

**SANTA MARIA JOINT UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
STAFF REPORT AND FINDINGS OF FACT
REGARDING THE CHARTER RENEWAL PETITION
OF OLIVE GROVE CHARTER – ORCUTT/ SANTA MARIA
October 20, 2025**

Pursuant to Education Code section 47605, subdivision (b), this staff report provides recommended findings to the Santa Maria Joint Union High School (“District”) Board of Education (“Board”) regarding the renewal petition (“Renewal Petition”) of Olive Grove Charter – Orcutt/ Santa Maria (“Olive Grove”).

I. BACKGROUND

On July 30, 2025, Olive Grove submitted its Renewal Petition to the District. Olive Grove originally opened in 2015, as a nonclassroom-based charter school with multiple resource centers within Santa Barbara County. Following geographical restructuring required by the court decision in *Anderson Union High School District v. Shasta Secondary Home School* (2016) 4 Cal.App.5th 262, the learning center located within Santa Maria was established as Olive Grove Charter – Orcutt/ Santa Maria, and, initially authorized by the State Board of Education (“SBE”) to begin operations in or about 2018. Olive Grove was previously authorized for a 5-year term from July 1, 2018, to June 30, 2023, which was extended through June 30, 2026, pursuant to AB 130 and SB 114.¹ Pursuant to legal changes enacted by Assembly Bill 1505, the SBE can no longer serve as an authorizing entity, and, as the school district within the boundaries of which the charter school is located, Olive Grove has submitted its Renewal Petition to the District for consideration by the Board. (Ed. Code, § 47605.9, subd. (b).)

Olive Grove is a nonclassroom-based charter school operated by Olive Grove Charter Schools, Inc., a 501(c)(3) California nonprofit public benefit corporation. Olive Grove’s learning center at Orcutt/ Santa Maria is located within the District’s boundaries; Olive Grove Charter Schools, Inc., continues to operate three additional charter schools, all authorized by other school districts within Santa Barbara County.

Olive Grove serves students in transitional kindergarten (“TK”) through twelfth grade as an independent study program, using a hybrid educational model that personalizes educational plans to individual student needs. Students attend regular, individualized meetings with certified teachers to review their educational process, provide instructional support, and assign further assignments. As a result of its independent study program, students and families needing flexibility and/or a non-traditional educational model may choose Olive Grove to meet the respective needs of each student and their family.

During the 2024-2025 school year, Olive Grove served 153 students. Olive Grove’s student population is diverse, including socio-economically disadvantaged students (64.1%), English Learners (7.8%), and students with disabilities (12.4%). Olive Grove is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (“WASC”) for the term February 8, 2023, through

¹ Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the California Legislature lengthened most terms of school charters by 3 years.

June 30, 2029. Olive Grove additionally offers Advanced Placement courses, honors courses, and dual enrollment opportunities through local community colleges.

II. RENEWAL CRITERIA

Renewal petitions are governed by the standards and criteria described in Education Code section 47605 applicable to new petitions, as well as the criteria for a renewal petition set forth in Education Code section 47607 and 47607.2. (Ed. Code, § 47605, subd. (c); Ed. Code, §§ 47607, 47607.2.)

A. General Renewal Criteria

Renewal petitions must include a reasonably comprehensive description of any new requirements for charter schools enacted into law after the charter was originally granted or last renewed. (*Id.*) The Board may not deny a renewal petition unless it makes written factual findings, specific to the particular petition, setting forth specific facts to support one or more of the following:

1. The charter school presents an unsound educational program for the students to be enrolled in the charter school. (Ed. Code, §§ 47605, subd. (c)(1); 47607, subds. (a)(3), (b).)

Here, as discussed below, the District has considered the educational program described in the Renewal Petition and Olive Grove's California School Dashboard ("Dashboard") data and finds that Olive Grove presents a sound educational program.

2. The petitioners are demonstrably unlikely to successfully implement the program set forth in the petition. (Ed. Code, §§ 47605, subd. (c)(2); 47607, subds. (a)(3), (b).)

Olive Grove has operated since approximately 2015, operating in its current structural organization since 2018. It has been previously authorized by the SBE, overseen by the California Department of Education ("CDE"). Pursuant to the California Public Records Act (Gov. Code, § 7920.000 *et seq.*), the District obtained and reviewed records related to the CDE's oversight during the 2018 to 2025 charter term.

