum is provided for the high school grades, and the model that the applicant is proposing to replicate does not serve high school. Aside from the enrollment plan, there is no discussion regarding the educational programming for grades 9-12.

Lastly, the response lacks essential information about graduation criteria. The response references grades K-8 only, even though the proposed school will begin serving high school (9th graders) in its second year of operation.

Threshold 2: School Calendar, Schedule, and Staff Structure

Rating

Substantially Inadequate

A response to this section of the proposal should present a school calendar and daily and weekly schedule reflecting the needs of the academic plan and also a demonstration of the applicant’s understanding of and commitment to collective bargaining agreements and their impacts on the proposed school’s calendar, schedule, and staffing.

The applicant’s response is “Substantially Inadequate” because it lacks essential information about the weekly and daily schedule as well as the applicant’s commitment to collective bargaining agreements.

The applicant’s response lacks essential information because it does not provide a daily and weekly schedule for any of the high school grades. Further, the absence of a schedule for the high school grades makes it impossible to evaluate the applicant’s commitment to collective bargaining agreements. Evaluation of this section requires a comparison of the daily and weekly schedule to the staffing chart.

Without a daily and weekly schedule, evaluators cannot determine whether the staffing chart would be in line with collective bargaining agreements. Without both pieces, there is not enough information to assess what the applicant is proposing that teachers do on a daily and weekly basis.

Threshold 3: School Culture

Rating

Substantially Inadequate

A response to this section of the proposal should describe the shared beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and behaviors that will promote high expectations and a positive academic and social environment; explain how that culture will be created, implemented, and maintained for students, teachers, parents or guardians, and administrators; and describe the professional culture of the proposed school. The response should also reflect legally sound policies for student discipline, suspension, dismissal, and crisis removal, including a description of the procedural due process for all students and the additional due process measures afforded to students under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The applicant’s response is “Substantially Inadequate” because it raises significant concerns about the applicant’s understanding of and commitment to school culture and legally sound policies for student discipline, suspension, dismissal, and crisis removal.

The applicant does not appear to understand or be committed to school culture. The response describes the shared attitudes and behaviors of the students that will attend the proposed school but does not explain how those shared attitudes and behaviors that will make up the culture will be created, implemented, and maintained. In addition, the response briefly describes the professional culture but does not explain how it will be created, implemented, and maintained.

Further, the response lacks essential information about policies for student discipline. For example, the response does not describe a basic policy, the procedural due process for all students regarding student discipline.

Threshold 4: Special Populations and At-Risk Students

Rating

Not Substantially Inadequate

A response to this section of the proposal should demonstrate an understanding and commitment to identifying and meeting the needs of all special populations (students with an Individualized Education Plan or Section 504 plan, English Language Learner students, students performing below grade level, etc.).

The applicant’s response is not “Substantially Inadequate” and meets the minimum quality of this threshold because the response demonstrates an understanding of and commitment to special populations. The applicant plans to have at least one highly qualified paraprofessional in each classroom to support special populations and at-risk students and also plans to provide “push in” and “pull out” services and intensive interventions from a Reading Specialist. There is a plan for identification through the use of benchmark assessments and child study groups.

Threshold 5: Academic Plan Capacity

Rating

Not Substantially Inadequate

A response to this section of the proposal should present evidence that the proposed school's leadership and management team has the collective qualifications to implement the proposed school's academic plan successfully.

The applicant's response is not "Substantially Inadequate" and meets the minimum quality of this threshold because the collective qualifications of the leadership and management team generally appear to demonstrate capacity in the areas of school leadership, administration, curriculum, governance, instruction, and assessment. The proposed school director started a charter school and has extensive teaching and administrative experience.

Evaluators note, however, that it is difficult to truly assess whether the proposed school's leadership and management team has the collective qualifications to implement the academic plan when significant portions of the academic plan (for example, the almost complete absence of a plan for all high school grades) are missing.

Evaluator Biographies

Beth Bulgeron

Before joining the Commission, Ms. Bulgeron was an administrator in charter schools in Chicago, Illinois and Santa Cruz, California. She has developed standards-based curriculum and assessments for public school districts and charter schools and has served as a curriculum consultant. Prior to that, she taught for five years in charter high schools. She earned her BA at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and her JD and LL.M. in Education Law and Policy at the University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law.

Kirsten Rogers

Ms. Rogers is an Evaluation Specialist in the DOE's Accountability Section, which administers the public school system's statewide accountability program with a focus on developing and implementing educational indicators on school performance. She formerly served the Commission as its Academic Performance Specialist. She has experience as a middle school teacher at both a charter school in Tennessee and at Wheeler Intermediate, a DOE school in Hawaii. She is a Teach for America alumnus, a former corps member advisor, and former content community leader for the organization. She also holds a Master of Education in Teaching from the University of Hawaii at Manoa.