

**STEVE SISOLAK**  
*Governor*

**STATE OF NEVADA**

**REBECCA FEIDEN**  
*Executive Director*



**STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY**

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**BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SPCSA Board

**FROM:** Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing  
Mike Dang, Management Analyst

**SUBJECT:** Leadership Academy –Amendment to Eliminate a Contract with an Educational Management Organization

**DATE:** June 28, 2019

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**Summary of Request:**

Leadership Academy of Nevada (LANV) seeks an amendment to eliminate a contract with an Educational Management Organization (EMO). LANV is an online school serving students in grades 6 – 12 throughout Nevada and had an enrollment of 292 students during the 2019 – 2020 school year.

According to the amendment application, at the beginning of July 2018, the LANV Executive Director met with the Executive Committee and recommended that LANV not renew the contract with Williamsburg Learning at the end of the current contract, June 30, 2019. On July 23, 2018, a board meeting was held and the LANV Governing Board voted 4 – 3 to not renew the contract and to become an independent charter school, not using an EMO/CMO. If approved the amendment will go into effect for the 2019-2020 School Year.

As discussed below, SPCSA staff recommends that the Authority approve the request of LANV to offer student instruction without a contract with Williamsburg Learning, with the condition that their final proposed distance education curriculum be approved by NDE before the beginning of the 2019 – 2020 school year.

**Background Information**

The LANV charter contract was first approved in the Spring of 2013 and was slated to open in the fall of 2013. However, LANV failed to enroll enough students and postponed its opening until the fall of 2014 when the school opened with 208 students.

The administrative team consists of the Executive Director, the Director of Business, and Director of Academics. The Executive Director was on the Committee to Form and has been in education for over 20 years. The Director of Academics has been with LANV for five years and was a previous teacher for Clark County School District (CCSD). The Director of Business has been with LANV for a few months and came from a CCSD classroom. The school currently has seven board members, two of which are founding members who will term out on June 30, 2019. The school is currently in the process of finding replacements for those two members.

LANV has contracted with Williamsburg Learning since 2013. When the Nevada Department of Education transitioned to the Data Recognition Corp. criterion-referenced tests, the school determined that Williamsburg did not align with the Nevada standards. LANV began discussion with Williamsburg but Williamsburg made minimal changes. This resulted in a decrease in the 2017-18 criterion reference tests from the previous school year and subsequently a 2-star rating for the middle school and a 3-star rating for the high school as measured by the Nevada School Performance Framework.

LANV continued to have discussions with Williamsburg but determined in the spring of 2018 that Williamsburg would not make the needed changes to their curriculum in order to align with the Nevada Academic Content Standards. It was at this juncture that the LANV Board and Leadership team decided to not renew their contract with Williamsburg Learning after June 30, 2019.

LANV does not plan to replace Williamsburg with another EMO and will instead focus on hiring full-time teachers who will:

- Be locally based in order to increase in-person engagement with students
- Develop a classical-based curriculum that will be tied closer to Nevada standards
- Create integrative formative assessments so teachers will know exactly where students are in their academic progression
- Refine the current Response-to-Intervention protocol to respond more effectively to students needing additional support

LANV will use Canvas, its Learning Management System, to help develop systems, processes, and benchmarks to formally assess student progress. As LANV develops its own curriculum, teachers will also be including formative assessments that are tied to Nevada standards and which can be monitored and reported more closely as the school year progresses.

LANV terminated its contract with Williamsburg in order to increase their control and ability to make adjustments to its curriculum and systems more easily. As data is received from Canvas the school believes it will be able to make adjustments to the curriculum if needed, as well as work with individual students if needed. At the end of each year the school plans to review its data and make overall adjustments to curriculum or systems in order to improve academic performance. Lastly, it appears that LANV will save at least \$100,000 in the upcoming fiscal year by separating from Williamsburg and hiring their own staff.

**Legal Authority and Requirements Related to Amendment Requests**

[NAC 388A.575](#) requires that:

1. before the governing body of a charter school enters into a contract with an educational management organization or amends, renews or terminates any such contract:
  - a. The governing body shall hold a public meeting that complies with the provisions of [chapter 241](#) of NRS; and
  - b. A majority of the governing body must vote at the public meeting to approve the contract or amendment, renewal or termination thereof.
2. If the governing body of a charter school votes to enter into or terminate a contract with an educational management organization, the governing body must obtain approval from the sponsor of the charter school before the governing body enters into or terminates the contract.
3. If the governing body of a charter school votes to amend or renew a contract with an educational management organization, the governing body must notify the sponsor of the charter school before the governing body amends or renews the contract.

