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Senate Bill 1538: Charter School Applications

Focusing charter school proposals based on district needs.

The primary focus of SB 1538 is to allow districts that have reached a certain threshold of charter school capacity in their district to bring about greater focus to charter school applications and to provide greater relevance of new charter schools to a school district's main educational goals.

- If, in any given year, a district has more than 3% of its students in local charter schools and 3 or more operating charter schools (excluding virtual charter schools), that district may amend its application process to consider only proposals that specifically address one or more local board adopted educational goals.
- Under this alternative application process, a district is not required to evaluate each application individually on its own merits but may instead evaluate all applications together and select those, if any, that best meet the board-adopted goals.
- This allows for more of a competitive review process of applications meeting the goals defined by the district.
- Any district choosing to 'opt-in' to this alternative application process must proactively do so by adopting specific academic goals every 2 years; the goals are required to be reported to the State Board of Education upon adoption.

What SB 1538 DOES NOT do:

- The measure does not require a district to utilize this alternative application process. While this alternate application process may only be implemented in the case where a district has more than 3% of its students in charter schools and 3 or more operating charter schools, it is not mandatory.
- The measure does not implement a 3% enrollment cap for charter schools. The 3% used in the legislation is merely a triggering threshold for the new alternative application process and has no controlling authority over actual charter school enrollment.
- The measure does not allow districts to completely opt out of charter school application reviews; it merely allows them to bring greater focus to the applications that are being brought forward.
- The measure does not affect existing charter schools at all; it does not require existing charter schools to comply with this new process either currently or upon application for renewal. Existing charter schools, and any charter schools approved outside of this alternative application process would continue to operate as is and under their existing agreements with school districts.

SB 1538 Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Does this measure affect current charter schools?

A: No, the bill would not impact ANY current public charter schools.

Q: Will SB 1538 impact current charter schools when they come up for renewal?

A: No, the bill will not impact ANY current charter school at renewal.

Q: Will SB 1538 reduce funding for the "state-sponsored" charter schools?

A: No, the committee on Ways & Means removed the provision that would have impacted "state-sponsored" charter schools.

Q: Does this measure place a cap on either the number of kids that can attend charter schools or on the total number of charter schools in the state or a district?

A: No, the 3 charter schools and 3% attendance are merely triggering counts that allow a district to OPT-IN to this process of charter school application review, the measure does not deal with enrollment limits or school limits.

Q: Can you tell me what school districts fall under the 3 school and 3% attendance trigger?

A: Only 8 school districts currently fit under this definition, they are: Portland, Eugene, Gresham-Barlow, Oregon City, Reynolds, North Clackamas, Lincoln County and North Bend.

Q: If a district meets the threshold of having 3 charter schools and 3% of its kids attending district charter schools, are they required to use this alternate charter school application process?

A: No. This process is simply another option for districts that have reached this threshold; it is not mandatory.

Q: If a district opts to use this alternate application method, must it only review applications that meet these specific additional criteria?

A: No. Even if a district opts into this alternate application process, it may still receive applications that don't address the additional, board-adopted goals, if it wishes.

Q: What accountability does a district have in setting its goals under this new process?

A: If a district wishes to utilize this process, the school board must formally adopt the goals that will be reflected in the application. Additionally, those goals must be sent to the State Board of Education when adopted.

Q: Is this new process intended to limit the number of charter schools in the district and/or state?

A: No. The 3% of students in charter schools and 3 charter schools referred to in the bill are minimum thresholds, not limits. A district must have at least 3% of its students attending charter schools in the district AND at least three charter schools before it would be able to opt into this process. This alternate application process simply brings more focus to the application, and has no direct bearing on the number of charter schools in a district or in the state.