



STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Board
FROM: Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing
Mike Dang, Management Analyst IV
Danny Peltier, Management Analyst I
SUBJECT: Amplus Academy –Amendment to Charter Contract
DATE: June 25, 2021

Background & Summary of Request:

Amplus Academy is a classical education model charter school, currently serving students on two campuses in grades K-12. The Durango campus is located at 8377 West Patrick Lane, Las Vegas, NV 89113 and the Rainbow campus is located at 7077 W Patrick Lane Las Vegas, NV 89113. Both campuses reside in the southwest area Las Vegas.

The school opened in 2014 as American Preparatory Academy and contracted with a Utah based Education Management Organization (EMO), American Preparatory Schools. In July 2020, both the school board and the SPCSA board approved the name change to Amplus Academy and for the school to move forward independent of the EMO to become a self-managed school. Overall, Amplus Academy expects all rating factors to trend positively because of these proposed changes contained in this submitted amendment.

After reviewing the submitted amendment, SPCSA staff recommends the Authority grant a Good Cause Exemption and approve the amendment to the Amplus charter as submitted, with the conditions described below.

If approved, the amendment will go into effect for the 2021-2022 school year, the second year of the school's five-year contract. Amplus Academy was renewed by the Authority for this new term on January 31, 2020. A proposed motion can be found on page 4 of this memo.

Amendment & Proposed Changes

According to the amendment application, Amplus requests the following amendments to its charter contract:

1. Reconfiguration of the Rainbow Campus from grades K – 3 to grades K – 5 beginning in the 2021 – 22 school year,
2. Implementation of Dual Credit programs at the high school, and
3. Implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten beginning in the 2021 – 22 school year. Currently Amplus implements a half-day Kindergarten program.

Reconfiguration of the Rainbow Campus from grades K – 3 to grades K – 5

Currently, the Amplus Rainbow Campus operates with grades K – 3, and the Durango Campus operates with grades 4 – 12. According to the amendment application, after the SPCSA site evaluation in February 2021 the school determined the Rainbow campus would best be represented as an elementary campus with grades K-5 in future years per the Nevada state reporting guidelines for growth measures under the Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF).

Amplus Academy elementary school has been designated as a 2-Star school. The school implemented a restructuring of the academic program beginning in June 2020. Subsequently and as a result of the SPCSA site evaluation in February 2021 and Dr. Jessica Barr (an independent data analyst), it was determined by the Amplus leadership team and Board that the grade configuration of the Rainbow campus needed to change. In order to best represent the academic growth, resources, and focus, Amplus seeks to reconfigure the Rainbow campus as a traditional elementary with grades K - 5. All middle school classes (grades 6-8) and high school classes (grades 9-12) will operate at the Durango campus. Amplus believes this amendment will help enable the school to meet their growth goals to promote beyond the 2-Star designation.

Amplus expects the grade reconfiguration between the campuses to have a positive effect on the academic outcomes and a neutral to favorable effect on the financial outcomes of the school.

Implementation of Dual Credit programs at the high school

The second request contained in this amendment is the addition and implementation of Dual Credit programs at the high school. Amplus submitted an MOU with Truckee Meadows Community College and will have terms commencing July 1, 2021 in order to facilitate student registration and provide ample time to prepare students for the fall. Amplus stated in the application they are seeking to expand their academic services, particularly for special programs and populations (such as EL and FRL) by articulating an academic plan that includes dual/CTE credit options by the time students are enrolled in the Amplus high school program.

Additionally, Amplus predicts in their amendment proposal that by expanding course offerings to a CTE course of study and adding Dual Credit classes, students will graduate from the school being College and Career Ready—regardless of their socio-economic or demographic environments. The school also stated all students will be able to have an academic course plan that includes advanced study opportunities, particularly for EL and FRL populations. Amplus Academy high school was designated as a 2-Star school and expects the dual credit offerings to help raise their star-rating when those are released again by the Nevada Department of Education. Dual credit courses will be offered by qualified Amplus Academy teachers and Truckee Meadow Community College staff via virtually while on the Amplus Academy

campus. Both Amplus Academy and Truckee Meadow Community College will be responsible for maintaining their respective student records for the courses that are awarded credit under the dual enrollment program.

The school expects the fiscal impact of the dual credit program will include additional program related costs which Amplus has budgeted to be offset by obtaining available grants as they are able and shifting staffing units to compensate and subsidize for the costs associated with the concurrent enrollment. The bulk of the incurred costs will be covered by traditional operating revenues. Amplus also states in the RFA that the initial interest in the Dual Credit/CTE programs by staff meant there would be no current need for additional staffing. The MOU between TMCC and Amplus shows that TMCC will provide for the staffing of their classes.

Implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten

The school's third request in this amendment proposal is the implementation of a full day Kindergarten program. As previously stated, Amplus elementary school has been designated as a 2-Star school under the NSPF. In part, the schools expects that by expanding the kindergarten program, the school will provide a drastic improvement to current program, thereby allowing students to expand their foundational skills. According to the application the expansion of instruction will provide additional support and opportunities for remediation/acceleration of students as a support to the Read by Grade 3 statewide initiative. The application also states that a full day kindergarten program will enable higher long-term achievement, particularly for low-income students. Amplus states in their application that higher reading capabilities, test scores, self-esteem, and independence are all documented benefits of a full-day kindergarten program.

Amplus intends to hire highly qualified staff for the full day Kindergarten program in an effort to address students of all abilities, and licensed teachers with inclusion and RTI experience will be recruited and will be assigned to kindergarten classes. The financial impact of moving to full-day kindergarten, which will require the hiring of two additional teachers, will be absorbed by expanding the class offerings of eight (8) half-day classes to six (6) full-day classes. The application states that revenues received from the state for kindergarten students will fund the shift to a full-day kindergarten program.