**Staff Recommendation: Approve with Conditions**

For all of these reasons, SPCSA staff is recommending that the Authority approve the request of Leadership Academy of Nevada to offer student instruction absent a contract with Williamsburg Learning. Additionally, staff recommends that the Authority attach a single condition to this approval, requiring that LANV obtain approval of their distance education courses and curriculum from the Nevada Department of Education prior to implementation. This process is already underway, and if approved, the school should provide this confirmation in writing to SPCSA staff prior to the 2019 – 2020 school year.

**Leadership Academy of Nevada Star Rating, Grade Structure, Historical Enrollment, and Demographics**

*Nevada School Performance Ratings –Leadership Academy of Nevada Middle School*

| <b><u>School Year</u></b> | <b><u>Rating</u></b>     |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2015                      | NA                       |
| 2016                      | No star ratings released |
| 2017                      | 3 - Star                 |
| 2018                      | 2 - Star                 |

*Nevada School Performance Ratings –Leadership Academy of Nevada High School*

| <b><u>School Year</u></b> | <b><u>Rating</u></b>     |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2015                      | NA                       |
| 2016                      | No star ratings released |
| 2017                      | NA                       |
| 2018                      | 3 - Star                 |

*Historical Enrollment (as of Validation Day each year)*

| <b><u>Year</u></b> | <b><u>Total Enrollment</u></b> |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| 15-16              | 255                            |
| 16-17              | 240                            |
| 17-18              | 282                            |
| 18-19              | 280                            |

| <b><u>Year</u></b> | <b><u>A</u></b> | <b><u>B</u></b> | <b><u>C</u></b> | <b><u>H</u></b> | <b><u>I</u></b> | <b><u>M</u></b> | <b><u>P</u></b> | <b><u>IEP</u></b> | <b><u>ELL</u></b> | <b><u>FRL</u></b> |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 15-16              | 1.6%            | 2.7%            | 67.1%           | 20.0%           | 0.0%            | 7.1%            | 1.6%            | 4.7%              | 22.7%             | 0.4%              |
| 16-17              | 0.4%            | 2.1%            | 69.2%           | 19.6%           | 0.0%            | 8.3%            | 0.4%            | 3.3%              | 7.9%              | 0.0%              |
| 17-18              | 1.4%            | 2.1%            | 75.9%           | 11.7%           | 0.4%            | 7.8%            | 1.1%            | 6.0%              | 11.3%             | 0.0%              |
| 18-19              | 2.5%            | 3.2%            | 75.7%           | 12.5%           | 0.4%            | 4.6%            | 1.1%            | 4.6%              | 17.5%             | 0.4%              |

A – Asian

B – Black

C - White

H – Hispanic

I – American Indian/Alaskan Native

M – Two or more races

P – Pacific Islander

IEP – Individualized Education Plan –A student with a disability/special education student

ELL – English Language Learner

FRL – A student who qualifies for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

# Appendix A

Leadership Academy of Nevada Site Evaluation Report

*Conducted February 5, 2019*



**Nevada State Public  
Charter School  
Authority**

**To:** Valerie Blake, LAN Board Chair  
Bryon Richardson, LAN  
Jason Guinasso, SPCSA Board Chair  
**From:** Sandra Kinne  
**Date:** Monday, March 11, 2019  
**Re:** Site Evaluation Report for Leadership Academy of Nevada

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**SITE EVALUATION REPORT  
LEADERSHIP ACADEMY OF NEVADA**

Site Evaluations are a critical accountability component to the oversight of schools by the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) and are fundamental to charter schools' autonomy. As approved by the Legislature [NRS-388A.150] the Authority is to *"provide oversight to the charter schools that it sponsors to ensure that those charter schools maintain high educational and operational standards, preserve autonomy and safeguard the interests of pupils and the community."*

Site Evaluations allow the SPCSA to assess schools' student achievement, progress to goals, and fulfillment of their mission, vision, and educational program outlined in their charter. Improving the learning of pupils, and, by extension, the public education system; increased opportunities for learning and access to quality education; and a more thorough and efficient system of accountability for student achievement in Nevada are all foundational elements of the SPCSA's mission, the legislative intent of charter schools and are central elements of the Authority's on-going evaluation of charter schools.