The District notes that, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CDE raised concerns related to Olive Grove's compliance with certain legal requirements, and general governance matters. Specifically, in 2018, the CDE identified improperly credentialed teachers, in 2019, the CDE found that not all students had proper access to curriculum, and, in 2020, the CDE required Olive Grove to demonstrate it had established a functioning English Learner Advisory Council pursuant to the Education Code. However, Olive Grove has demonstrated receptive responses brought by the CDE, and there have been no reported concerns by the CDE following the pandemic and internal governance changes. Olive Grove has demonstrated that it is likely to successfully implement the program set forth in the Renewal Petition.

3. The petition does not contain reasonably comprehensive descriptions of certain elements in its program and operations as set forth in Education Code section 47605, subdivision (c)(5)(A)-(O), including any new requirements for charter schools enacted into law after the charter was originally granted or last renewed. (Ed. Code, §§ 47605, subd. (c)(5); 47607, subs. (a)(3), (b).)

Olive Grove’s Renewal Petition contains reasonably comprehensive descriptions of all elements required by the Charter School Act, including new requirements for charter schools enacted into law after the charter was last renewed, such as incorporating all required assurances and affirmations.

1. CDE’s Determination

Pursuant to Education Code section 47607, subdivision (c), an authorizer must additionally consider the charter school’s performance on the Dashboard, where student performance is measured based on data from the current year, and, any improvement in results from the prior year.² The CDE designates charter schools as “low-performing,” “middle-performing,” or “high-performing,” based on these two years of Dashboard performance. The CDE has designated Olive Grove as a “middle-performing” charter school pursuant to Education Code section 47607.2, subdivision (b).

For middle-performing schools, a chartering authority must consider the following in its renewal petition review process:

1. The schoolwide performance and performance of all subgroups on the Dashboard, providing “greater weight to performance on measurements of academic performance in determining whether to grant a charter renewal”; and
2. Clear and convincing evidence, demonstrated by verified data, showing either: (a) the school achieved measurable increases in academic achievement, as defined by at least one year’s progress for each year in school, or (b) strong postsecondary outcomes equal to similar peers, as defined by college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates.

(Ed. Code, § 47607.2, subd. (b).)

2. Renewal Criteria for Olive Grove

Pursuant to Education Code section 47607.2(b)(6), a chartering authority may deny the renewal of a middle-performing charter school only upon making written findings, setting forth specific facts to support the finding, that:

1. The charter school has failed to meet or make sufficient progress toward meeting standards that provide a benefit to the pupils of the school; and
2. Closure of the charter school is in the best interest of pupils; and

² See <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/about/accountability>.

3. The decision not to renew gave “greater weight” to the charter school’s performance on measurements of academic performance.

In addition, pursuant to Education Code 47607(e), irrespective of the performance criteria, a chartering authority may deny renewal a charter school if:

1. The charter school is demonstrably unlikely to successfully implement the program set forth in the petition due to substantial fiscal or governance factors; or
2. The charter school is not serving the pupils who wish to attend, as documented by aggregate data reflecting pupil enrollment patterns at the charter school.³

The District has evaluated the Renewal Petition in accordance with the applicable “middle-performing” renewal criteria, including considering the above-referenced factors, as set forth in this report.

III. ANALYSIS AND PROPOSED FINDINGS

Finding 1: The Renewal Petition presents a sufficiently sound educational program for the pupils to be enrolled in the charter school.

A. Olive Grove’s Academic Program

Olive Grove offers an alternative to traditional classroom-based learning through its independent student program. This alternate model is intended to meet the differing needs of students with the need for flexible schedules, in a manner that may not be readily available in traditional classroom-based settings throughout the District and Santa Barbara County. However, the flex-based programming naturally results in parents or guardians required to be heavily involved in their student’s progress and success; additionally, while Olive Grove offers enrichment activities such as field trips, and arts programming including in-person workshops, there is limited opportunity for student interaction in club-like activities.

