

[Print Page](#)

Thursday, May 10, 2007

Last modified Tuesday, May 8, 2007 12:23 AM PDT

Community

Charter school back on track

By BENNETT HALL
Gazette-Times business editor

Corvallis district officials urge OK of revised Muddy Creek plan

"Let the wild rumpus begin!"

That was Muddy Creek Charter School proponent Anita Grunder's response Monday night after a Corvallis schools administrator recommended conditional approval of the program.

If approved by the Corvallis School Board, it would be a reversal of a decision made Jan. 17, when a divided board rejected the original plan by a 4-3 vote.

Backers of the plan for a rural campus to replace Inavale School, which shut down in June, exchanged hugs after Monday's school board meeting.

The celebration was muted, however. Numerous details remain to be hammered out, and the board won't hold an up-and-down vote on the matter until May 29.

Still, the positive recommendation by district staff was a major turnaround for Inavale Community Partners, the group making the proposal.

The reconfigured Muddy Creek Charter School would serve children in kindergarten through fifth grade, with three blended classrooms. The original plan called for a first- through sixth-grade program.

District officials had expressed fears that as many as 40 students who transferred to Lincoln School after Inavale closed might bolt to the new charter school, undermining Lincoln's expanded K-8 offerings. The revision ensures that parents won't pull their fifth-graders out of Lincoln for one year at Muddy Creek.

In a report to the board, Assistant Superintendent Jim Hogeboom noted that the group's 155-page revised proposal took pains to address the concerns that scuttled the original plan.

"I think they've been very thorough and responsive," he said.

The state lays out seven criteria for evaluating charter school applications, and the district determined that the initial proposal met all but two: No. 4, addressing the needs of low-achieving students, and No. 6, demonstrating that the plan's value outweighed the adverse impacts on the district of adopting it.

The revised plan, Hogeboom said, did a good job of addressing those concerns.

"The key condition, in my opinion, really is No. 6," Hogeboom said. "Does the proposed charter school outweigh the potential adverse impact? To me, that's the debate in a nutshell."

The staff's conclusion, Hogeboom said, was that it did. While there will be some loss of state funding to other district schools if the charter is approved, he said, the revised application made its case for the value of its

place-based, project-based curriculum.

District officials recommended approving the proposal with multiple conditions, including:

- The Muddy Creek Charter School will open in the fall of 2008, to give the district adequate time to work out all the details of the formal charter agreement.
- Enrollment is not to exceed 65 students or fall below 25 students.
- The charter should initially be approved for two years.

Board members will have an opportunity to submit questions on the matter to district staff before discussing the revised proposal in depth at their next scheduled meeting May 21. The board will decide whether to accept or reject the charter application in a special meeting May 29.

It's still not clear exactly where the new school would be housed if approved, although the mothballed Inavale campus south of town still seems the likeliest possibility.

"The proposal is not site-specific," Kathleen Westly, speaking for Inavale Community Partners, told the board Monday. "The particular location is something for discussion after you approve."

Speaking for the board, Chairwoman Kari Rieck thanked the charter school backers for their efforts in revising their plan.

"We all appreciate the fact that you took our concerns and addressed them," she said.

Representatives of Inavale Community Partners also had kind words for the board.

"We are enthusiastic," Grunder said. "We would like to work with the district instead of against the district. We couldn't be more pleased."

Bennett Hall is the business editor for the Gazette-Times. He can be reached at 758-9529 or bennett.hall@lee.net.

Copyright © 2007 Corvallis Gazette-Times