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## Guahan Academy accreditation deadline looms

John O'Connor | The Guam Daily Post Jan 14, 2018 Updated 9 hrs ago

Guahan Academy Charter School (GACS) has until the end of this school year to obtain accreditation or risk violating Guam's charter school law.

All charter schools must become accredited within five years of opening. Although GACS received accreditation candidacy last year, it is now sunsetting on its fifth year of operation.

Vince Leon Guerrero, the governor's liaison to education and former chief executive officer of the charter school, said GACS' start date was amended to school year 2013-2014 from an initial date of school year 2010-2011.

Members of the Guam Academy Charter Schools Council are to review documents to pinpoint GACS' actual start date, but it appears the school is in its final year to obtain accreditation regardless.

About \$2,500 is outlined in the school's fiscal year 2019 budget for accreditation purposes. Charter school council Chairwoman Amanda Blas said she was concerned that GACS had been requesting funding for an accreditation committee for the last two or three years and that the council will be seeking additional information on accreditation status.

While the school is still seeking accreditation, several high school students have already graduated from GACS.

Accreditation officials recently communicated with school officials in December and while certain items need to be addressed, Fe Valencia-Ovalles, chairwoman of the charter school board, said the school is on track to meet accreditation requirements.

Additional items were discussed during the school's budget work session on Jan. 9.

The school currently enrolls prekindergarten students, but the charter school law authorizes only students from kindergarten to grade 12.

The charter school council did not take action on existing prekindergarten students during an overall budget meeting on Jan. 12, but the body did choose to gut GACS' pre-K request for next school year.

The school was seeking a little more than 60 prekindergarten students and around 900 students overall for their next enrollment – a \$1.3 million increase than what is currently allocated to them.

Blas issued a letter asking current charter schools on island to submit budget requests that maintain their current enrollment caps – given the more conservative nature of the Legislature when it comes to the budgeting process.

GACS was limited to 740 students for fiscal 2018 but exceeded that cap before the GovGuam budget was enacted, having earlier submitted a budget request for more than 1,000 students.

Charter schools derive public funding through annual Guam Department of Education appropriations, at a rate of \$6,500 per student enrolled at the school. GDOE has often been critical of this practice, noting the strain the budget places on their operations.

GovGuam funding may be particularly restrained for fiscal 2019 due to the passage of federal tax cuts anticipated to take tens of millions of dollars out of local coffers.

Charter school council members cautioned GACS officials, and all other charter school officials, that lawmakers would be especially critical of budget requests given the tax reform.

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**John O'Connor**

Reporting on utilities, education and other topics.