

## Admission Applications & Policies vs. Enrollment Forms & Policies

As part of the Organizational Performance review process, the Commission must review and approve the admissions policies and enrollment processes for each Charter School. The Commission reviews each school's admissions and enrollment policies based upon the provisions in its Charter contract and against the statutory requirements of HRS§302D-34 Enrollment, which prohibit discrimination or limits on enrollment of a student based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, income level, disability, level of proficiency in the English language, need for special education services, or academic or athletic ability. As staff has been working to gather and understand each school's policies and practices, the Commission has adopted some general guidelines for schools to review.

***Understanding the process and where the complications can raise issues and concerns:***



**Q: Our school has been using the DOE Enrollment form as our application; why is that problematic? Why can't our school continue to use that form as is?**

**A:** Unlike schools in the Department of Education, who have open enrollment (public schools are obligated to enroll all students and may only limit what school they attend based upon their place of residence), charter schools may limit enrollment due to space and other approved enrollment preferences. For this reason, charter school admissions and enrollment policies are subject to greater scrutiny.

Prospective applicants and their parents need to understand how and/or why they may or may not necessarily be able to attend the charter school of their choice. Distinguishing between a charter school's applications and admissions policy and practices vs. the enrollment process of an applicant who has been accepted, is an important distinction.

Review of each of the steps taken by applicants to ultimately gain entrance into a charter school is vital to understanding the Commission's interest in insuring that our charter schools are following its obligations under its charter as well as to insuring that charter schools are the "schools of choice" for every public school student in our state.

Generally the process is three fold: (1) application forms are filled out by prospective applicants and their families; (2) the charter school will apply its admissions policy to the pool of applicants who have applied; and (3) the applicants are selected, notified and the school will then initiate the

enrollment process that the school engages in to officially enroll a student in their school. The information gathered during phase 1 should enable the charter school to apply its admissions preferences to the pool of applicants and make its selections for entrance to the school. Once an applicant has been notified of their acceptance, the school would initiate its enrollment process and then is free to solicit more information that is necessary to assist the school in providing that applicant the appropriate and best education possible.

**Q: So what if our application form asks more than is necessary for us to apply our admissions policy and enrollment preferences? We need that information to better plan for prospective students.**

**A:** If a school asks for more information on its application form than is needed to apply its enrollment preferences, and often schools will ask for additional information not relevant to enrollment preference but may be for planning purposes, these questions could be perceived by prospective applicants as a way to “screen out” students. To eliminate the occurrence of such misconceptions, on September 11, 2014, the Commission issued guidance to schools to remove provisions and practices that make acceptance of a student contingent on submittal of interviews, tests, essays, past academic performance, and letters of references. Additionally staff asked that schools remove questions regarding an applicant’s special education needs, IEPs, or 504 plans to avoid similar concerns and issues.

In the January 22, 2015 Performance and Accountability Committee meeting, the committee recommended to the full Commission the issuance of further guidance to schools that have been using the DOE’s enrollment form or adaptations of that form as its application, to remove questions regarding McKinley-Vento (Homeless students) eligibility, ethnicity, and language spoken by applicant, *unless* the school has an immersion or language medium program, as well any other questions unrelated to the school’s approved enrollment preference(s). These questions should be moved to the school’s enrollment process after the applicant has been selected for admission.

**Q: So, how does our school prepare for and make the necessary changes to our application and admission policies to gain the Commission’s approval?**

**A:** Since this is the first time the Commission is reviewing these policies, it is important review HRS§302D-34 to insure that schools admissions & enrollment policies and practices meet these statutory requirements.

Here are questions to ask in reviewing your school’s admissions and enrollment policy:

1. Does the school’s application ask questions about:

- race
- color
- ethnicity

- national origin
- religion
- gender
- sexual orientation
- income level
- disability
- level of proficiency in the English language
- need for special education services
- academic ability
- athletic ability

If any of the boxes are checked, ask why? For what purpose do we ask for this information?

If it's not relevant to our admissions policy or an approved enrollment preference that allows the school to limit enrollment on that basis(es) OR a start-up school whose mission is focused on serving students with disabilities, who are of the same gender, who pose such severe disciplinary problems that they warrant a specific educational program, or who are at a risk of academic failure? If not, these questions should be removed from the application and placed into the enrollment form/process.

If you are unsure or have concerns about moving these questions to your post-acceptance/enrollment process call Danny Vasconcellos, Organizational Performance Manager at (808)586-5228 for further assistance.