

**TO:** Melissa Mackedon, State Public Charter School Authority Board Chair  
Members of the SPCSA Board

**CC:** Rebecca Feiden, SPCSA Executive Director  
Mark Modrcin, SPCSA Director of Authorizing

**FROM:** Alejandro Rodriguez, Proposed Board Chair, Sage Collegiate PCS  
Proposed Board of Directors Sage Collegiate PCS  
Sandra Kinne, Proposed Executive Director Sage Collegiate PCS

**DATE:** Wednesday, January 22, 2020

**RE:** Appeal for authorization – Sage Collegiate Public Charter School

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The proposed Board of Directors of Sage Collegiate Public Charter School and its proposed leader appreciate the review and consideration of our application to open Sage Collegiate Public Charter School. We heard the feedback through the review process and at the December 17, meeting; we are eager to continue through this process for authorization and ultimately launch of a successful public charter school.

In the attached document and in our original submission, we have addressed the feedback from the Review Team and Board, noting specific pages where our response can be found, when applicable. We have worked thoroughly to address the expressed concerns of the Board, and, as a result, we have a stronger, sounder application in our appeal.

We remain confident in the merits of our application and proposed school, and we are certain of our capacity to successfully deliver a quality school as part of the state's portfolio of schools. With respect, we ask the State Public Charter School Authority to authorize Sage Collegiate Public Charter school so we can begin the urgent work of providing a currently unavailable, high-quality public education option to students in the central part of our city.

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration of our appeal.

**SAGE COLLEGIATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL APPEAL**

<b>MEETING THE NEED SECTION</b>	
<b>SPCSA Finding</b>	<b>Sage Collegiate Response</b>
<i>While there are several letters of support from the charter school community in Las Vegas and in California, none of the letters of support are from community members or organizations that are located in the target community.</i>	<p>We have secured multiple letters of support from families, which are included in <b>Appendix AA</b>.</p> <p>We have had multiple intentional conversations with daycares in and adjacent to our targeted area about our school and we are communicating with families of children who would be age-eligible for the proposed school.</p> <p>Venues for conversations include Stonebridge Learning Academy (serves students 6-weeks through Kindergarten, the Hills Preschool, and the Mirabelli Community Center.</p> <p>We have long been committed to participating in the Las Vegas School Choice Fair at UNLV on Saturday, January 25, at which we anticipate identifying additional interested families.</p>
<i>While there are several letters of support from the charter school community in Las Vegas and in California, none of the letters of support are from community members or organizations that are located in the target community.</i>	Please see above.
<b>ACADEMIC SECTION</b>	
<b>SPCSA Finding</b>	<b>Sage Collegiate Response</b>
<i>Several parts of the academic program were intentionally left undefined, in particular the curriculum. The proposal is a compilation of the programs and strategies the proposed ED has researched and likes, but is unwilling to commit to which ones will be implemented. This was probed and crystalized during the interview (and is explicitly stated in the written application regarding curriculum). Specifically, during the capacity interview, the review committee listed out ten programs directly from the application and asked “are there any that you do plan to implement, for sure, that you’ve listed in your application. Or are they just kind of ideas that you’ve researched?” The proposed school leader stated “At this stage, they’re ideas we’re weighing and considering. Upon authorization and upon the receipt of a grant we will make those decisions.”</i>	<p>We have provided clarification of our planned curriculum in <b>Appendix BB</b>.</p> <p>We learned on January 21, that we would receive the CSP grant we requested for \$600,000<sup>1</sup>, contingent on authorization by the SPCSA. As such, we plan to purchase Bridges for Math for our math curriculum and our identified ELA components for our ELA curriculum.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Email on Tuesday, January 21, 2020 from Chris James Education Programs Professional, chrisjames@doe.nv.gov