Legal Authority and Requirements Related to Amendment Requests

Existing charter schools that are sponsored by the SPCSA may submit a charter school contract amendment application to the SPCSA – which is reviewed by SPCSA staff and presented for SPCSA Board action – in order to, among other things, increase enrollment, add grade levels above and beyond what the charter school is approved to serve, or add a new campus.

While Amplus Academy is not seeking to expand its enrollment under this amendment, it is worth noting that only those existing charter schools that are meeting expectations in regard to academics (under both the Department of Education's Nevada School Performance Framework -- the "Star Ratings" -- and the SPCSA's Academic Performance Framework), are compliant in regard to the SPCSA's Organizational Framework, and are fiscally sound may be approved for expansion. Furthermore, the academic, organizational, and financial performance of other charter schools that contract with the same Charter Management Organization or Educational Management organization is taken into account when reviewing an expansion application.¹

Staff Recommendation: Approve

¹ There are limited exceptions to these eligibility requirements for those charter schools that have been approved by the State Board of Education and the SPCSA Board to be rated under Nevada's Alternative Performance Framework.

The Authority will recall that in January 2020 Amplus Academy was renewed for a new, five-year charter term that began on July 1, 2020. The school has demonstrated relatively strong academic performance since its inception. This is best exemplified by consistent 4- and 5- star ratings under the NSPF throughout most of its charter term at the middle school. Despite the issuance of a Notice of Concern due to academic underperformance at the elementary school in the 2018 – 2019 school year, SPCSA staff is confident the school will improve its most recent ratings for the elementary school and high school while maintaining strong performance at the middle school level. Achieving these results serves as the basis for the proposed changes requested within the amendment submission. It is also worth reiterating that the proposed changes in this amendment do not expand the school's enrollment.

The school currently has strong enrollment and financial performance indicators indicating that the school is financially solvent and viable.

For all of these reasons, SPCSA staff recommends the Authority approve the requests of Amplus Academy to continue to provide instruction to students and operate as presented within the amendment submission.

Proposed Motion: Grant Amplus Academy a Good Cause Exemption and approve the Amplus requests, with conditions, to allow the school to:

- **Reconfigure the grade configuration of the Rainbow Campus to grades K – 5 beginning in the 2021 – 22 school year,**
- **Implement a Full-Day Kindergarten program beginning in the 2021 – 22 school year; and**
- **Implement a dual credit program, with the condition that the school provide evidence that the governing body of Amplus has applied and been approved by the State Board, thereby permitting students to earn credits during the upcoming school year, and provide evidence of a final, signed, Memorandum of Understanding between Amplus and Truckee Meadows Community College.**

The chart below provides the **current** Amplus enrollment caps for each year of the current charter term:

School Year	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Durango Campus				
Grade Levels	4-12	4-12	4-12	4-12
Enrollment	1616	1616	1616	1616
Rainbow Campus				
Grade Levels	K-6	K-6	K-6	K-6
Enrollment	640	640	640	640
Total Enrollment	2256	2256	2256	2256

The chart below provides the **proposed** Amplus enrollment caps for each year of the current charter term should this amendment request be approved:

School Year	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Durango Campus				
Grade Levels	K-12	K-12	K-12	K-12
Enrollment	1616	1616	1616	1616
Rainbow Campus				
Grade Levels	K-5	K-5	K-5	K-5
Enrollment	640	640	640	640
Total Enrollment	2256	2256	2256	2256

Amplus Academy (f.k.a American Preparatory Academy) Star Rating, Grade Structure, Historical Enrollment, and Demographics

School Year	Rating(s)
2014 – 15	Elementary: Not Rated Middle: Not Rated
2015 – 16	No Star Ratings Released
2016 – 17	Elementary: 4 stars Middle: 5 stars High: Not Rated
2017 – 18	Elementary: 4 stars Middle: 5 stars High: Not Rated
2018 – 19	Elementary 2 stars ^{1,2} Middle: 5 stars High: 2 stars ^{2,3}

Historical Enrollment and Demographic Information (as of Validation Day each year)

Year	Total Enrollment	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
15-16	548	14.4%	12.6%	42.7%	19.5%	0.4%	8.6%	1.9%	4.3%	6.7%	9.3%
16-17	402	16.2%	12.9%	43.4%	18.5%	0.4%	6.6%	1.9%	5.4%	3.1%	2.7%
17-18	384	17.0%	14.6%	41.4%	18.3%	0.3%	5.8%	2.6%	5.2%	3.2%	0.0%
18-19	1657	16.4%	16.1%	39.9%	18.5%	0.2%	6.2%	2.7%	5.1%	1.8%	14.4%
19-20	1637	17.3%	14.6%	39.8%	19.4%	0.1%	6.1%	2.6%	4.8%	1.5%	19.3%

Amplus Durango Campus

Year	Total Enrollment	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
20-21	1476	18.9%	17.5%	33.9%	19.9%	0.0%	6.5%	3.0%	5.2%	^	23.1%

^ indicates count data are suppressed to protect student privacy, because rate is in extreme value (<5 or >95)

Amplus Rainbow Campus

Year	Total Enrollment	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
20-21	773	20.5%	19.9%	32.6%	16.0%	0.2%	8.6%	1.9%	^	7.2%	27.1%

^ indicates count data are suppressed to protect student privacy, because rate is in extreme value (<5 or >95)

- 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

² The Elementary school is currently operating under an Academic Notice of Concern that was issued on October 4, 2019.

³ No action was taken by the Authority with regard to the two-star rating for the high school given purported issues related to the school’s graduation rate in 2018. The high school is not operating under a notice, and the 2019 graduation rate improved significantly over the prior year.