



Secretary Cardona
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

RE: Charter Schools Program Grant Regulations

Dear Secretary Cardona,

As the Executive Director of a state advocacy network for charter schools, I am writing to strongly oppose the Department of Education's proposed new rules for the Charter Schools Program (CSP). The CSP was designed to provide critical resources to expand access to high-quality charter schools, but instead of empowering educators to open these unique public schools, the Department of Education is trying to make it harder for the communities most in need to serve their students.

I implore you to reject these rules and regulations that put politics first and ignore the needs and desires of families. Idaho is the second-fastest growing state, and charter schools are an important part of our public education ecosystem. Our families need and deserve to have high-quality charter schools in the communities that need them most.

The proposed regulations disregard the needs of Idaho students and families and should be put on hold. The Department should proceed with the most recent grant guidelines from the last competition for FY22 awards. Specially, I would like to highlight the following major issues with the proposed rules:

The regulations should not create a new federal standard for measuring whether a charter school has enough community support to open. Using vague standards, the "community impact analysis" in Application Requirement 1 would give anonymous grant reviewers in Washington the power to veto parent, community, and state efforts to open a new school with an approved charter. Instead of respecting voices and policies at the state and local level, these requirements focus on maintaining district enrollment and funding. The Department should focus on whether there are enough seats in high performing public schools to serve all students. This requirement should be removed for all the competitions.

The community impact rules should also be removed because they would make it difficult for schools that serve a high concentration of students of color to receive support, especially those schools that identify as culturally affirming. Schools that exist to protect indigenous cultures



and native languages are also at risk because of the proposed rules' strident commitment to opening "diverse" schools.

The regulations would require states to give priority to applicants that can find a school district to "partner" with them. If a large district refuses to partner with charter schools, they will succeed in placing them at a disadvantage for funding. It could unfairly preference district-authorized charter schools and empower districts to block the opening of charter schools. The focus of the proposal is on bureaucratic inputs, rather than what is best for families. It also sets double standards for schools that would never apply to district schools. Proposed priority 2 is unnecessary and should be removed.

These requirements would create so many new requirements that it would make it harder for under-resourced communities and single-site charter school founders to apply and meet these requirements and submit the significant documentation and follow up that would be required for monitoring. It also proposes almost punitive requirements like requiring a school to have a facility before it can receive funds to open their school after the planning phase—when it may need those funds to secure an adequate facility. Further, typically a school district is not prepared to sign a lease with a charter school a year in advance of the school opening. School districts need time to have open dialogue about the use of vacant properties with the community—the same community that these rules purport to include.

Given that this proposal would create a much more burdensome application process with almost no discussion with the impacted community, the Department should focus on implementing current program requirements and ensuring that grantees are well-supported in spending grants.

Around the country, charter schools are making a difference in kids' lives: during the 2020-21 school year, nearly 240,000 new students enrolled in public charter schools, representing 7% growth in one school year—the largest increase in half a decade. Even more telling, charter schools were the only sector of public education to grow during the 2020-21 school year. The CSP is the only source of dedicated federal funding to support the growth of charter schools to meet this need. It's more important than ever to come together to ensure the CSP grant can meet its intended purpose of expanding the number of high-quality charter schools available to students across the Nation.

Best Regards,

Blake Youde
Executive Director
Idaho Charter School Network