The SPCSA conducts multiple visits and evaluations throughout schools' charter terms. The cumulative evidence through multi-year oversight measures become part of the record that help inform recommendations put forth by SPCSA staff, specifically renewal recommendations to the Authority Board. The Board of the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority makes all final charter renewal decisions. Site Evaluations are just one criterion considered for renewal; student achievement, financial prudence, and fulfillment of the program outlined in the approved charter are also evaluated by the Authority when making renewal decisions.

Attached is the Site Evaluation Report for LEADERSHIP ACADEMY of NEVADA, which was conducted by SPCSA Sandra Kinne and Mike Dang on Tuesday, February 5 at the school's central offices 7495 W Azure Dr #120, Las Vegas, NV 89130. The school is current in its 5th year of its first charter authorization term, which expires June 2020.

Please contact the Team Lead for this Site Evaluation, Sandra Kinne, with any questions.

# SITE EVALUATION REPORT

## LEADERSHIP ACADEMY of NEVADA

**Campus Name:** Leadership Academy of Nevada  
**Grade Levels:** 6-12  
**School Leader:** Byron Richardson  
**Purpose of Site Evaluation:** 5<sup>th</sup> year Site Evaluation  
**Date of Authorization:** January 2013  
**Conducted Date:** Tuesday, February 5, 2019  
**Conducted By:** Sandra Kinne and Mike Dang

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### SUMMARY OF SITE EVALUATION

The mission of Leadership Academy of Nevada is *“to provide highly motivated and self-directed students in Nevada with a classical education so that they can become principled leaders.”*

The most common trends and evidence related to the school living out its mission came through multiple examples in multiple classrooms of connecting the subject/topic to real life. The application of what was being discussed and/or read about helped students to better understand the content. Additionally, in multiple focus groups, there were common trends related the leadership emphasis of the school, including opportunities for students to serve in leadership capacity, read and discuss leadership traits and habits, and the leadership skills students are developing through this school’s philosophy and approach.

While students identified some shared concerns around “cliques” and fitting in, they, as well as parents in the family focus group, generally felt the school was a good fit for their needs, learning styles, and interests, and all participants were glad to have this school as an option. There was collective, demonstrated pride by staff, students, and parents of being members of this learning community and school.

As has been a trend for the Authority in Site Evaluations, an over-arching observation at Leadership Academy was the limited rigor and engaging questioning within classes and class discussions. We noted off-task questions and comments by students in chat boxes during observations, and, in their focus groups, students collectively said they felt challenged but not engaged in their coursework.

### I. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

| Classroom Environment                          | Evidence Observed   | School-wide Rating                                     |
|--|---|--|
| Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport | Teachers generally offer praise for students, particularly when they participate, as well as maximize learning time through school-wide close out processes. While students were often off-task in the chat boxes, their conversations were respectful of one another and that was modeled in verbal communication by teachers. | Distinguished<br>Proficient<br>Basic<br>Unsatisfactory |
| Establishing a Culture for Learning            | While the observations noted that classroom interactions are warm and friendly, and teachers model respect for students, the number of students   | Distinguished<br>Proficient<br>Basic                   |

|                               |  |  |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
|                               | who offered comment on the culture at the school and their limited engagement led to a 'basic' rating. As discussed in recommendations below, there is room for the school's leaders to reassess culture, including the influence of the school's culture on learning and its impact on student achievement.                 | Unsatisfactory   |
| Managing Classroom Procedures | Consistently, teachers have a proficient approach to ensuring learning time is maximized. There were common practices observed in multiple classes, including the closure process and keeping all students in the class until it was officially over.  | Distinguished<br>Proficient<br>Basic<br>Unsatisfactory |
| Managing Student Behavior     | There were limited, observable instances of student behavior concerns. In some cases, when students were off-task in the class chat box, teachers would verbally remind students of the topic and/or reiterate the question/comment to ensure students were following. Teachers' approach was always respectful of students. | Distinguished<br>Proficient<br>Basic<br>Unsatisfactory |

**II. INSTRUCTIONAL OBSERVATION**

| Instructional Observation                   | Evidence Observed  | School-wide Rating                                     |
|---|--|--|
| Communicating with Students                 | Teachers maintained a balance between verbal communication with students and engaging with them in the chat box. Two teachers, in particular, seemed to maintain conversations both through verbal discussion and typed comments in the class chat box. With one or two exceptions, particularly in classes of low-engagement and/or low rigor, teachers' explanation of content is appropriate and connects with students' knowledge and experience.                  | Distinguished<br>Proficient<br>Basic<br>Unsatisfactory |
| Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques | As discussed in the recommendations (below), questions were generally low-level DOK/Bloom's focused more on recall questions. There were strong examples of application and connections to real life, but the majority of questions were limited in scope, including a number of DOK 1 "identify" and "recall" questions.  | Distinguished<br>Proficient<br>Basic<br>Unsatisfactory |
| Engaging Students in Learning               | As noted by both the majority of student focus group participants, as well as the team through observations, students tended to be more disengaged than engaged. Off-topic conversations in the chat box, limited participation by all students with responses coming from the same few voices in each class, as well as students in the focus group identifying themselves as disengaged, though challenged, provides an uneven and inconsistent level of engagement. | Distinguished<br>Proficient<br>Basic<br>Unsatisfactory |