<p><i>Not only does this raise questions about the level of investment to date from the committee to form in researching and identifying programs that will best suit the target community, but it also leaves the application with significant holes that make it hard to fully evaluate the quality of the academic plan, a fundamental element of the charter proposal.</i></p>	
<p><i>While key components of the model are identified and research-based, the application is lacking in detail regarding how these components would be implemented in a coherent manner. Responsible parties, target population, actions, timelines, context, delivery methods, and rationale are not provided for many of the identified components.</i></p>	<p>We included our Incubation Year Plan as part of our original submission, and we resubmit it here as <b>Appendix CC</b>. This plan specifically outlines responsibilities and actions in Y0.</p> <p>Further, our job descriptions in <b>Attachment 2</b> of our original application outline responsible parties and tasks through Years 0, 1, and beyond.</p>
<p><i>The application does not speak to plans for exiting students from special services.</i></p>	<p>When students meet their behavioral and/or academic goals and progress monitoring shows growth, the IEP team will discuss exiting of students who no longer show academic or behavioral needs. If Sage Collegiate has a student who needs transitioning out of Special Education, the IEP team may transition the student out by revising the IEP to provide consultation services during the reevaluation timeframe. If the IEP team determines that a student no longer needs an IEP, the student will be referred to the consulting school psychologist for evaluation. The IEP team will then determine if the student is still eligible for services or no longer meets service eligibility. All final decisions will be made with parent/guardian participation.</p> <p>We will adhere to all state and federal guidelines, particularly IDEA, to ensure legal compliance and meeting students’ needs.</p>
<p><i>The application does not provide a strong sense of the culture, other than being structured with routines and a thoughtful/rigorous approach to discipline. The description of the culture of the school contains a list of resources from well-respected authors. However, it is not clear how this knowledge will be transferred to staff members. This is compounded by a lack of clarity on the overall academic model.</i></p>	<p>Please see our response on <b>page 69</b>.</p>
<p><i>A “core value tracker” is mentioned but not explained. It is not clear how this tracker will relate to the clip change</i></p>	<p>The clip chart discussed is for our lower and upper academies, which includes grades K-2 in the Lower Academy and Grades 3-5 in the Upper Academy, while the merit/de-merit system is</p>

<p><i>chart and merit/de-merit systems. A few different systems are mentioned without full clarity on each and how they create a cohesive system.</i></p>	<p>for Grades 6-8 in the Middle School. These systems respect and respond to the growing age and maturity of our students across grades. Regardless of the “system of delivery, each is based upon the core values of the school. While we name this in the original application, we have clarified it and added subheadings to provide the reader with more specificity.</p> <p>We clarify beginning on <b>page 73</b> in the “Behavior Management” section of <b>Section 4: Academic Plan.</b></p>
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<p><i>Restorative Justice is briefly mentioned a few times but this approach is not developed throughout the culture or discipline sections.</i></p>	<p>Please see our response on <b>page 75.</b></p>
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**OPERATIONS SECTION**

<b>SPCSA Finding</b>	<b>Sage Collegiate Response</b>
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<p><i>The written application identified only two proposed board members. In advance of the capacity interview, three additional board members were identified, all of whom were in attendance for the capacity interview. The board does now meet the legal requirements for membership and proposed members bring a range of skills and experiences. Yet serious questions remained after the interview regarding whether the proposed board would be prepared to hold the proposed school leader accountable, and whether there has been meaningful preparation work (such as community engagement) undertaken by the collective team – this interview was dominated by one strong personality (proposed school leader). It didn’t balance well between leadership and governance and therefore the reviewers did not feel confident that this was a strong proposed board that understands the proposal and is ready to govern.</i></p>	<p>As noted in the original application and, the Capacity Interview, and at the Board Meeting on December 17, 2019. Ms. Kinne was asked by senior leadership at the Authority to refrain from recruiting board members while still on staff of the SPCSA.</p> <p>Meeting all requirements of <a href="#">NRS 388A.240</a>, a full Committee to Form was in place by mid-October, in advance of and participating within the Capacity Interview. Training and development of the proposed Board began in late summer, with proposed Board Members having weekly and ongoing touchpoints, training on their governance role through detailed study of <i>Charter School Board University</i>, and having a team retreat in preparation for both the Capacity Interview and their roles as governing board members. All Board members are aligned to our mission, dedicated to our community, and bring the requisite skills to conduct effective fiscal and academic oversight of the school and successfully implement all details of its academic program. We have outlined a robust and detailed training and development process for the governing board in our application (<b>pp. 90-91</b>) and have secured Follow on Support with BES for the first two years of operation, which includes direct board training and development.</p> <p>Further, the proposed Board Chair has begun working with the BES team to support development of his role and the Board as a whole. BES has staff dedicated to the support and development of governance skills and Board members to ensure the Board understands its roles, is ready to govern, and has the support necessary to continuously develop in its roles.</p> <p>We have included all proposed Board Members’ bios in <b>Appendix DD</b> and resumes in <b>Appendix EE</b>, as well as included descriptions of the backgrounds of board members we continue to seek and aim to have in place by June 30, 2020 on <b>Page 93.</b></p>
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	<p>We are confident that the experiences of the proposed Board Members, and the well-established support and nationally-recognized of BES and the local support of Opportunity 180, meet the requirements of the state and provide the proposed team with the necessary skills, knowledge, and capacity to effectively and efficiently govern Sage Collegiate PCS.</p>
<p><i>The proposed school leader has a strong personality, experience, and is knowledgeable. However, during the capacity interview, she demonstrated a marked reluctance to having the board involved in anything she considered the purview of “management.” Her definitions of where the lines are between management and governance seem to be skewed on the side of letting the school leader make all decisions and run the school without much oversight and input from the board. She also acknowledged that she led the application writing process (and the proposed board confirmed this as well) and therefore owns all the mistakes and problems found throughout the proposal, of which there are many. The application itself becomes a foundational charter document and therefore should be constructed with a high level of rigor and intentionality.</i></p>	<p>Please see our response on <b>Page 92</b>.</p>
<p><i>At the time of submission of the application, a facility had not been identified. A basic timeframe was provided for acquisition but lacks discussion of other key dates and steps to be followed. The budget assumptions related to leasing and tenant improvement costs raise significant questions as to whether a viable facility exists within the budgeted amount. In addition, the applicant raises the possibility of retrofitting a former retail space which would require extensive renovations to be made suitable for use as a school. During the capacity interview, the applicant was vague about whether any options had been identified within the projected cost assumptions.</i></p>	<p>As shared with members of the Authority in December and at the Capacity Interview in October, we are working with Building Hope<sup>2</sup>, a national, non-profit headquartered in Washington, DC and with a history of successful work in Las Vegas, that supports public charter schools with facility development. (We have included a letter from them in <b>Appendix AA</b>.) Building Hope has worked with public charter schools for nearly 20 years and assists schools’ teams with site identification and procurement; project financing; and designing, pre-development, and construction management. Building Hope has worked locally with Nevada Rise Academy, Nevada Prep, and Futuro Academy, (all schools with school leaders incubated, developed, and supported through BES). Building Hope is also working with the SPCSA’s newest school in its portfolio, Las Vegas Collegiate Charter School (BES School) to support their facility plans.</p>

