

KOMO News

State's first charter school to go back to private

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SEATTLE (AP) - The first charter school in Washington will go back to being a tuition-free private school after the state Supreme Court struck down the charter school law as unconstitutional, officials announced Monday.

All nine charter schools in Washington, including eight that opened last fall, have been scrambling to find a way to keep their doors open after losing state funding. The others said last week that they will go a different way, trying to become so-called Alternative Learning Experiences under the umbrella of a traditional school district.

First Place, a school for kindergarten through fifth grades, said it received a grant to stay open for the rest of the school year without state funds or disruption to its 106 students.

It was a private school for decades, serving homeless and other vulnerable students in Seattle's Central District, before becoming Washington's first charter school last year.

First Place had a rough transition to a public school, in part because it was the first school to do so. State officials also had issues with the blurred lines between the school and its supporting nonprofit organization, which provided health care and other services to the families of students.

The statewide Charter School Commission had put First Place on probation for failing to create a sustainable budget, to offer all required special education and to do enough to help kids learning to speak English. The commission said First Place leaders had worked hard to turn the school around before the beginning of the school year.

The Charter School Commission, which is starting to shut down in response to the Supreme Court decision, worked closely with First Place to help it adjust to becoming a public school. That oversight, one of the main functions of the commission, will end when the shutdown is complete.

Closing the agency is required after the Washington Supreme Court ruling, which cited issues with the way charter schools are supported with state dollars and governed by a board that is not elected by residents. The justices said last month that they would not reconsider their decision.

For the state's eight other charter schools, the Mary Walker School District in Stevens County said it was working with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to bring them under its umbrella.

The plan would allow the schools to stay open and receive state education dollars.