|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Using Assessment in Instruction</b> | During the observation, Site Evaluators did not observe this criterion significantly enough to evaluate. This criterion is not rated. | Distinguished<br>Proficient<br>Basic<br>Unsatisfactory<br><b>Not Observed</b> |
|--|---|---|

**III. OPERATIONS**

| Observations                          | Evidence Observed  | School-wide Rating   |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Mission driven operations</b>      | The emphasis on leadership opportunities and learning, as emphasized by staff and students, supports mission-driven operations.  | Distinguished<br><b>Proficient</b><br>Basic<br>Unsatisfactory                                |
| <b>Managing Schoolwide Procedures</b> | There was consistency in multiple classrooms around the close out process, including teachers providing a recap of the day’s lesson and next steps, as well as ensuring students remained in the class through its official conclusion time. | Distinguished<br><b>Proficient</b><br>Basic<br>Unsatisfactory<br>Not observed/Not applicable |
| <b>Maintaining a Safe Environment</b> | Given the online nature of the program and the current description for this criterion, the team did not evaluate this area in its observations.  | Distinguished<br>Proficient<br>Basic<br>Unsatisfactory<br><b>Not observed/Not applicable</b> |

**IV. FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY**

| Group            | No. of Participants |
|------------------|---------------------|
| Governing Board  | 3                   |
| Parents/Families | 4                   |
| Students         | 8                   |
| Staff            | 5                   |

Site Evaluation team members conducted four Focus Groups, one each with the following groups: Governing Board,<sup>1</sup> Parents/Families, Students, Staff, plus a conversation with the school leadership team. Participants were asked a series of questions, including common questions across all Focus Groups. For the Parent/Family focus group, grades 6, 10, and 12 were represented, while for the Student Focus Group, students in all grades but 8<sup>th</sup> were represented.

<sup>1</sup> Of the full Governing Board of seven members, three members participated, so quorum was not met, and Open Meeting Law was not violated.

In general, the common theme threaded throughout all Focus Groups was the flexibility of the online school, the focus on leadership and learning about leadership, and the positive changes since ending the relationship with the former EMO. Additionally, the following responses developed from each of the following Focus Groups:

#### **Student Focus Group**

- Students spoke of the ease and flexibility of the program and the accessibility of teachers. Multiple students identified being able to participate in other activities during the day as a positive feature of the school.
- Several students named not feeling “like we fit the mold” as a concern about the school, saying they don’t feel like they fit in. Multiple students named the class presidencies as ineffective and contributing to class bullying, rather than preventing it. They said the cliques of the school are unexpected, and it can be awkward, especially when you’re new.
- The majority of students said they are grateful for the school and its approach. Multiple students cited the openness of teachers and discussions in class. They said they felt welcomed to be open. *“Some things can be really hard, but I don’t think I’ll find a better place. This place is the best for me now,”* said one student.

#### **Staff Focus Group**

- Staff spoke of the positive leadership emphasis, for both students and staff; team activities like book clubs and yoga, and the learning opportunities for staff member; and the 1:1 meetings with supervisors to share concerns and continue their growth as positive aspects of their work. Two staff members specifically cited the external professional development opportunities in which leadership allows them to participate, and the opportunities that are aligned to staff members’ individualized needs and skills. *“Your efforts feel valued,”* said one staff member.
- Staff members feel there are plenty of resources and resources are allocated appropriately. *“We have so many resources. ... You just have to ask,”* said one staff member. This is a positive of the school; other staff members echoed the sentiment.

#### **Governance Board Focus Group**

- Board members cited the work around increasing student achievement and getting students where they need to be as the current focus of the school. Said one board member, *“We look at data and growth to ensure progress or to adjust; we’re concerned with it all the time.”*
- Board members said the biggest challenge they’ve faced was deciding whether to continue with their EMO, which they ultimately decided against. A board member said it was an 8-month, “very intense” process but ultimately it was made to better ensure student outcomes. They also said enrollment has been a challenge, citing they’re growing slower than they hoped but are marketing the school for its fit for students.