All Olive Grove teachers hold the Commission on Teacher Credentialing document required for their certificated assignment. Olive Grove uses approved curricula, such FlexPoint, UC Scout, and iReady, all aligned to current state standards. The high school program includes A-G courses and dual enrollment opportunities. As a WASC-accredited school, all Olive Grove high school courses are generally transferable to other educational institutions. English Learner students are served through an English Language Development (“ELD”) model, with ELD courses aligned to student language level needs. For the purposes of special education, Olive Grove is a member of the El Dorado County Charter Special Education Local Plan Area (“SELPA) in good standing.

³ Based on its review of CDE’s oversight and its own review of documents and information provided by Olive Grove, the District staff has not found any governance or fiscal factors, or lack of service to students wishing to attend, to warrant findings here.

The District notes that until 2022, Olive Grove qualified for “Dashboard Alternative School Status (“DASS”). Schools that serve at least 70 percent high-risk students, including, habitually truant students, credit deficient students, foster youth, and homeless youth, are eligible for DASS status and receive certain Dashboard indicators to identify strengths and areas of improvement.⁴ Per the Renewal Petition, Olive Grove has not qualified to renew DASS status since 2022. The Renewal Petition further attributes Olive Grove’s “relatively high level of transiency” in relation to students’ times enrolling and departing through the school year as the reason for the lack of DASS renewal since 2022.

B. Olive Grove’s Verified Data

The State Board of Education’s approved verified data includes Star Assessments by Renaissance, an assessment metric adopted by Olive Grove as an internal benchmark.⁵ To measure progress of a Student’s Growth Percentile (“SGP”), Renaissance “compares a student’s growth to that of his or her academic peers nationwide. These peers are students in the same grade with a similar achievement history on Star assessments. SGP is measured on a 1–99 scale. Lower numbers indicate lower relative growth, and higher numbers indicate higher relative growth. For instance, if a student has an SGP of 75, it means the student has shown more growth than 75 percent of his or her academic peers. Teachers and administrators can use SGP scores to determine if students grew more than, less than, or as much as expected.”⁶ Fall to Spring SGPs between 35 to 65 have demonstrated a year’s growth in a year’s time.

Olive Grove has provided Star Assessment data demonstrating schoolwide and grade level median SGP scores for the 2024-25 school year, as well as median scores for student groups. Olive Grove’s overall median SGP in Reading through the 2024-25 school year was reported as 77.5, and its overall SGP in Math was reported as 74. Both scores are higher than the median SGP range of 35-65, demonstrating that the average Olive Grove student has achieved higher relative growth in a year’s time than academic peers.

The median 2024-25 school year data by grade level shows that in Reading, students in five of the ten grades reflected in the data, including all high school grade levels, exceeded the median score. Three grades achieved the median range of growth, and two grades were below the median. In Math, six of the eleven grades reflected, including all high school grade levels, exceeded the median score, one grade was within the median range, and four grades were below the median range of necessary growth. The median data by student group demonstrates that all students exceed the median score in Reading, and that, in Math, almost all groups exceed the median; specifically, English Learners achieve within the median range, and Students with Disabilities fall below the median.

Olive Grove has also provided Star Assessment data for overall growth related to Star Math and Star Reading assessments from the 2020-21 through 2024-25 school year, reflecting the percentage of students at or above the median 35 SGP percentile, performing with high growth, typical growth, and low growth relative to other students in the same grade with similar Star

⁴ See <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/dass.asp> and <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/eligibilitycriteria.asp>.

⁵ See <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ch/verifdataacadprogress.asp>.

⁶ See https://support.renaissance.com/s/article/Student-Growth-Percentile-SGP-1752674163265?language=en_US.

Math and Star Reading score histories. The District recognizes an overall trend of growth for both metrics. The Star Math SGP in the 2021-21 school year reflected that 49.1% of students achieved low growth, while 27.3% of students achieved high growth; in the 2024-25 school year, these numbers have improved with 31% of students achieving low growth rates relative to their peers, and 55.7% of students achieving high growth rates. The Star Reading SGP provided that 39.6% of students achieved low growth rates and 40.9% of students achieved high growth rates in the 2020-21 school year, while in the 2024-25 school year, 20.5% of students achieved low growth rates and 65.2% of students achieved high growth rates.

