



14445 NW Charlton Rd, Portland OR 97231
503-821-3426

January 16, 2017

Members, Oregon State Board of Education
255 Capitol Street NE
Salem, OR 97310

Subject: Charter School Waiver Request

Re: Request a Waiver of Public Charter School Law

Dear State Board of Education Members and Oregon Department of Education:

Please consider this written petition pursuant to ORS 338.025 and OAR 581-026-0130. In March of 2012 the State Board of Education approved our waiver, which would allow us to establish criteria in our enrollment to children of employees, founders and residents of the Island. The board reconsidered our waiver in December of 2014 and extended it through the 2015-16 school year. We reapplied in November of 2015 for the waiver, however we did remove the "founders" from the list of criteria. The waiver was approved through the end of our current contract which comes at the end of 2016-17. *Therefore, we are reapplying asking that our waiver again be approved for the length of our upcoming contract.*

The Sauvie Island Academy (SIA) respectfully requests that you approve our waiver according to ORS 338.125 – which requires “selection for admission to a charter school be through an equitable lottery” – for two groups of students:

1. students who reside on Sauvie Island; and
2. students who are children of Sauvie Island Academy employees (not to exceed 10 percent of the school's annual enrollment).

Sauvie Island Academy, is a public charter school sponsored by the Scappoose School District beginning in July of 2011. SIA is a conversion of Sauvie Island (Elementary) School, and is currently operating on their second three-year charter contract to provide Place-Based Education to K-8 students. We have submitted our renewal letter to the Scappoose School District and our 1st hearing is scheduled for Jan 9, 2017. Therefore, we are applying for the waiver and renewing our contract simultaneously in hopes of completing both processes prior to our lottery in the April of 2017.

Background-

Sauvie Island maintained an independent K-8 school district for neighboring and Portland children from 1935 to 1998. In 1998, when the state required all districts to offer K-12, the Sauvie Island School (SIS) District merged with the Scappoose School District (SSD) and the school transitioned from K-8 to a K-6 configuration.

Approximately 600 families live on the island and nearby houseboats. Our population of slightly over 1,000 includes approximately 225 children under the age of 18. Therefore, as a K-8 school SIS enrollment averaged about 90 students per year, however when the school transitioned into the SSD and became a K-6 school the average enrollment decreased and averaged around 75 students per year.

Sauvie Island is located at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers. At 26,000 acres, it is one of the largest river islands in the U.S. Most of the island is either farmland or wildlife refuge. The community spans the socio-economic scale, including generational farm families whose parents and grandparents attended the island school, many migrant families who work in agriculture or nursery industries on the island, and families who live on houseboats along the island shores.

Like many rural Oregon schools with enrollment under 75, the long-term viability of SIA in its prior configuration was in jeopardy. On an annual basis, the Scappoose School District openly considered closing the Sauvie Island School. Should this become the reality, this would mean island students would be forced to attend schools located in Scappoose, which is approximately 20 minutes away from the island bridge. However, considering the island spans two counties, the southern portion belongs to Multnomah County and the northern one-third to Columbia County, if a student lived at the northern end of the island it would add an additional 45-50 minutes to the 20 minutes creating a bus ride well over an hour to an hour and a half after the bus ran the entire island bus route.

Therefore, this instability of remaining open and the thought of island students riding around the island bus route and then all the way to Scappoose compelled many Sauvie Island School families to look for another option. They established a group of founders who researched the possibility of the island school transitioning into a public charter school on the island.

A committed team of founders worked to develop SIA over a six-year period motivated by two primary factors:

- A. to provide a stable public school for families who reside on Sauvie Island; AND
- B. to provide an innovative, high-quality educational model which maximizes our unique setting and integrates Place-Based learning, thematic instruction through Storyline, and service learning from within the community.

The SSD was open to the idea and worked with the founders through the charter and contract process. SIA was opened in July of 2011.

With the island school transitioning to a public charter school, the reality was that On-island students could potentially not be able to access their neighborhood school, Sauvie Island Academy. These would be the island students facing the bus ride of at least an hour or more to and from another public school in the district. Therefore in 2011, SIA applied for and received a waiver enabling SIA to create criteria in our admissions for students who reside on the island. This allowed us to provide a stable public school for families who reside on Sauvie Island and provide an innovative, high-quality educational model which maximizes the unique island setting by integrating Place-based learning, thematic instruction and service learning within the island community. This is why we are asking the State Board of Education again for the waiver. SIA believes that our waiver request meets the following criteria as defined by the waiver process established by the ODE:

ODE Waiver Criteria-

Criteria:	SIA Alignment:
<p>(a) Promote the development of programs by providers;</p>	<p>SIA founders, the board and staff, our families and Island residents are all committed to bridging classrooms and communities through Place-based education.</p> <p>The <u>VISION</u> of Sauvie Island Academy: To systematically and intentionally integrate the concepts of Placed-Based Education, Project-Based Learning and Thematic Instruction into a quality standards-based core curriculum so that students are engaged in their learning and connected to their community.</p> <p><u>OUR MISSION:</u> To provide the K-8 children of our community an opportunity to learn through the values of stewardship deeply rooted in the uniqueness that Sauvie Island offers. Our school is the heart of the Sauvie Island community. It is a meeting place that fosters an environment where students, parents, staff and the community are partners in the educational process for the achievement of all children.</p> <p>Sauvie Island Academy is the "community center" of the island. The school is the gathering place for the residents of the island. The families and their children provide the stewardship for which our mission is trying to connect, develop and teach. Therefore, ensuring the access of island students to the school allows for the implement our vision and mission of Place-Based education.</p> <p>If island students and their families were not given criteria in our lottery, eventually we would become a Place-Based school without anyone who represents the "place" from which our curriculum is developed and grown. It is the residents, their farms, their ponds, their wetlands, their skills, their history, their experiences and their knowledge upon which our Place-Based learning is dependent.</p> <p>Therefore, it is essential to promoting, developing and sustaining our program. It is imperative to have a mechanism in place that allows for the geographical location and its residents some criteria in our lottery process (not a guarantee). We currently have island students who are on our wait list and they are waiting for a spot to open.</p>
<p>(b) Enhance the equitable access by underserved families to the public education of their choice;</p>	<p>With such a vast amount of agriculture (and nursery) industry on the island, we have many migrant families who live on the island. We work with the Migrant services of our local ESD, to help us reach out to and support these families.</p> <p>For many English is not their first language, so we work hard to help these families navigate the application and lottery processes, because without our waiver there is no criteria to help them have a better chance to attend their "neighborhood" school. It is extremely confusing for our migrant families, who are not able to access SIA, because then they must go into Scappoose for their district school. They must find transportation into Scappoose to register their student and then they have to try to figure out the busing system to and from Scappoose.</p> <p>For example, a migrant family that has a Kinder student who does not speak English</p>

	<p>gets on a bus and rides many times over an hour to Scappoose, where they have to get off at the high school and transfer to the elementary bus, which then takes them to the elementary school and then do this in reverse to get back home in the afternoon.</p> <p>They often do not have anyone they know at their school because they do not live in Scappoose and rarely go there, unless their families have a means of transportation.</p> <p>By allowing our waiver to continue with the criteria allowing island residents, it drastically lowers the number of island migrant students who have to leave the island to go to school.</p>
<p>(c) Extend the equitable access to public support by all students;</p>	<p>In Oregon, public employees and non-public employees have many options when choosing a school that best fits their child. For example, they can apply for a yearly inter-district transfer, they can apply through open enrollment, they can enroll in a virtual school, they can apply for a public charter school, they can do home school. However, since charter schools are unable to offer options like inter-district transfer or open enrollment like the other Oregon public schools, a staff member is limited in options for their child to access the charter school where they are employed. Therefore, allowing SIA to have criteria in our lottery process would create an option similar to those offered in the other Oregon Public Schools</p> <p>In addition, the two biggest challenges charter schools face in Oregon are funding and teacher retention. We cannot pay a competitive wage or offer a competitive benefit package. On the island, there are very few homes to rent and the cost of purchasing a home is very expensive and well beyond what our staff can afford. Therefore, all most all of our employees commute to the school.</p> <p>Also, in public charter schools employees are often asked to wear many hats, which often lead them to working many extra hours at the school. Add this to a long commute and our employees are missing out on time with their own children, which would not be the case if they attended SIA.</p> <p>Therefore, when an employee chooses to work for less and work more, it is because they believe in what they are doing. They often want their own students to attend their school. Having criteria for employee's students to access the school, builds a stronger connection and dedication to the charter school by our employees. This in turn results in less turn over in employees.</p> <p>When you can decrease the turnover in employees you are able to build stronger, more reliable, more fluid and more consistent curriculum in Place-Based education. Because without this you are constantly working on re-establishing partnerships and community connections each time an employee leaves.</p> <p>This type of criteria in our waiver builds employee retention, which ultimately is great for kids and essential for our school.</p> <p>Providing criteria (not a guarantee) for employees children to attend SIA increases our ability to attract and retain the highest caliber employees.</p>

Federal Guidance-

Our request for a waiver for On-Island residents and children of employees is consistent with **state criteria and with federal guidance. Federal Non-regulatory Guidance (April 2011), E-4**, provides that specifically, the following categories of applicants may be exempted from the lottery on this basis:

- a) Students who are enrolled in a public school at the time it is converted into a public charter school;
- b) Students who are eligible to attend and are living in the attendance area of, a public school at the time it is converted into a public charter school;
- c) Siblings of students already admitted to or attending the same charter school;
- d) Children of a charter school's founder, teacher and staff (so long as the total number of students allowed under this exemption constitutes only a small percentage of the school's total enrollment); and
- e) Children of employees in a work-site charter school, (so long as the total number of students allowed under this exemption constitutes only a small percentage of school's total enrollment).