#### **Family Focus Group**

- Parents generally say the school provides a great experience for their students, and they cite the flexibility, the small class size, and the support for students with special needs as highlights of their experience. They said the school isn’t just about the “status quo,” and they chose the school for their children because of the smaller classes, the more personalized approach teachers and staff take with their students, and because it’s not like the other virtual schools that seem to have too many students in their class. *“Students feel valued and their teachers know who they are,”* said one parent.

- Parents said their children are appropriately challenged in their classes, including through debate, group projects, and leadership opportunities. They also said the opportunity for their children to be more autonomous and accountable for their learning was a positive feature of the school.
- Parents cited the ease and convenience of being able to go into the parent portal to be able to check on their children's progress and academic achievement. Said one parent, *"We can go in at any time to see how Ss are doing. ... Grades and curriculum are much more transparent than (traditional) schools."*

## V. OVERALL STRENGTHS OF PROGRAM

### 1. Flexibility and approach to meet individual students'/families' needs

Multiple students and parents named the school's flexibility and online mission as a key feature of the school and their reason for being there. Parents spoke openly of being grateful for this type of model, and they specifically cited the small class sizes (as compared to other online options), the caring and kind teachers who know their students, and the ease of the school, in general, as their reasons for enrolling their children and keeping them enrolled. Students identified the openness and approachability of teachers, as well as their support as highlights of their experience at LAN.

### 2. Transition to independence allows for flexibility and focus on mission

Multiple staff and board members cited the recent decision to sever ties with the EMO as a positive decision for the sake of the school. Both staff and governance team members said it allow the school to better address students' needs, implement curriculum that is more aligned to Nevada state standards, and

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION ITEMS

### 1. Increase rigor and higher-level questioning

In multiple observations, students were disengaged, non-participatory, and/or off-task in the discussion, be it in the chat box or verbally. In the focus groups, students said that while they feel challenged in their classes, they're not particularly engaged. This was in part due to perceived cliques and, what students identified as, an ineffective class president approach, as well as limited comfort within the class. In multiple observations, the team observed teachers making connections to real-life application, which is higher-level questioning, but for the most part, the questioning was low-level DOK and Bloom's with limited discussion and engagement – both verbal and in the chat box – and almost always teacher-driven discussions rather than student-driven. A shift in who is engaging in the conversations, as well as the substantial nature of the discussions, will shift the 'lift' to students and allow for more student-driven learning.

#### ACTION ITEM

Collectively review the DOK levels and/or Blooms' Taxonomy to push for higher-level, more rigorous questioning throughout all grade levels. Encourage teachers to craft questions, related to the instructional delivery and mastery of objective, as part of the lesson planning process so that teachers may be intentional in their questioning of students to informally assess understanding. Coach and develop teachers to 'let go' of leading the questioning and discussions, and rather work with them to feel comfortable with allowing students to facilitate their own, grade-level appropriate conversations that speak to and provide engagement with the lesson's content. Develop an approach – be it written in the chat box or verbal – that allows students to be more focused on the

discussion and content so that they are engaged and consider eliminating off-topic conversations and messaging in the chat box during guided instruction.

## **2. Reassess student culture**

While one student said she disagreed with her peers' comments (but understood their perspective and was respectful in her contribution to the conversation), the consensus from students in the focus group was that while they love the school's approach to learning and its flexibility, they don't often feel like they fit in. Students in online schools, especially those in this focus group, often have very specific reasons for unenrolling in traditional, brick and mortar schools. They don't feel comfortable with their peers; they're in rural communities with limited access or burdensome travel times to school; and/or they have other factors (i.e., medical needs) for which online schooling is a better fit. As the students in this focus group discussed, they often feel like they don't fit in in traditional environments, and the majority of them said they often feel like they don't fit in with 'cliquey' peer groups in their current classes.

### **ACTION ITEM**

Re-evaluate the 'mold' of the school as related to culture to ensure full inclusion for all students. Survey students specifically about the culture and climate within the school's model, and assess through multiple lens' – students, staff, and families – key components of the school's approach to cultures. The 'class presidencies' were specifically named by a majority of students as an ineffective feature of their classes. Given the school's emphasis on leadership, which was identified and appreciated by multiple stakeholders in focus group, this may be an opportunity for students to take lead and create a revised approach to cultural to ensure its strengthened.

### **NOTE**

SPCSA School Support Team members will follow up on each of these recommendations during their next site visit, unless otherwise noted.

###