Based on the review of Star Assessment data, the District acknowledges that Olive Grove students demonstrate growth across their academic careers by scoring within or above the median range of academic growth. The verified data therefore demonstrates “measurable increases in academic achievement, as defined by at least one year’s progress for each year in school” for students overall as required under the Education Code. Olive Grove’s verified data demonstrates positive and continuing academic trends for its students. Therefore, the internal benchmarks as reported by Olive Grove suggest that Olive Grove’s academic program is sufficiently sound.

C. Olive Grove and Comparative Dashboard Performance

The District has analyzed Olive Grove’s recent data as available for the 2024 and 2023 years, and compared to the performance of District students and California students statewide for the same periods. Overall, Olive Grove’s student performance on the Dashboard is less successful than its internal benchmarks using the Star Assessments.

Olive Grove’s 2024 Dashboard Indicator provides that Olive Grove performed 37.9 points below the score required to meet standard⁷ in English Language Arts, and 132.5 points below standard in Mathematics. Additionally, while not academic performance measures, 9% of students were placed as “Prepared” on the College/ Career Readiness Indicator. 21% of students were reported as chronically absent.⁸ 60.4% of eligible students completed high school and graduated. There was not enough data to reflect English Learner Progress. While the Education Code requires consideration of all subgroups, there is limited Dashboard information available for Olive Grove at this level. However, Hispanic and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged students performed at 32.5 and 34.3 points below standard respectively in English Language Arts, and 143.1 and 140 points below standard respectively in Mathematics. Socioeconomically Disadvantaged students were also specifically reported to be 9.3% “Prepared” for College/ Career Readiness. 25% of Hispanic students and 17.6% of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged were reported as chronically absent, and 58.3% of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged students graduated.

⁷ The Dashboard assesses academic performance using the metric of “Distance from Standard” to measure the average distance students are from “the lowest possible score for Standard Met,” the score which demonstrates “the knowledge and skills necessary for students to be on track for college and career readiness at their grade level.” See <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/about/glossary>.

⁸ The Dashboard measures chronic absenteeism as the percentage of students in Kindergarten through Eighth Grade absent for at least 10% of the instructional days they were enrolled. See <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/about/glossary>.

In comparison, the District’s 2024 Dashboard Indicator provides that students performed at 12.1 points below standard in English Language Arts, and 109.1 points below standard in Mathematics. 35.2% of students were placed as “Prepared” for College/ Career Readiness. While chronic absenteeism information is not available for the District, as a measurement excluded from high school data on the Dashboard, 92.8% of eligible students graduated. To further compare these numbers statewide, California students in 2024 performed 13.2 points below standard in English Language Arts, 47.6 points below standard in Mathematics, 45.3% of students were “Prepared” for College / Career Readiness, 18.6% of students were chronically absent, and 86.7% of eligible students graduated.

Olive Grove’s 2023 Dashboard Indicator scores provide that Olive Grove performed 22.4 points below standard in English Language Arts, and 119.8 points below standard in Mathematics. 9.3% of students were “Prepared” for College/ Career Readiness. 8.6% of students were reported as chronically absent and 61.4% of students graduated. Examining available subgroup data demonstrates that Hispanic and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged students performed 22.9 and 24 points below standards respectively in English Language Arts, and 130.9 and 128 points below standard respectively in Mathematics. Socioeconomically Disadvantaged students were reported 9.1% “Prepared” for College/ Career Readiness. While 10% of Hispanic students and 7.1% of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged students were reported as chronically absent, 64.7% of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged students graduated.

The District’s 2023 Dashboard Indicator scores provide that the District performed 43.8 points below standard in English Language Arts, and 127.1 points below standard in Mathematics. 38.7% of students were “Prepared” for College / Career Readiness, and 93.4% of students graduated. Statewide in 2023, California students performed 13.6 points below standard in English Language Arts, and 49.1 points below standard in Mathematics. 43.9% of California students were “Prepared” for College/ Career Readiness, 24.3% of students were chronically absent, and 86.4% of eligible students graduated.

