AGENDA ITEM: Charter Renewal – Reconsideration of Renewal Application

Issue

Although Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc. did not meet the conditions set forth in the Board's renewal decision that would allow it to request the Board review the FY2014 Dashboard to consider whether conditions exist to grant a renewal, the Charter Holder has submitted such a request because the school it operates, STAR Charter School, received an FY2014 A-F Letter Grade of C. Along with its request, Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc. has submitted a Performance Management Plan that has been evaluated as "Meets" in all areas, and has executed a renewal contract which incorporates provisions requiring heightened monitoring and accountability.

Background

Prior Renewal Consideration

At the June 9, 2014 meeting of the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools (Board), the Board voted to deny the request for charter renewal and not grant a renewal contract for Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc. for the reasons that the charter holder failed to meet or make sufficient progress toward the academic performance expectations set forth in the performance framework in accordance with A.R.S. § 15-183(I). The Board's decision included a provision that would allow the Charter Holder to request the Board review the FY2014 Dashboard to consider whether conditions exist to grant a renewal if the FY2014 Academic Dashboard for the school operated by the Charter Holder, STAR Charter School, reflected an Overall Rating that improved by at least one category as compared to the 2013 Dashboard (DNM to Meets) and the school was assigned a letter grade of C or better.

The portfolio considered by the Board as well as an audio recording of the discussion during the June 9, 2014 meeting regarding Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc.'s renewal application is available at: https://asbcs.az.gov/board-staff-information/meeting-dates-materials.

On June 12, 2014, Board staff emailed a letter to the charter holder which informed the charter holder of the Board's decision to deny Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc.'s request for renewal, the conditions for requesting the Board review the FY2014 Dashboard, and the process for appealing the Board's decision.

Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc. did not appeal the Board's decision.

Request for Reconsideration

On September 11, 2014, the Charter Holder notified the Board that STAR Charter School has been assigned a C letter grade by the Arizona Department of Education (Department) and requested further consideration of its renewal request. Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc. did not meet the conditions set forth in the Board's renewal decision as the Charter Holder could not demonstrate that STAR Charter School had improved its Overall Rating by at least one category. STAR Charter School received an Overall Rating of "Not Rated" on the FY2014 Academic Dashboard because the school did not have sufficient data to calculate ratings for any of the growth measures, which account for fifty percent of the Academic Dashboard weighting.

FY2014 Academic Performance Data

The lack of growth data raised concerns about the data that had been used to calculate both the FY2014 Academic Dashboard and the FY2014 A-F Letter Grade. As a result, on October 15, 2014, the Arizona Department of Education notified the Charter Holder that they would be recalculating the School's letter grade because it appeared that AIMS test records and/or students enrollment data used to make an accountability determination for the school were submitted to the Department incorrectly.

The school made corrections to its FY2014 student enrollment data. The Department completed its investigation and determined that the revised data would not affect the calculation of the FY2014 A-F Letter Grade, thus the school's FY2014 C Letter Grade was correct.

On December 12, 2014, an Academic Dashboard was recalculated for STAR Charter School using the corrected student enrollment data. The FY2014 Academic Dashboard (portfolio b. Academic Dashboard) reflected that STAR Charter School's Overall Rating remained at a "Does Not Meet." Again, Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc. did not meet the conditions set forth in the Board's renewal decision to request additional consideration of the renewal decision.

On January 7, 2015, Board staff notified Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc., through its authorized representative - Mark Sorenson, that while the Charter Holder had not met the required conditions, Board staff would present the Charter Holder to the Board for additional consideration of the renewal decision upon submission of a Performance Management Plan (PMP) that meets the Board's evaluation criteria.

Performance Management Plan

On February 2, 2015, Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc. submitted a PMP.

On February 18, 2015, Board staff evaluated the PMP and provided the Charter Holder with an evaluation and technical feedback. The evaluation indicated that for Action Steps the PMP was evaluated as Does Not Meet in four areas and Meets in one area, and for Evidence the PMP was evaluated as Does Not Meet in five areas.

On March 6, 2015, Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc. submitted a revised PMP. Board staff evaluated the revised PMP and determined that the PMP was acceptable, receiving evaluations of Meets in all areas for both action steps and evidence (portfolio c. Revised PMP Evaluation).

Proposed Renewal Contract

Board staff has prepared, and the Charter Holder has executed, a proposed renewal charter contract (portfolio d. Renewal Charter Contract Between Arizona State Board for Charter Schools And Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc.). The renewal contract requires Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc. to "submit documentary evidence of the implementation of the action steps from the Charter Holder's Performance Management Plan…and findings from the school's analysis of student assessment data" every three months and submit "baseline and benchmark data in reading and math that demonstrates appreciable improvement in the school's academic performance" through the end of FY2017. After that time, the contract requires the Charter Holder to "meet or demonstrate sufficient progress toward the academic performance expectations set forth in the performance framework adopted by the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools."

Board Options

Option 1: The Board may reverse its previous decision and approve the renewal. The following language is provided for consideration: Renewal is based on consideration of academic, fiscal and contractual compliance of the charter holder. In this case, the charter holder did not meet the Academic Performance Expectations set forth in the Board's Performance Framework. However, the Charter Holder demonstrated the capacity and willingness to make improvements by agreeing to renewal contract terms that include provisions requiring heightened monitoring and accountability, submitting a Performance Management Plan that meets the Board's evaluation criteria, and increasing its A-F Letter Grade from a D in FY2013 to a C in FY2014. Additionally, Board has adopted an Academic Performance Framework that allows for additional consideration of the charter holder throughout the next contract period. With that taken into consideration, as well as the information provided to the Board on June 9, 2014 and today for consideration of this renewal application package, and during its discussion with representatives of the charter holder, I move to reverse the previous decision and approve the request for charter renewal and grant a renewal contract to Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc. incorporating the renewal contract terms found in the materials provided.

Option 2: The Board may choose to take no action. Because the Charter Holder failed to appeal the Board's decision to deny the request for charter renewal and not grant a renewal contract, the charter contract between the Board and Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc. will expire on June 26, 2015. Painted Desert Demonstration Projects, Inc. will no longer be authorized to operate a charter school under the Board's sponsorship after that date.