**QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS:**
ROYAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS CHARTER APPLICATION IN SAN ANTONIO
SEPTEMBER 5, 2020

**Overview:** Royal Public Schools proposes to open four new campuses in south and central San Antonio initially targeting Harlandale, Southside, Southwest, and South San Antonio ISDs but including a total of 23 districts in the geographic boundary. The campuses will include two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, with a maximum enrollment of 2,328 students.

**Revenue loss for public school districts:** At a minimum, south and central San Antonio public school districts will lose an estimate of up to **$23 million** in revenue annually once Royal is at maximum enrollment capacity. Over the first ten years, these San Antonio districts would lose an estimate of up to
**$162 million** in revenue (*based on average estimated per student revenue loss*).

**Fiscal cost to the state:** Because of the Charter Funding Advantage giving charter schools a larger entitlement than most school districts, Royal Public Schools will cost the state an additional **$4,121,582** in its first five years and **$14,122,670** in its first ten years over the cost of enrollment of the same students in Southside ISD, Harlandale ISD, Southwest ISD, and South San Antonio ISD.

**QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS**

**A poor record of diversity in top leadership positions.** In his 17 years as the Superintendent/CEO of Harmony Public Schools in Texas, Royal’s CEO Soner Tarim only hired men in top leadership positions. He never hired a female or any Hispanic, African American, or Asian individual to serve as a
“key employee” or a “highly compensated employee” according to the employee names he submitted on the Harmony financial reports to the IRS between 2001–2017 when Mr. Tarim left Harmony.

**The majority of Royal’s Board members live in Houston – not San Antonio.** Royal proposes to locate its charter school in San Antonio, but the majority of its Board lives in Houston. The two members from San Antonio who have recently joined the Board do not live in the south and central San Antonio community where the proposed charter school will be located. Royal also was criticized in 2019 for having Board members that did not represent the community it proposed to serve in Austin.

**Royal will exclude certain students from enrollment.** Royal indicates in its application that it “shall” exclude students who have any discipline history from enrollment. This exclusion discriminates against students of color and students with special needs, because research shows these student populations receive a disproportionate percentage of discipline actions. In addition, Royal Public Schools will not provide transportation to students which will also exclude many students from attending whose parents do not have cars or whose work schedules make bus transportation a necessity.
 **Charter schools in San Antonio already significantly underserve at-risk and special needs students.**Existing charter schools in south and central San Antonio already serve significantly fewer students who face both academic and life challenges, by as much as 41 points. Because Royal will use similar exclusionary practices that discourage or prohibit the enrollment of at-risk and special needs students, it is likely that Royal will also underserve the students who face the most challenges. This results in a higher percentage of students with challenges who attend public school districts and a higher cost to the district.

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| **Description**TEA TAPR 2018-2019 | **HarlandaleISD** | **South SanAntonioISD** | **Southside ISD** | **Southwest ISD** | **IDEA South FloresAcademy** | **IDEA BrackenridgeAcademy** | **IDEA Ewing HalsellAcademy** | **StateAverage** |
| At Risk | 74.8% | 69.9% | 67.5% | 69.2% | 40.0% | 42.9% | 33.7% | 50.1% |
| SPED  |  9.8% | 10.4% | 10.8% | 12.4% |  7.5% |  2.9% |  2.7% |  9.6% |

 **A record of charter failures over the past two years.** Mr. Tarim has been involved in three out-of-state charters in the past two years that have been denied, revoked, or ended in disagreement and a lawsuit. The Education Code prohibits award of a charter to an applicant who has had a charter revoked.

* **Woodland Prep charter**: Revoked by the Alabama Charter Commission in June 2020 (Mr. Tarim’s company Unity School Services was the lead education services provider).
* **Nevada Strong charter**: Denied by the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority in December 2019 (Mr. Tarim was co-founder).
* **LEAD Academy**: The principal of the Alabama charter sued Mr. Tarim and the charter operator;
Mr. Tarim left the charter amid press reports of “near chaos” and disagreements with the operator.

**Royal will not give students in south and central San Antonio enrollment priority**. While Royal justifies the need for its charter by focusing on the academic record of schools in south/central San Antonio, it actually does not intend to enroll the students in these districts as a first priority. Instead of listing the south and central districts as a priority for enrollment (i.e., in the primary boundary), these districts are given equal weight with all the 23 districts included in the broader geographic boundary (page 12).

**Few details about the budget or the academic program**. Questions were raised by TEA staff about the lack of detail regarding the multitude of new programs that Royal will implement. In addition, there is serious concern whether there is sufficient planning time, professional development, funding, and in-house expertise/experience to ensure a successful roll-out of so many programs at one time that all require experienced staff or consultants and considerable PD. Royal proposes 12 major educational models such as: STEM, blended learning, project-based learning, social emotional learning, block schedule, the Deming Cycle, plus more. Note what authorizers in other states say about Mr. Tarim’s applications which include a similar academic program to the Royal program in San Antonio:

* “*significant identified weaknesses”;*
* “*applicant was unable to provide…a clear understanding of the academic plan”;* and
* *“…educational plan does not constitute a rigorous, quality instructional design that ensures students will meet or exceed standards.”*

**Districts in south and central San Antonio are positioned for progress.** The districts targeted by Royal have worked diligently with TEA over the last few years to make progress with academics and operations. With new leadership and a sense of urgency and mission, they are positioned for change. But the opening of another new charter school will jeopardize the progress these districts have made and the momentum for change by draining millions of dollars from the budget and jeopardizing their ability to adequately fund programs and services for students. In contrast to Royal, these districts are committed to enroll all students and to providing them with the academic support, services, and transportation they need to meet their unique challenges.

Link to the Royal charter application: <http://castro.tea.state.tx.us/charter_apps/content/downloads/Nocdn/25-22.pdf>