



December 17, 2015

Isabel Muñoz-Colón  
Executive Committee Chair  
Washington State Board of Education  
P.O. Box 47206  
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Chair Muñoz-Colón:

On behalf of the students, families, and staff of the First Place Scholars School, I urge the Washington State Board of Education to approve the application of this long-standing community institution to return to private school status.

For more than 25 years, First Place operated a successful school in the heart of the 37<sup>th</sup> Legislative District, providing essential academic and integrated student supports to children who were experiencing trauma in their lives. The effectiveness of the First Place “whole child” approach ensured that students would have a stable foundation upon which to continue their education even while other aspects of their lives were in chaos. Indeed, often serving as a provider of supplemental education services to Seattle Public School students on a temporary basis, First Place School could boast that these students returned to their home school on-grade level and with their trauma associated behaviors under control.

Against the backdrop of this strong and sustained record of accomplishment, the leaders of First Place sought to serve more students as a public charter school, a distinction granted to the First Place Scholars School. With the recent State Supreme Court ruling on charter schools in Washington State, First Place Scholars School and the other public charter schools no longer have legal standing to serve students as currently organized. I understand that, while the other schools have obtained standing as Alternative Learning Experiences (ALE) through a recognized elected school board, First Place Scholars is choosing instead to revert to its original function as a private school.

I fully support First Place Scholars School as a private school and urge the Washington State Board of Education to approve their application without delay. Clearly, the decisions and the timing of the State Supreme Court were well beyond the control of the First Place Scholars School. Yet, the school, its staff, and its leadership have remained

steadfast since 1989 in providing uninterrupted quality education to students whose home lives are full of uncertainty and turmoil. Without immediate approval from the State Board of Education as a private school, First Place Scholars School cannot continue to provide basic education and supports to these extremely underserved and vulnerable children.

Please give these students their best opportunity to succeed with a newly approved First Place Scholars private school.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharon Tomiko Santos". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sharon" being the most prominent.

Sharon Tomiko Santos  
State Representative  
House of Representatives  
37th Legislative District

cc: Ben Rarick, Executive Director of the Washington State Board of Education  
Dawn Mason, Board President of First Place Schools