



Chico Unified Board Approves Blue Oak Charter Renewal

Originally published in the *Chico Enterprise-Record*

Blue Oak Charter School will continue to operate in Chico.

The Chico Unified School District board of trustees voted to renew the school's charter for the next five years on the condition that the school show improved student performance on state tests, and improved financial health over the next two years.

The petition first came before the board in February as part of a state-mandated process that charter schools must undergo to continue operating. At that meeting, Director Susan Domenighini spoke about the school, how it serves students, its financial situation and changes made in response to the release of a *FCMAT audit*, which found that fraud may have occurred at the school. Trustees expressed concerns at that time about the financial health of Blue Oak.

At Wednesday's meeting, district staff gave an in-depth presentation about Blue Oak student performance on state tests and how that compares to similar schools in the district. Student academic achievement is an integral part of the charter renewal process, district attorney John Yee said, and an increase in student achievement should be considered the most important factor.

Generally, district schools scored higher than Blue Oak students on state assessments, but in some areas, Blue Oak students outperformed district students, particularly at the junior high school level. The school did not sustain three-year growth in academic performance by certain subgroups, such as Hispanic and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, in most cohorts, CUSD Assessment and Accountability Director Tim Cariss said.

District staff also highlighted concerns about the school's financial health, particularly in terms of cash flow and debt as the school had to take temporary loans to meet its obligations.

District staff presented two options, denying the charter petition or approving the petition with conditions. The board ultimately decided to approve the school's petition under the conditions that Blue Oak show growth overall and in all subgroups in state English and math assessments under the definition set forth in the California School

Dashboard.

The district also is requiring that Blue Oak take a number of measures to improve its financial health, including submitting an updated interim budget for the current year, monthly cash flow reports and monthly accounts receivable and payable reports. Blue Oak must also maintain a positive ending fund balance each fiscal year of the renewal term, submit a report to CUSD within 30 days that explains how the school will maintain a positive fund balance and pay off all financial obligations in a timely manner. If the school fails to do so, the district has the option to revoke Blue Oak's charter.

Student performance was of particular concern to the district and the board. Trustee Eileen Robinson, who sat on the board when Blue Oak first sought authorization from the district, said she was concerned about the school's test scores, something she said the school has continued to struggle with over the years.

"I have concerns very similar to the original petition — test scores, management, governance, academic performance. That's what's really bothering me, for the sake of the kids," Robinson said. "I will be voting for it, but I want to let you know that my goodness, you can't fail these kids any longer."

Trustee Liz Griffin said she was heartened by the school's improvement in some areas and said test scores don't reflect the whole of students' educational experience.

Blue Oak educators and administrators provided information about their efforts to improve student performance and said they expect the school will meet the district's requirements.

The board voted unanimously to approve the charter petition and encouraged Blue Oak to get parents and educators involved to improve student performance.

The audience, which comprised more than 40 people, broke into applause.

The board also heard an in-depth presentation about possible alternative scheduling options for district high schools.

The district last year began exploring the possibility of changing the high schools' current six-period day into something that will better accommodate student needs, such as credit recovery after failing classes and AP and career technical education courses.

On Wednesday, a schedule committee, comprising representatives from Chico and PV high schools, updated the board about possible scheduling options and the results of visits to several north state high

schools that use schedules other than a six-period day. The committee will review possible options with staff and report back to the board later this year.

Reach reporter Dani Anguiano at 896-7767.