



Dear SPCSA Staff and Board Members,

At the December 13, 2019, SPCSA Board meeting, SLAM! Charter School (SLAM) has four Requests for Amendments for consideration before the Board, three of which have been recommended for approval. We appreciate the work of the SPCSA staff in reviewing all of the applications and understand their efforts to ensure that all schools will meet the SPCSA's Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment. We are grateful for the recommendations for approval which will allow SLAM's enrollment and facility to grow to serve our community.

The only amendment not recommended for approval is SLAM's request to expand instruction to grades K through 5. We recognize that the current application, which was insufficient in presenting the intended curriculum and academic plan of SLAM K-5. The SLAM elementary model is fully developed, has received multiple approvals from authorizers in other states, and is in practice at the SLAM Tampa location. As such, all of this information should have been contained in the application.

Fortunately, as set forth in more detail below, NAC 388A.310 contemplates the submission of an incomplete or non-compliant application, and provides for a resubmission within 30 days and reconsideration by the SPCSA at the next Board Meeting. Please know that SLAM Intends to revise, supplement, and resubmit this application as allowed and looks forward to a future approval of this innovative educational program which will allow SLAM to provide a high-quality education for all grade levels in a diverse community.

In addition, the SPCSA staff raised other concerns in support of their desire to postpone any approval of a SLAM Expansion to grades K-5. As set forth below, SLAM deserves the opportunity to give the students of southeast Las Vegas a better elementary education, which will lead to improved middle school proficiencies and higher student achievement throughout SLAM. As such, we look forward to bringing this amendment before the Board for additional consideration in the very near future.

**I. SLAM Requests Consideration of the K-5 Academic Plan at a Later Date Pursuant to NAC 388A.310**

SLAM is a replication of successful schools from around the country that have a tradition of serving at-risk communities in grades 6 through 12. However, after years of enrolling 6<sup>th</sup>-grade students that were routinely 1 to 3 grade levels behind after receiving their K-5 education in traditional public schools, SLAM has developed and implemented a K-5 curriculum and academic plan to ensure that early interventions and strategies are in place prior to middle and high school. SLAM has already expanded to grades K-5 or has been approved to expand and employ its elementary academic plan in Florida, Georgia, and Arizona. The Academic Plan that has been approved in three other states was intended to be included in the



amendment application and will be provided in the resubmission.

NAC 388A.310, which governs the amendment of charter contracts to expand instruction to additional grade levels, has a list of requirements, including the academic plan, that must be included in the request for amendment. Section 4 and 5 of this regulation states:

4. Within 30 days after receipt of the written request, the sponsor of the charter school shall provide written notice to the governing body of the charter school of its findings, including any items that are incomplete or noncompliant. Written notice informing the governing body that the written request is incomplete or noncompliant shall be deemed denial of the written request.
5. If the sponsor of the charter school denies a written request, the governing body of the charter school may correct any deficiencies and resubmit the written request within 30 days after receipt of the written notice of denial for review.

SLAM's written request was submitted to the SPCSA on October 15, 2019. According to regulation, the written notice of the SPCSA's findings should have been provided to SLAM no later than November 14, 2019. The SPCSA's written notice was posted on the SPCSA website on December 6, 2019, 52 days after the request was submitted. Unfortunately, SLAM was not given an opportunity to correct the deficiencies in the request for amendment prior to the December 13, 2019, SPCSA Board meeting. However, in the written staff recommendation, the following was stated regarding the SLAM Elementary Academic Plan:

SPCSA staff expects that schools seeking to expand have a fully developed academic program for staff's review prior to any approval. This would include more information about the curriculum, confirmation of alignment to standards and a complete description of how the elementary program would be implemented.

At this time, neither the SPCSA staff nor the Board Members have had an opportunity to review the fully developed Academic Plan. SLAM intends to resubmit for consideration at the next SPCSA Board meeting pursuant to NAC 388A.310.

**II. Other rationale against the approval of the SLAM K-5 expansion would preclude innovation in Nevada and harm the children SLAM K-5 intends to serve.**

SPCSA Staff recommends denial for SLAM expansion based on a few additional criteria that warrant discussion at this time. First, Staff notes that the SLAM middle-high model is "well-established" but comments that the K-5 model is new and the first schools "just opened their doors." SPCSA staff suggests



that a SLAM K-5 should not be approved in Nevada until after an established track-record of success elsewhere. Charter schools are intended to be where innovation occurs in Nevada education and we cannot wait for programs such as SLAM's K-5 academic plan to show a history of success in other states before being approved in Nevada. If we continue to wait until these programs have already had success in other states, Nevada will continue to be three to four years behind those states that foster innovation in charter schools.

Secondly, SPCSA staff suggests a multi-year track record of success should be required before approval, justifying denial of SLAM's K-5 amendment on the "past performance of the middle and high school programs." This is inconsistent with Nevada law. NAC 388A.310(6) provides that "the sponsor of the charter school may deny the written (amendment) request if ...the charter school was not rated in the first, second or third highest tier during the last rating of the charter school..." (Emphasis Added). The regulation only references the ratings for the prior year. SPCSA staff is creating a higher standard of multiple year performance requirement for a school that has already shown significant growth.

Furthermore, the approach of requiring prolonged middle school success before establishing an elementary school hampers SLAM's efforts to grow the middle school. SLAM staff has reviewed records of current sixth grade students and confirmed that 86% of enrolling students most recently attended a school-district elementary school, with the most common schools of prior attendance achieving only 1 and 2 star ratings. The creation of a high performing elementary school is a critical component of improving performance in the middle school. SPCSA staff's refusal to award expansion to SLAM, which has a 3-star middle school that has already made extensive growth, creates a circular argument which paralyzes SLAM. It is unfair to demand better growth in a school, while at the same time refusing to allow the creation of an elementary school that would establish the necessary foundation to accelerate growth. Furthermore, such a delay harms students, keeping all of the younger siblings of SLAM students trapped in the 1 and 2-star elementary schools surrounding SLAM.

Lastly, SPCSA staff raise concerns about services to special student populations. Since its inception in Florida and its approval in the State of Nevada, SLAM has been innovative in delivering its sports integrated curriculum to high-need student populations. SLAM is the only 3-Star middle school in an area that has been identified as having high academic and demographic needs. While SLAM is surrounded by all 1- and 2- Star elementary and middle schools, SLAM has implemented interventions and strategies that have resulted in a 20.5-point increase in its NSPF index score from the 2017/18 school year to the 2018/19 school year. This has resulted in SLAM rising from a 2-Star middle school in its second year to a high 3-Star middle school (68 index points, only 2 points from a 4-Star school) in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year of operation as a Title 1 designated school with a highly diverse population.

Furthermore, although SLAM's high school has not yet received a rating, in both the 2017/18 and the



2018/19 school years SLAM has earned 4-Star NSPF index scores. With an expected 100% graduation rate for SLAM's first graduating class, it is expected that SLAM will continue to earn 4- or 5-Stars in their first high school ratings.

For all of these reasons, we believe that SLAM should be granted an amendment to expand to grades K-5, and we are hopeful that the SPCSA Staff and Board will be open to a reconsideration of the approval of this amendment upon the submission of the complete curriculum and academic model information.