

Charter school council lacks quorum

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(Photo: PDN file photo)

The council with oversight of Guam's two charter schools hasn't had a quorum since January, which puts at risk a new charter school application.

The Guam Academy Charter Schools Council currently has three members, said Rosa S. Palomo. She chaired the council before her term expired in January, when another member's term also expired.

Palomo asked Gov. Eddie Calvo to withdraw her renomination to the council because of a potential conflict of interest. She intends to establish a charter school in the months ahead.

Calvo withdrew Palomo's nomination on March 13. Palomo said she still helps the council.

Palomo said on Tuesday the council received an application on March 10 from an entity wanting to build Career Tech High Academy Charter School.

"The council has 45 days to act on that, either to accept or reject. Accepting it does not mean approving it, but it means we still have to hold public hearings, ask more questions," Palomo said.

She said without a quorum, which she said is at least four members, the council can't even hold formal meetings, much less formally review new charter school applications.

Under the law, the council is supposed to have eight voting members.



Rosa Palomo (Photo: PDN file photo)

Working on it

Eric Palacios, special assistant to Gov. Eddie Calvo for education, environment and natural resources, said Tuesday the Calvo administration continues to actively work on filling vacancies within the council.

"We are working closely and communicating regularly with Sen. Joe San Agustin, the education chairman, through this process," Palacios said.

San Agustin's committee held a March 15 confirmation hearing on Calvo's nomination of Amanda F. Blas to the Guam Academy Charter Schools Council.

If senators confirm Blas' nomination, the council will have a quorum, Palomo said.

Oversight

The Guam Academy Charter Schools Council has oversight over two existing charter schools — iLearn Academy and the Guahan Academy Charter School, with combined annual government funding of some \$10 million.

Under the law, the council "shall monitor the operations of each academy charter school" and "shall monitor that each such academy charter school complies with applicable laws and the provisions of the charter granted to such school."

San Agustin said his legislative committee on education will be taking a closer look at the charter schools.

\$10K for retreat

The Guahan Academy Charter School board recently spent more than \$10,700 on a Jan. 6-8 retreat at the Dusit Thani Guam Resort. It included overnight stays at 10 guest rooms and two luncheons.

The charter school board requested, but was denied, reimbursement from the Guam Department of Education for the retreat's expenses.

"That shouldn't have happened; \$10,000 for a charter school board retreat is extravagant. I would rather see that amount go to student classroom learning and teachers' professional development to help students," Palomo said.

San Agustin said if Guam DOE's Internal Audit Office didn't validate it as an approved expenditure, then it wouldn't be proper to use government funds or taxpayer money for it.

Palomo, who chaired the Guam Academy Charter Schools Council for years, also said the council submitted the proposed fiscal 2018 budget for iLearn Academy and the Guahan Academy to the Guam Department of Education.

The Guam Education Board approved Guam DOE's proposed 2018 budget, which includes almost \$6.6 million for Guahan Academy Charter School and almost \$5.8 million for iLearn Academy.

Funding for each charter school in 2017 is \$6,500 per pupil, an increase from the prior year's \$5,500 per student.

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