

TXSBOE JUNE 2019
CHARTER VETO PUBLIC HEARING

ROYAL CHARTER OPERATOR - SONER TARIM, FOUNDER OF HARMONY

Please note: The information used for comparison is based on Harmony's established policy which remains in place today. While Royal was VETOED by the Texas State Board of Education, Harmony continues with the practices detailed below.

Location

The original application explicitly stated that the Royal facilities would be located in **Alief ISD** because there were six low-performing schools in a four-mile radius of **Sneed Elementary**.

2017-18, three of these campuses were not rated because of Hurricane Harvey and three met state standards.

2016-17, five campuses met state standards. Only Sneed was raked as “low-performing.”

Royal has created a Royal-specific rating system outside of the Texas’ A-F accountability metrics. Royal uses their own parental survey information, waitlist numbers that have not been verified, school rating data which conflicts with TEA’s data, available space to build a school, and a limited number of schools with the STREAM 369 program.

The application also includes **Houston ISD** in its overall boundary but is specific about where the charter would be located because of “need” based on Royal’s rating formula rather than the Texas’ accountability A-F rating system.

1) For the record, exactly how exactly was the application amended and under which statutory authority did TEA change the original application’s attendance zones in Houston - within 24 hours of a Texas State Board of Education Committee of the Full Board vote?

This new application was not posted for public access with a minimum of 72 hours required for a public meeting and vote of the TXSBOE.

TEA’s response in the public hearing: Alief ISD Superintendent HD Chambers, had “extensive” communication with them. In fairness, each of the impacted ISD's sent a team of people and copious amounts of data to combat the false information delivered by Royal and all charter operator applicants.

2) Who proposed the switch of attendance zones in the Houston area, and why?

3) Were the impacted districts on this new application given the opportunity to evaluate the new attendance zones and provide statements of impact based on such a significant change?

4) Did TEA rescore the new application, and does this new application meet minimum criteria - based on factual data based on the State’s accountability system rather than Royal’s rating formula?

5) Under which statutory and rule-making authority is the agency acting?

6) Please explain the applications “description of need” requirement.

7) Has Royal provided the new “description of need” for the new location?

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English Learners

Are you aware of the educator certification requirements for English Learners? I am referring to Bilingual Certifications via the State Board for Educator Certifications, in addition to ESL programs.

I ask because Royal appears to be projecting a student need at 25%. If Royal genuinely intends to serve in areas listed on the application, the 25% projection is low - unless the application is foreshadowing an intent to implement a cap on this particular demographic.

The 12 schools listed on the application - campuses in Alief ISD, Austin ISD, and Houston ISD - the English Learner demographic begins at 42% and climbs as high as 80%.

Please describe Royal's plan for bilingual education.

2017-18 English Learner enrollment

Austin ISD:

Burnet MS: 61%

Dobie MS: 53% Lanier HS: 42%

Pillow: 42%

Pickle: 80%

Webb Primary: 75%

Alief ISD

Sneed: 71%

Landis: 68%

Horn: 78%

Klentzman: 58%

Owens: 65%

Houston ISD

Piney Point: 77%

Special Needs

Royal's application projects the Students with Special Needs enrollment at 7%.

The percentage of students with special needs at the two Austin Middle Schools that Royal referenced in the application are both over 17%.

The high school is 13%.

Harmony was cited by the Civil Rights Office of the U.S. Department of Education in 2014 for not serving a proportionate percentage of English Learners and children with special needs compared to public schools in close proximity.

Harmony / Royal leadership have stated on numerous occasions, "We'll deal with that once we hold the lottery and see which students enroll."

The "wait and see" approach is a highly irresponsible way to serve our English Learners, Special Needs, and all students.

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Diversity and Representation

There are no Latinx or African American Board members in a community where 98% of students are children of color.

Existing board members voted to open a school in a city without having any representation from that city. The application - the one the public has seen - lists only 2 Austin residents of the 22 individuals Royal has spoken with; these two people they are not from Northeast Austin community. One of these individuals is a Royal Charter funder.

