

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB1087 - FEBRUARY 23, 2015
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

My name is Keith Donahue. I am the Development Director for Sage International School of Boise. I am here at the invitation of Terry Ryan of the Idaho Charter School Network (ICSN). Mr. Ryan asked me to share my thoughts regarding SB1087 with the Committee as someone who works every day to grow and sustain a successful charter school. I would like to express my support for SB1087.

I believe SB1087 will improve Idaho's Charter Statute and admission process in at least three key aspects:

- (1) Help Establish K-12th Continuity and Vision for Families: SB1087 provides a clearer K-12th grade path for students and families attending (or considering attending) a school of choice. When entering the traditional public school system in kindergarten, students and parents know and understand (absent moving) their natural progression through the K-12th grade system - they know the elementary, middle, and high schools they will attend and these schools typically align their curriculum and cultures. Students know where they are heading and the schools know the educational experience of the students they receive. This is not true in the charter school system. Currently, there is no natural progression through the school choice system - if a charter school ends in 5th grade and the student/family want to continue with a school of choice, they face a great deal of uncertainty. SB1087 helps resolve this challenge by bringing into the 'school choice' world some level of the K-12th continuity that currently exists in the traditional public school system.
- (2) Foster Collaboration Among Charter Schools: While the situation is rapidly improving with the efforts of the ICSN, Idaho's 45+ charter schools often operate as 'islands' - we do not coordinate our efforts and miss the opportunity to learn from each other. I believe this results in missed educational opportunities for students and inefficiencies. SB1087 will encourage schools to learn about each other, work together, and foster partnerships. Legislation (like SB1087) that gets charter school leaders talking and collaborating (sharing knowledge and experiences) is hugely beneficial - we can only improve by working together.
- (3) Improved Planning ('On-Ramps'): As a K-12th grade school, Sage International would benefit from SB1087 by having the ability to establish informed 'on-ramps' for new students in our annual lottery. Specifically, each year we lose a small percentage of our students. In our annual lottery, we have to identify specific grade levels to let new students in to replenish our student numbers - we refer to these as 'on-ramps'. Currently, it is difficult to determine the best grade levels to establish these on-ramps or entry points, particularly at older grade levels where demand decreases and fluctuates. Sage International is fortunate to be located in an area with a number of excellent charter schools. SB1087 would enable Sage International, via partnerships with area charter schools, to conduct a more informed lottery. For example, we could establish an admission preference with two area charter schools; one school that ended after 5th grade (elementary) and another that ended after 8th grade (middle school). Sage could then establish 6th grade and 9th grade 'on-ramps' - where we know we will have demand for seats. In this regard, SB1087 helps Sage International better plan its lottery while helping establish the K-12th continuity I previously discussed.

The provisions of SB1087 address any concern I would have regarding an admission preference for students coming from other charter schools, as follows:

- (1) One Year Requirement: SB1087 requires students to attend the charter school they are leaving for a minimum of one year before being able to use the admission preference authorized by SB1087. This provision resolves my concern that students would 'game the system' by joining a charter for a day (or other short period) as a means to leapfrog their way into a different charter school. With the one year requirement, students/families will have to be vested in a school of choice in order to gain this favored admission status.
- (2) Charter Schools Must Agree to Establish Admission Preference: SB1087 provides that both charter schools involved must agree to establish the admission preference between the schools. This provision provides for local control, affords charters autonomy, and allows charters to partner with schools that fit their curriculum model/style - schools with similar curriculums, cultures, etc. could partner with each other - setting students up for continued success via K-12th continuity.

Thank You for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee.

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