English Language Arts

	2023	2024
Olive Grove	22.4 points below standard	37.9 points below standard
Santa Maria Joint Union High School District	43.8 points below standard	12.1 points below standard
Statewide	13.6 points below standard	13.2 points below standard

Math

	2023	2024
Olive Grove	119.8 points below standard	132.5 points below standard
Santa Maria Joint Union High School District	127.1 points below standard	109.1 points below standard
Statewide	49.1 points below standard	47.6 points below standard

Chronic Absenteeism

	2023	2024
Olive Grove	8.6% chronically absent	21% chronically absent
Santa Maria Joint Union High School District	N/A	N/A
Statewide	24.3% chronically absent	18.6% chronically absent

College/ Career Readiness

	2023	2024
Olive Grove	9.3% prepared	9% prepared
Santa Maria Joint Union High School District	38.7% prepared	35.2% prepared
Statewide	43.9% prepared	45.3% prepared

Graduation Rate

	2023	2024
Olive Grove	61.4% graduated	60.4% graduated
Santa Maria Joint Union High School District	93.4% graduated	92.8% graduated
Statewide	86.4% graduated	86.7% graduated

Overall, Olive Grove’s Dashboard data does not reflect performance in parity with District students or statewide performance, which may cast doubt upon the success of Olive Grove’s academic program. Olive Grove’s academic performance has failed to consistently increase as the District’s has across the same time period for the same metrics. Rather, many academic measures have trended downwards as reported for both overall student metrics and available subgroup information. While the District recognizes that absenteeism and graduation rates are not academic performance measures, the District notes these factors as vital to academic engagement and observes that Olive Grove’s graduation rate, notably, has been in steady decline. However, the District also recognizes that the Renewal Petition includes actions detailed in Olive Grove’s Local Control & Accountability Plan (“LCAP”) to decrease chronic absenteeism, as well as improve college and career readiness and graduation rates. These plans include parent support and attendance initiatives, internal tracking systems to identify students at risk of leaving the school prior to or without graduating, and expanding career and technical education pathways for students enrolled at school. The District recognizes that Olive Grove is aware of these challenges and expects that the issues will continue to be addressed.

Finding 2: The Charter School is likely to successfully implement the program set forth in the Renewal Petition.

In order to successfully implement the program described in the Renewal Petition, Petitioners must demonstrate that they are familiar with the content of the Renewal Petition and the requirements of laws applicable to the proposed school; present a realistic financial and operational plan; and have the necessary background in areas critical to the charter school's success, or have a plan for securing the services of individuals with the necessary background, including curriculum, instruction, assessment, finance and business management. The District has reviewed the Renewal Petition and reviewed SBE records related to Olive Grove's progress throughout its last charter term.

Olive Grove has successfully implemented its program through its original charter terms. Further, the CDE's records from the 2018-25 charter term demonstrate that any concerns raised either to the CDE during its period overseeing Olive Grove, or brought directly to Olive Grove, have been addressed in a prompt and thorough manner. Olive Grove has remained financially solvent, and the CDE presented no concerns about its fiscal health and operations.

However, the District notes that Olive Grove administrative staff do not hold administrative credentials. While this is not a legal requirement, Olive Grove may benefit from such expertise, or from administrative leadership training, in order to effectively address academic and attendance challenges, and assist in developing and implementing academic intervention strategies to ensure student success. The District encourages Olive Grove to receive outside coaching services from a support provider with charter school expertise.

Additionally, Olive Grove has indicated use of a waitlist and a lottery system. The District had been informed that Olive Grove projected an enrollment of 171 for the upcoming school year of 2025-26, and, as of a first meeting with the District, that Olive Grove had enrolled 160 students. However, as this number is below the current projected enrollment, and, below the highest enrollment capacity of 262 students in the 2019-20 school year per the Renewal Petition, the District requires further clarification regarding Olive Grove's enrollment and waitlist system.

Finding 3: The Renewal Petition contains a reasonably comprehensive description of the specific elements described in Education Code section 47605, subdivisions (c)(5)(A)-(O), as applicable, including any new requirements for charter schools enacted into law after the charter was originally granted or last renewed.

The Renewal Petition contains a reasonably comprehensive description of the specific elements described in Education Code section 47605, subdivisions (c)(5)(A)-(O), including adherence to all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, including any new requirements enacted into law after the charter was last renewed. The Renewal Petition identifies all legally required affirmations and declarations and ensures the Renewal Petition is legally compliant.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

To Be Determined at the November 4, 2025 Santa Maria Joint Union High School District School Board meeting.