<sup>2</sup> <http://buildinghope.org/>

<p><i>The proposed school leader reaffirmed with confidence the team’s commitment to finding a suitable building for the school but failed to instill this same confidence in the review committee given the lack of detail provided.</i></p>	<p>We have identified two strong options for opening Sage Collegiate Public Charter School for students from our intended locations. One potential location provides the necessary square footage for year one - nearly 15,000 square feet. It also has sufficient acreage and space to allow for multiple bungalows in subsequent years to support our slow growth addition of grades 3 and 4. The second potential location provides more than 22,000 square feet, which would get us through Year 3, when we are at K-4 school.</p> <p>Upon authorization, our Board would work with Building Hope on finance and leasing options, as well as any construction management to ensure we meet state and federal codes and the location is suitable for students and within legal compliance for a school as well aligned to our budget for the length of authorization.</p>
<p><i>Professional development requirements to keep up with multiple methods of instruction will require large workload for teachers and may lead to burnout.</i></p>	<p>The Professional Development model of Sage Collegiate is designed based upon the best practices of high-performing schools and based on practices observed by Lead Founder during visits to BES supported schools, including during her Residencies. It is also comparable and aligned with the PD plan for the SPCSA-authorized Las Vegas Collegiate, which has 35 planned PD/Data Days and three hours of professional development each week.<sup>3</sup></p>
<p><i>The plan for safety and security is not fully developed. It does indicate that the applicant is familiar with mandates, however, doesn’t offer a robust discussion of how the facility will be kept safe, other than administering visitor badges. This is important to address since there will not be any additional security contracted. When asked about this during the capacity interview, the applicant acknowledged the importance of this work, but did not provide many additional specifics, pointing to working with law enforcement and learning from other charter schools.</i></p>	<p>As shared at the Capacity Interview, we fully plan to have a strong safety and security plan in place in advance of the first day of school. However, as we noted at the Interview, a safety and security plan is dependent on the facility. We cannot develop a specific plan without the building’s floor plans, emergency exits, and available entryways. We also need to have secured the building, which we cannot do without authorization, to be able to identify and execute any modifications related to state and federal regulations for students.</p> <p>Further, we need to consult with the local police precinct around any safety matters specific to the immediate neighborhood and traffic patterns. We have to secure our facility to be able to identify the most immediate local precinct, with which we plan to work closely to finalize any safety and security plans. We expect to follow the timeline and due dates outlined in the SPCSA’s Pre-Opening Checklist, as related to all safety and security plans, checklists, and relevant procedures that ensure student safety and a strong opening for our school.</p>
<b>FINANCE SECTION</b>	
<b>SPCSA Finding</b>	<b>Sage Collegiate Response</b>

