

July 26, 2022

Ms. Miriam Hogg  
Chief Executive Officer  
REALMS Academy  
325 S. Downs St.  
Ridgecrest, CA 93555

Re: REALMS Status and Concerns

Dear Ms. Hogg:

As the agency assigned oversight of REALMS by the Kern County Board of Education, this office is contacting you with significant concerns requiring immediate attention.

Background

In February 2019, the California Department of Education (CDE) recommended to the State Board of Education that the Ridgecrest Charter School (K-8) petition be revoked based on the following:

“The RCS petition is not consistent with sound educational practice. RCS does not perform, overall, at least equal to its comparable district schools where the majority of RCS pupils would otherwise attend.” (See attachment accs-feb19item06).

In 2019, the Ridgecrest Charter School Board President, Eric Bruen and then Superintendent Steve Martinez, met with the Sierra Sands Unified School District Superintendent and Kern County Superintendent of Schools (KCSOS) to request that the Board of Education consider a two-year authorization of a reorganized REALMS Charter serving K-6 students. The purpose of this two-year authorization was to provide time for the Sierra Sands Unified School District and REALMS to explore ways to transfer authorization and oversight to Sierra Sands Unified School District. The current petition was approved on April 9, 2019, to expire on June 30, 2021. The initial two years was extended to accommodate difficulties related to COVID 19. The mandatory extension language in Education Code Section 47607.4 seems to indicate REALMS may remain open until June 30, 2024. However, Section 47607.4 does not limit the ability of a charter authorizer to revoke a charter should appropriate revocation grounds exist.

Current Concerns

During the past three years of oversight, KCSOS has provided extensive support to REALMS to bring the educational program into satisfactory performance. However, the student

performance does not meet renewal requirements, nor does it meet the stated outcomes in your charter. Failure to meet charter outcomes is a ground for revocation, per 47607(f)(2).

Revocation Standards

Revocation is warranted under the conditions listed in Education Code Section 47607(f)(2), which reads:

“A charter may be revoked by the chartering authority if the chartering authority finds, through a showing of substantial evidence, that the charter school did any of the following:

- (1) Committed a material violation of any of the conditions, standards, or procedures set forth in the charter.
- (2) Failed to meet or pursue any of the pupil outcomes identified in the charter.
- (3) Failed to meet generally accepted accounting principles or engaged in fiscal mismanagement.
- (4) Violated any law.”

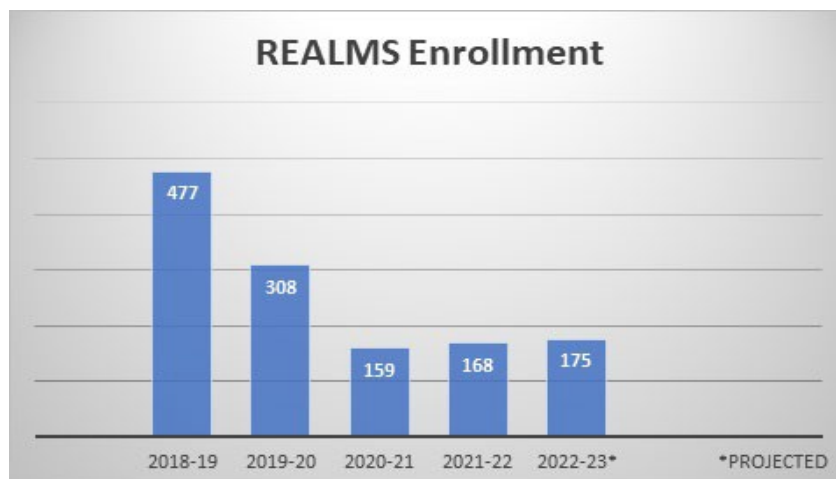
As it currently stands, REALMS would not qualify for renewal due primarily to low student performance and lack of compliance with state law.

As discussed below, our review indicates that the current status of the REALMS Charter triggers several of the revocation criteria, demonstrating a failure to substantially implement a sound educational program. While the following list of issues is not exhaustive, the list reflects significant items that would be included in any subsequent revocation proceeding.

- Failure to fully implement the educational program outlined in the charter petition.
- Ongoing lack of required parent sitting on the school board.
- Noncompliance with established policy as to a parental complaint alleging a biased and discriminatory environment, IEP violations, and disparate disciplinary practices.
- Ongoing issues with full implementation of the school’s specified educational programs, including scope/sequence and progress monitoring of the STEM, music, and foreign language programs.
- Potential board member incompatible offices.
- Failures to meet charter renewal criteria in regard to student academic performance. The academic performance of REALMS, since its inception in 2019, reflects an underperforming charter school specifically:

While CDE's last Dashboard was for the 2019-2020 school year, that year's Dashboard indicated that REALMS was in the "Yellow" category in both ELA and math achievement, indicating that some growth was being made, but that students were performing below standard in math (32.6 points) and ELA (44.4 points). In 2020-21, REALMS administered CAASPP assessments, but that data was not used to produce Dashboard data. With a 98% participation rate, the REALMS CAASPP data indicated that only 27.92% of students met standards in math, and 44.44% did so in ELA. In light of the fact the state has not produced Dashboard data for two years, REALMS Charter School permissibly identified and used the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment tools. NWEA recommends analyzing the data on a grade-level basis. The REALMS NWEA data from the 2020-21 academic year indicated that 2 of 7 grade levels made one year's progress in ELA, and 1 of 7 grade levels made one year's progress in mathematics. For the 2021-22 school year, the NWEA data indicated that only 1 of 5 (6th grade did not participate in ELA) grade levels made one year's progress in ELA, and 1 of 6 grade levels made one year's progress in math. This does not qualify for charter renewal, and indicates revocation is warranted.

- Failure to follow state law, such as: (1) ensuring properly credentialed staffing with current TB and fingerprint clearance, (2) providing state-mandated staff training (i.e. child abuse reporting, safe/healthy emergency training, etc.) , (3) Title IX required posting is missing several elements as outlined in EC 221.61, (4) noncompliance with required special education timelines, (5) giving parents required notices on enrollment and disenrollment, (6) providing mandatory sight and hearing screening , and (7) providing mandatory notice to districts of residence in a timely manner when charter students withdraw from the school for any reason.
- Severely reduced pupil enrollment is creating budget issues, deficit spending, and lack of public ongoing interest in the REALMS program.
- Failures to follow reasonable and standard fiscal practices and adjusting for declining enrollment, leading to deficit spending. The Multiyear financial projection submitted for Estimated Actuals and Adopted Budget indicates a substantial general fund operating deficit for the current (2021-22) year (\$471,240) and subsequent fiscal year (\$547,900).



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Conclusion

While this communication is not formally the first step in the revocation process, we understand that voluntary closure was a topic for discussion and possible action on the special agenda in early July. The board chose not to close the school at the time. We believe that decision should be reconsidered due to the lack of performance as detailed below, based on our annual oversight review completed on May 11, 2022.

Please discuss this matter with the board and respond in writing to this office within 5 days to describe how the board will address these deficiencies to avoid initiation of a revocation recommendation to the Kern County Board of Education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary C. Barlow". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Mary C. Barlow, Ed.D.  
Kern County Superintendent of Schools

CC: REALMS Board Members