



November 15, 2019

Members of the SPCSA Board,

At an SPCSA meeting to discuss the over enrollment of Doral Academy of Northern Nevada on September 13, 2019, we were asked by Member Moulton how our school could have made this mistake. It is a priority for us to explain the many circumstances that led to this error in over admittance. This letter is meant to provide context and does not in any way justify the mistake or negate our responsibility.

Doral Academy of Northern Nevada, like all start-up charter schools, faced significant obstacles in obtaining a facility to commence operations. Doral Academy and Academica initially targeted a land parcel which did not receive zoning approval from the City of Reno. A temporary location was found at the South Reno United Methodist Church, however more than \$150,000 in start-up expenses related to portable buildings, fencing, and other property preparations had to be expended to occupy the proposed church facility. The current location of the school was then identified, however the site required significantly more levelling and retention than the initial target site, thereby increasing costs.

In July of 2017, Academica Nevada presented the Butch Cassidy Drive property as a permanent option to the Doral Academy board of directors. As part of the site considerations, the option was presented to construct a Phase II to the project, allowing all grade levels to expand to 4 classrooms of students. However, the option to possibly pursue a second phase of construction was just that, merely an option that could be explored at a future time after necessary SPCSA approvals.

In February of 2018, important decisions were made by the board of directors which hastened the expansion of enrollment to four classrooms per grade. First, the board elected not to utilize a private pre-K vendor to occupy the fourth kindergarten-style room, and instead approved four classrooms of kindergarten. In the same board meeting, enrollment targets for the 2018-2019 school year were presented by the former Principal and Academica. Due to the cost of the facility and financing requirements, the proposed enrollment contained 3 classrooms per grade level in grades 1 through 4, but with enrollment of more than 25 students per grade level. A lengthy discussion then ensued regarding class-sizes and total enrollment for the school. Ultimately, the board voted (with two board members in opposition) to cap class-sizes at 25 students per grade and to expand 1st-grade to 4 classes (See February 28, 2018, board meeting minutes). Additional grade levels were then expanded to 4-classroom per grade targets at subsequent board meetings with the same intent, to increase the overall budget (and thereby improve staffing and programs) while maintaining smaller class sizes (now at 26 to 1 in most elementary grades).

We provide this context simply to demonstrate that the quick transition to four-classrooms per grade level was motivated by the board's admirable goal to maintain small class sizes, while simultaneously addressing financial

constraints. After this decision was made, five-year budgets presented by Academica included four classes per grade level, and the board made decisions with this in mind. This obviously does not excuse the failure to recognize that the additional enrollment would require an immediate amendment and expansion of the facility, notifying the board of that need, and pursuing that with the SPCSA. Those oversights were Academica's responsibility, and the board should have questioned what needed to occur to admit more students than the original charter allowed, but at this point the board moved forward with four classes per grade level without realizing that the charter was only written for three classes per grade level.

In addition, the recognition that the expansion to four classes per grade level was a departure from the initial targeted enrollment was hindered by significant turnover in all parts of Doral Academy of Northern Nevada's governance and management. From July of 2017, when the board initially considered the construction of the current facility, to March of 2019, when the budget for the current school year was approved with the expanded enrollment, there was a transition in more than half of the board of directors, a change in Principal, and a transition in the Executive Director of Academica in Reno. Once again, this does not excuse the failure to prepare an earlier amendment, but we do believe this context demonstrates the unique circumstances that created the confusion with regard to enrollment limits.

In May 2019, the board's newly selected Principal, Angela Orr, quickly identified that the four classroom per grade enrollment targets would not fit within the current facility. Angela notified Academica and board chair, Winquest, who shortly thereafter obtained approval at the June board meeting to pursue an amendment for an expansion to the Doral Academy facility to support four classrooms per grade at all grade levels. In late July on a phone call with SPCSA staff regarding assistance with an annual report, Principal Orr shared the school's current enrollment of 834, which was then shared with other SPCSA staff. Then, in early August, SPCSA staff contacted Principal Orr, DANN board chair and Academica regarding the enrollment numbers for the 2019-2020 school year. Following a call to discuss the situation, SPCSA staff requested that an immediate amendment also be submitted for current year enrollment. That amendment was subsequently submitted on August 14, 2019 and heard by the SPCSA board on September 13, 2019.

In short, the Doral Academy of Northern Nevada board, school staff, and Academica employees made several unintentional oversights over a two-year period that led to the over enrollment of our school in 2019. As soon as the mistake was revealed, an amendment to expand our enrollment was approved at the subsequent board meeting. Based on past practice of the SPCSA board, the DANN board was under the impression that emergency amendments were rarely, if ever, approved, and so planned to bring the amendment at the next cycle. We recognize now that we should have been in immediate communication with SPCSA staff when we determined there had been an error in enrollment. We have since engaged in many conversations with SPCSA staff and board members in order to build a more robust partnership and discuss ways in which to rectify this mistake and continue serving our population of students and families.

We do not wish to grow our campus beyond the organic growth that will occur if we maintain four classes in grades K-4 and allow those four classes to advance up through the 8th grade. We know from our parents, students, and community partners, as well as our strong waitlist numbers, that we are serving a need in our community for a high quality, tuition-free, arts-integration education for all students. We have a strong desire for our campus to grow more diverse and, now that CSP grant period restrictions have concluded, we are seeking approval for a weighted lottery in our next open enrollment period so as to increase our percentage of free and reduced lunch students. It is our understanding that we would be the first school in Nevada to implement a weighted lottery, and we hope it will be a successful model for other schools to follow.

We have learned a great deal from this mistake and take seriously our role in ensuring that an error like this does not happen again. We have established a strong board of directors with a long-term commitment to govern the school and management team to ensure that we are on a clear path moving forward. We will continue to offer our community an excellent education option where students can attend a five-star school committed to a whole-child, arts-integrated approach and where families and staff collaborate effectively to meet the diverse needs of every student.

We thank you for your time and consideration.

Indra Winquest, Board Chair

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Doral Academy of Northern Nevada