

Wildflower Montessori Public Schools of Colorado

House Education Committee
State Capitol Building
200 E. Colfax Ave.
Denver, CO 80203

February 23, 2023

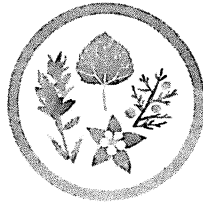
Madam Chair & members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Hannah Ewert-Krocker, and I am serving as Interim Shared Services Partner / Executive Director at a brand new public charter school, authorized by the state's Charter School Institute and scheduled to open in Aurora in August of this year. I write to you on behalf of the team at Wildflower Montessori Public Schools of Colorado in support of **HB 23-1025**, and thank you for the opportunity to share about our experience during the charter application process.

Our community has navigated two separate charter applications in the past 16 months: one in Aurora and one in the Grand Valley of Western Colorado. In both cases, we would have benefited from an extended timeline, as this bill is proposing.

We submitted an application to Aurora Public Schools in March of 2022 and received a release to apply through CSI in May. Subsequently, we engaged in CSI's Fall application timeline and received the good news of our approval on November 15. Committed to serving students in Aurora with our innovative, teacher-led, public Montessori microschoool model as soon as possible, we are moving rapidly through a Y0 timeline with the intent to open in August. While we have confidence that we will succeed in opening our first microschoool site on time, we are doing so with fewer pieces in place than we would have had with a longer runway: we are just now securing a facility, hiring our founding school leader, and identifying our inaugural teaching staff. Given the extended timeline most contractors require at this time for renovations, we are cutting it close in terms of completing the necessary renovations in time to open in early August. Because of our small microschoool size, our renovation needs are less than other charter schools, but an earlier application deadline – and, consequently, an earlier notice of approval – would have given us much more lead time to explore facility options, explore multiple contractor bids, and complete the renovations with integrity and at an affordable cost. Similarly, we will hire our founding school leader by April or May, which will give that individual just enough time to onboard and ground in the work before the schools open. An earlier application timeline and approval notification would have set our founding leadership team up with more time to succeed.

Our application experience in the Grand Valley (Mesa County Valley School District 51) has resulted in our inability to open our microschoool sites on the timeline we had originally planned. We submitted an application in August to D51; by the time D51 voted to release us in December, we had missed CSI's Fall application timeline, rendering us unable to secure approval in time for a Fall 2023 opening. As such, we are pursuing a Spring application and will have to postpone our school's opening until Fall 2024. We have interest forms representing XX% of our Year 1 seats.



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These interest forms represent families in the Grand Valley who are passionate about our school and do not feel that, at the moment, they have options in their community that support their children. These are real parents with real young people who are not being served by their current schools, some of whom expressed their dire need for community-focused, individualized, hands-on educational options in their testimonies to the D51 Board. Because of the current short timeline, we are not able to serve these families for another year.

Both of our charter application experiences speak to the need to extend this timeline. 18 months would provide teams proposing grassroots innovative school models an appropriate amount of time to apply, as is required, through the local school district and, if necessary, pursue an application through CSI in time to open on time – a timeline they share openly with families throughout the application process.

We ask for your yes vote on this bill so that we can continue providing effective, diverse educational options to our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony today.

Hannah Ewert-Krocker
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