Royal letters of support are almost exclusively from Houston.

Royal held **two** community meetings in Austin, with as few as only 7 people in attendance in one session and only 34 in the other. These records illustrate very little community outreach in Austin. *Perhaps because there is very little community interest.*

In more than 20 years of leadership, Harmony's 16 top leadership positions have always been held by males; none being from any of the communities which Harmony campuses are located.

The Royal Board of Directors has no members from Austin, no Latinx or African American members. Meanwhile, the students Royal intends to serve are 98% Latino / African American.

- What is Royal's plan to ensure that the Board, leadership, and staff are of diverse representation reflective of the community?

Conflict of Interest

According to the Unity School Service website, Soner Tarim created a charter management organization called Unity School Services that will operate two charters in Alabama while providing services to facilities in Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Georgia, Maryland, Missouri, New York, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington D.C., Mexico, Qatar, and Hong Kong.

Soner Tarim also sits on the Board of the International Leadership of Texas Charter Schools.

Tarim's salary is listed at \$140,000.

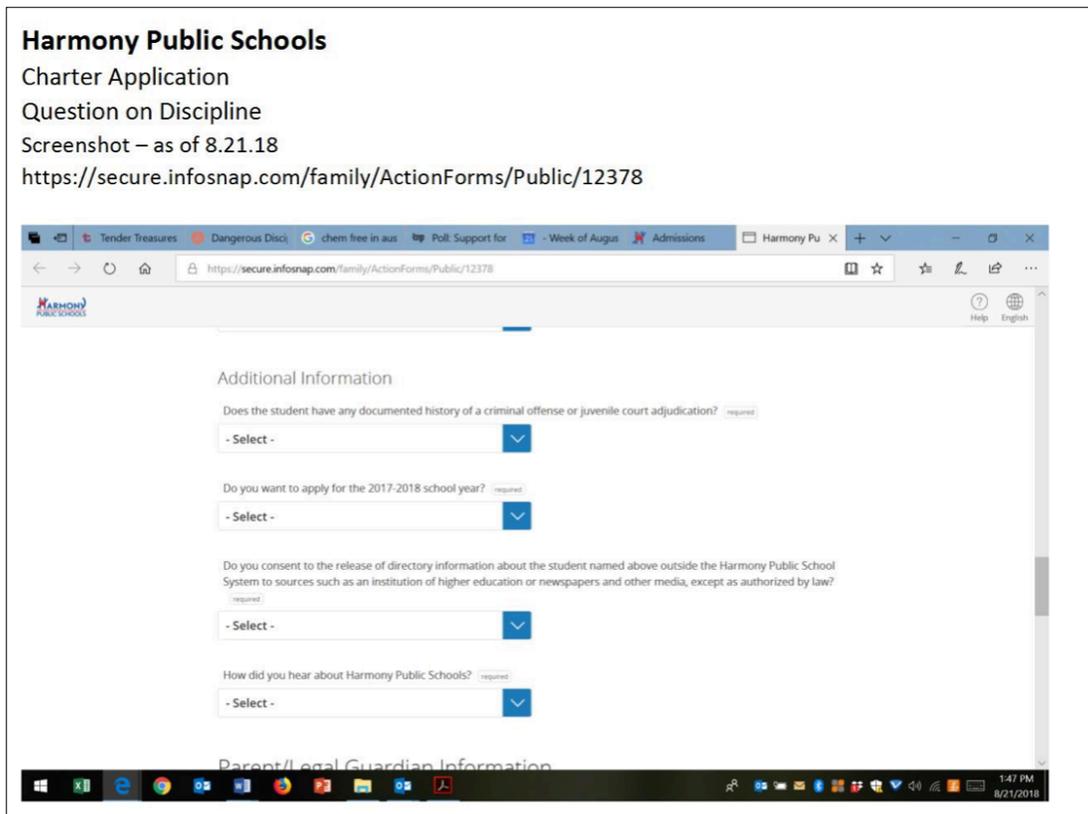
- Please tell the TXSBOE how many charters Unity is currently managing or providing services to and each of these locations?
- Which conflicts of interest have you identified with these concurrent roles?
- How will you have time to be the full-time CEO for the 8 charters on the Royal application?
- Will you make a commitment that you will never contract with Unity or another CMO that you create to provide services of any kind with Royal?