<sup>3</sup> State Public Charter School Authority. <http://charterschools.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/CharterSchoolsnvgov/content/News/190816-LV-Collegiate-Application-Coversheet-and-Executive.pdf>

<p><i>During the interview it became clear that the construction of the budget is not thorough. Throughout this portion of the interview it was repeatedly stressed that the figures and assumptions were “preliminary” (the phrase “very preliminary” was also used). The totality of the conversation left the impression that the assumptions and draft budget are very unreliable and may not come close to matching the reality the school may face. While reviewers know budgets can and do change after approval, the responses here indicated a rushed or incomplete budgetary planning process. Overall the budget seems to be like the academic program – something was put on paper but it does not yet reflect a realistic plan. Assumptions should be logical, defensible, and supported by evidence – not explained away as being “preliminary” or “very preliminary.” Ensuring this is true for all major budget categories will yield a proposal that is much more likely to be aligned with the proposed school’s eventual reality. Moreover, it can be evaluated for viability.</i></p>	<p>We have included changes and updates in the Budget Narrative (<b>Attachment 15</b>) and Financial Plan Workbook (<b>Attachment 16</b>). Changes are highlighted in orange.</p>
<p><i>At the time of submission of the application, a facility had not been identified. A basic timeframe was provided for acquisition but lacks discussion of other key dates and steps to be followed. The budget assumptions related to leasing and tenant improvement costs raise significant questions as to whether a viable facility exists within the budgeted amount. In addition, the applicant raises the possibility of retrofitting a former retail space which would require extensive renovations to be made suitable for use as a school. During the capacity interview, the applicant was vague about whether any options had been identified within the projected cost assumptions. The proposed school leader reaffirmed with confidence the team’s commitment to finding a suitable building for the school but failed to instill this same</i></p>	<p>As discussed at the December 17 SPCSA Board Meeting and in response to an SPCSA Finding, we are working with the experienced national non-profit, Building Hope on facility securement. We have identified two strong options for opening Sage Collegiate Public Charter School for students from our intended locations.</p> <p>Budget assumptions are based on similar assumptions and practices of first-year, independent schools such as Nevada Rise, Nevada Prep, and Futuro Academy, as well as current and anticipated costs in Years 1 through 5.</p> <p>We have worked with EdTec, a back-office provider, an established and respected firm with expertise that allows for appropriate assumptions in the budget creation and adoption process. We are confident, given the experiences of similar schools, the expertise of our back-office provider, and our informed planning and discussion with Building Hope that we have made reasonable and appropriate budget assumptions.</p> <p>More specifically, working with an external facility partner allows us the opportunity to manage our facility costs over</p>

<p><i>confidence in the review committee given the lack of detail provided.</i></p>	<p>time, through a potentially staggered payment structure. Informed by their expertise working with slow growth schools to access facilities in the early years of growth, such guidance allows us to ensure we maintain a balanced budget as we continue to grow one grade level each year and add students.</p>
<p><i>There are several assumptions in the budget that were not substantiated, such as the assumption that just because vendors have a history of building payment plans around DSA payment timing with other schools will mean they will make the same arrangements with this school and the assumption that the unidentified landlord will be willing to make a large portion of the tenant improvements.</i></p>	<p>We have made assumptions related to the budget that are aligned on the past experiences of other BES schools and recommended vendors who are familiar with the start-up process for independent, single-site schools such as Sage Collegiate PCS. These assumptions are also based on conversations and experiences the proposed Lead Founder has had in a previous role related to start-up schools.</p> <p>Further, the receipt of the CSP grant would support the needs of start-up and would significantly change the budget allotment for Year 0. [As noted above, we learned on January 21, 2020 that we would receive our fully requested funding (\$600,000) on the condition of authorization.]</p>
<p><i>Several components of the budget do not line up with the application narrative:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>• The application indicates that teachers will receive bonuses based on longevity and student performance. No bonuses are included in the budget.</i></li> <li><i>• The application indicates that PE will be taught at the school, but there is no budget for athletic expenditures.</i></li> <li><i>• The application puts a heavy emphasis on the importance of parent and staff meetings, but there is no budget for this.</i></li> </ul>	<p>We have adjusted these in our Financial Plan Workbook (<b>Attachment 16</b>) and Budget Narrative (<b>Attachment 15</b>).</p> <p>We had included a budget for PE equipment within the budget “Supplies for Students” (Line 1290), as noted in the original application. This has been moved from that line item to “Athletic Expenditures” (Line 1301).</p> <p>Further, we have made the following adjustments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Line 1268: Added Bonus in Year 3 – Year 6</li> <li>- Line 1311: Added \$750/year for parent meeting supplies/food</li> </ul>