



Board of Education Informational Report

MEMORANDUM

Date: February 2, 2021

To: Members of the Board of Education, Charter Schools and Alternative Programs Committee

From: Korinna Wolfe, Area Senior Director, Multiple Pathways to Graduation

Subject: Opal Charter School Renewal Request

Opal Charter School is a k-5 charter school in SW Portland, housed in the Portland Children’s Museum building, enrolling 88-90 students. The school’s instructional program is guided by the work of early childhood educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy, neuroscience research, and constructivist practices. The Opal School, through its association with the Museum Center for Learning, operates as a research lab and professional development hub for educators nationwide, who take part in Opal’s Summer Symposium and Visitation Days during the school year.

Opal opened in 2001, and is in its 20th year of operation. It successfully applied for charter renewal in 2006 and 2011. The school is currently operating under a five-to-ten-year “flexible” agreement which has been extended annually to reach the statutory 10th year limit, and will terminate on June 30, 2021.

Opal Charter School has formally submitted an Application for Renewal of its charter with the District. Per ORS 338.065(4)(c), this renewal term “shall be for a minimum of five years but may not exceed 10 years.” Opal has requested a ten-year renewal of its charter.

Highlights of renewal term include:

- Opal Charter School’s research has been presented to an estimated 10,000 educators worldwide since 2001, touching the lives of perhaps one million students from Portland to Dubai.
- Opal has partnered with Woodlawn School to expand use of the arts as languages for thinking and learning, with Vestal School to deepen teachers’ understanding of and alignment with their newly adopted social justice mission, and with KairosPDX to collaborate on professional development.
- Opal Charter School has worked with Teaching Preschool Partners (Beaverton, Gladstone, and Parkrose) to expand inquiry-based approaches in PreK-5.
- Students regularly meet or exceed District averages and State targets on state assessments.

Considerations:

- Opal Charter School does not have an economy of scale to operate independently from the Portland Children’s Museum at current enrollment.
- Student population at Opal reflects lower representation of students of historically underserved races/ethnicities and economically disadvantaged students than the District as a whole.
- Due to small student numbers, it is difficult to disaggregate achievement data for all student

groups with statistical significance.

Requests from Opal for consideration in Renewal Contract:

- Opal has requested an increase in enrollment capacity from 92 students to 250 students to allow the school flexibility in future searches for facilities to expand from 4 classrooms to 6 or 10 classrooms and gain some benefit from economy of scale (see justification for request on pg. 23 of Renewal Application). Proposed increase in enrollment would occur gradually over a number of years within the 10-year contract term.

Charter schools, as schools of choice, continue to work to attract a student population that is reflective of the District's population. Opal's enrollment reflects significantly less racial diversity than District averages. About 2% of its students are English Learners (compared to 11% District k-5), 5.6% are Economically Disadvantaged (compared to 32.1% District k-5), 16.9% are Historically Underserved Races/Ethnicities (compared to 31.9% District k-5), and 80% are White (compared to 56.9% District k-5). Opal has posted translated enrollment information as well as made hard copy brochures available in all District supported languages to broaden its outreach to English Language Learners. Opal's continued work is to broaden its outreach to historically underserved communities resulting in a more diverse student population.

In academic, financial, and organizational performance, the Charter Schools Office found no areas of concern regarding statutory compliance. The unique relationship Opal Charter School shares as a component program of Portland Children's Museum complicates both organizational and financial analysis; for example the Museum's Board is the governing body for Opal School, which is only one part of the Board's responsibilities. Additionally, many typically "central office" functions are managed by Museum staff, for which Opal Charter School is charged administrative fees by Portland Children's Museum. Clearly defining the organizational and financial relationship between the entities has been ongoing work during the current and prior charter terms.

The PPS Charter Schools Office submits the attached 2019-20 Oregon School Profile and 2019-20 Performance Framework and Report for Opal in review of its academic performance, fiscal management, organizational stability, adherence with all applicable state laws, and compliance with all terms of the charter contract. In addition, Opal's Charter Renewal Application is attached.

Attachments:

- 2019-20 Oregon School Profile
- Opal School 2019-20 Performance Framework and Report
- Opal School Charter Renewal Application