SIA Enrollment Data-

The following table reflects the actual numbers Sauvie Island Academy has for the 2016-17 school year. In addition, we have included the data from when we originally opened in 2011. As you will notice most students sibling status is the biggest factor or percentage impacting SIA's enrollment. In fact, the On-Island (non-sibling) student is less than 10% of the current criteria defined in our enrollment process.

		2016-17*		2011-12*	
K-8 Students #	In-District	171	79.90%	122	70.52%
	Out of District	43	20.10%	51	29.47%
	Total Students	214		173	
Lottery Criteria:					
ORS Allowable	On-Island Sibling	43		22	
	Off Island Siblings	76		89	
	Total Siblings	119	55.61%	111	64.16%
Waiver Allowable	On-Island	21	9.81%	10	5.78%
	Staff	13	6.07%	1	.57%

*Data from October

The reason SIA has not been filled by On-Island students is due to the constraints placed on the island from the state, the county and the city, regarding restriction on growth and land use, the island's ability to grow is self-limiting. Therefore, the current population of homes and home sites that exist on the island is unable to increase due to growth restrictions and land use restrictions. This limits the number of homes and families that will ever live on the island, controlling the number of children potentially attending the Sauvie Island Academy. In actuality, Sauvie Island Academy is dependent on students coming from off the island in order to be self-sustaining.

In speaking with a local realtor it seems that approximately 5-7 homes are sold each year on average on the island, therefore next year even if each home brought with it two children school age (within the K-8) and none left we would still only be at 15% On-island students out of 216 potential spots.

The fact is that even with a waiver, which allows On-Island students criteria in the SIA enrollment process; the potential for the school to be solely attended by On-Island Students is not feasible. However, when you consider the much higher number of In-District students who attend SIA, it is completely feasible that without the waiver no On-Island student would make it into the school.

SIA Waitlist Data-

As you will notice in the following table of our current waitlist, the waiver is not a guarantee for employee children or On-Island students. We have set our class size to 24 students per grade and therefore, unless a spot becomes open even employee and On-Island students remain on the waitlist.

Current Waitlist	Siblings	4
	Employee	0
	On-Island	5
	In-District	32
	Out of District	57

Place-based Relationship-

We are in our sixth year and SIA has developed a strong foundation of Place-based relationships with Island families who allow us to do work at their ponds and wetlands, as well as entities such as SI Fire Department, Charlton Kennels, SI Grange, SI Pumpkin Patch, Krueger's Farm and the SI Center. In addition, we are continuing to grow our Place-based curriculum through local agency partnerships which include the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, West Multnomah Water and Soil, Metro, and OSU Extensions. It is through the combination of Island families, business and agencies that our Place-based mission is reliant to build the sense of place that our Island students experience on a regular basis. Allowing us to have the geographic waiver to Island students ensures that people of the island and their children help to support and contribute to the Place-based mission of the school. By allowing us this waiver which establishes criteria in our lottery process for children of island residents and children of employees, our commitment and efforts regarding a diverse student body will remain intact.

In order to provide Oregon Department of Education with data regarding the impact of our waiver SIA could on a yearly basis submit our current percentage of employee and On-Island students. If ever these percentages rise to a level that is concerning to the ODE, SIA would be willing to revisit our waiver to ensure that it is still meeting the requirements of the ORS.

We hope that you will consider this request carefully, in light of the unique geographic isolation of Sauvie Island and our Place-based mission. Thank you for your consideration. Please let us know if you require any additional information or an in-person meeting with us.

Sincerely,



Darla Meeuwsen, Executive Director
Sauvie Island Academy



Matt Mahaffy, Chairman
Sauvie Island Academy Board of Directors



SCAPPOOSE SCHOOL DISTRICT

"We prepare our students for the future"

January 6, 2017

Oregon Department of Education
State School Board
255 Capitol Street NE
Salem, OR 97310-0203

RE: Sauvie Island Academy Charter Waiver Request

Dear State School Board:

The Scappoose School District finds no objection to the continuation of Sauvie Island Academy's waiver request as per the ORS 338. If approved by the State Board of Education, we understand that this waiver will be valid for providing preferences in the enrollment processes as defined in our charter agreement. Our charter agreement lists preferences as:

- Existing Student
- Siblings of Existing Students
- Staff Children
- On-Island Children
- Within the District Children
- Outside the District Children

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephen Jupe, Superintendent
Scappoose School District

cc: SIA Board, SIA Director