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Students with Disciplinary Histories / Records

During the interview, Tarim stated that Royal would not ask students to disclose their discipline history on their application. **However, the Harmony application does include this question.**

Harmony Science Academy - Houston, Harmony El Paso, San Antonio, etc. have ZERO disciplinary students.



2017-18 TAPR, <https://rptsrv1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tapr/2018/srch.html?srch=C>

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Students with Disciplinary Histories / Records

The Royal student application states:

The school **shall** exclude from enrollment those students who have a documented history of a criminal offense, a juvenile court adjudication, or other discipline problems under Subchapter A, Chapter 37 of the Education Code.” (page 232).

Page 93 of the student application, disciplinary history is required.

Please clarify, will Royal exclude any child because of any discipline history?

Is this response included in the Royal charter application?

Social Emotional Learning / Innovation

Royal’s application depicts a need for SEL in the schools/communities listed on the application.

Austin ISD offers SEL for all schools in the districts and started its program 8 years ago.

Royal’s application intends to blend SEL with STEM but fails to provide details as to how this will be accomplished.

How is social emotional-learning an innovation in Austin? How did this application win the Commissioner’s approval with this glaring oversight?

The Royal application states that you will work with CASEL on SEL, Tarim said he would talk to CASEL about SEL. CASEL had not spoken to Royal by the date of the public hearing. Tairm used the name for credibility falsely.

Counselors

Royal’s application states that counselors at every facility will coordinate the Social Emotional Learning Program. The application lists counselors on Royal’s staffing chart with a counselor to be hired at the beginning of the start-up year. **However, there are no counselors budgeted on the spreadsheet.**

See Royal Financial Workbook attached Tab “SOF” – See Projected Budget for/Operating Plan for Initial Charter period (2019 – 2024) Under Instructional Personnel Costs - No budget for counselors

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Custom Contracted Services

Royal's application budget details \$5,000 in the start-up budget for custom contracted services.

- Is this funding for Social Emotional Learning experts? Or consultants to train staff?
- Is there another line item for experts and/or consultants?
- If not, is Royal developing their own SEL program and training staff?
- If so which, research-based curriculum is Royal planning to use? Can you provide this information?

Professional Development

Royal's application budget details \$20,000 for professional development for the summer of 2020, prior to the first day of class.

- 42 teachers, leadership, and instructional staff on the year 1 budget = approximately \$476 per staff member to train in STEM, project-based learning, and social-emotional learning as well as new school training
- The math on this is \$15/hour at 32 hours/faculty in 1 week.
- What is the specific plan to schedule additional professional development time for each of these significant initiatives to ensure staff is ready to launch?
- Is Royal phasing these programs in?
- How will this work?

*See Position descriptions in the Financial Worksheet attachment – personnel tab; Year 1 positions
[https://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/Leadership/State_Board_of_Education/SBOE_2019/SBOE_2019_June/
June_2019_Committee_on_School_Initiatives_Item_7](https://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/Leadership/State_Board_of_Education/SBOE_2019/SBOE_2019_June/June_2019_Committee_on_School_Initiatives_Item_7)*

Note 2:

a) New charter operators are approved solely by the TEA Commissioner of Education. The Texas State Board of Education may veto these annual approvals.

b) Charter Expansions are approved solely by the TEA Education Commissioner. In fewer than 7 years, more than 400 expansions have been approved without public hearings, without taxpayer input, without community voices.