



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
SUBJECT: Pinecrest Academy of Nevada – Amendment Request to Add Seats to Current
Campuses
DATE: June 25, 2021

Summary of Request & Recommendation:

The Pinecrest governing board approved the submission of an amendment seeking approval from the State Public Charter School Authority to increase enrollment at the Cadence, Sloan Canyon and Inspirada campuses beyond the current enrollment caps. The amendment contemplates a net addition of approximately 900 seats through FY26 across these three campuses.

After reviewing the submitted amendment, SPCSA staff recommends with reluctance that the Authority approve a modified increase to the enrollment caps for the Cadence, Sloan Canyon and Inspirada campuses for FY22. As described in detail within this memo, Pinecrest Academy has already exceeded its student enrollment cap by more than 10% at both the Cadence and Inspirada campuses for the 2021 – 22 school year with no notice provided to SPCSA staff about surpassing contractual numbers.

SPCSA makes this recommendation based on two primary factors: 1) to date, Pinecrest Academy of Nevada has demonstrated strong academic performance since being authorized, and 2) SPCSA staff recognizes the inherent difficult task of un-enrolling students just weeks before the start of the 2021 – 22 school year. SPCSA staff will note this compliance concern under the Organizational Performance Framework for both the current and 2021 – 22 school years. Recommendations for the current year are likely to be presented to the Authority before the end of the calendar year.

It is also noteworthy that the current submission does not include detailed information about how the Pinecrest network plans to become more representative of the communities its schools serve. The demographic gaps seen across the network when compared to local and statewide numbers give SPCSA staff pause. More information is provided within the body of this memo, and a proposed motion can be found on pages 4 and 5 of this memo.

If approved, the amendment will go into effect for the 2021-2022 school year, the fourth year of the school’s six-year contract. Pinecrest Academy’s current charter contract went into effect July 1, 2018 and expires on June 30, 2024.

Amendment & Background:

Pinecrest Academy of Nevada is a network of five campuses in the Las Vegas area that served 6,461 students in grades K-12 according to the most recent validation day numbers for the 2020 – 21 school year. Pinecrest Academy of Nevada opened its first campus in 2012, and contracts with Academica Nevada. This is Pinecrest Academy of Nevada’s second charter term, and the current term began on July 1, 2018. The current contract between the SPCSA and Pinecrest Academy of Nevada expires on June 30, 2024.

According to the amendment application, Pinecrest Academy of Nevada is requesting the following adjustments to the current enrollment caps at the Cadence, Inspirada and Sloan Canyon campuses through FY26. The current approved enrollment caps are also provided in this chart:

	Current 21 – 22 Cap	21 – 22 Request	22 – 23 Request	23 – 24 Request	24 – 25 Request	25 – 26 Request
Cadence	1,860	2,153	2,297	2,400	2,441	2,454
Inspirada	1,070	1,235	1,232	1,231	1,230	1,235
Sloan Canyon	1,595	1,792	2,071	2,230	2,346	2,372
New Seats Over Prior Year		+655	+420	+261	+156	+44

The amendment application does not contemplate any adjustments to the enrollment cap for the Horizon or St. Rose campuses. Only the Sloan Canyon campus is approved for growth in the current charter term. The approved growth trajectory for this campus can be found below.

	2021 – 22 Approved Cap	2022 – 23 Approved Cap	2023 24 Approved Cap
Sloan Canyon	1,595	1,829	2,025

According to the amendment application, Pinecrest Academy of Nevada has already engaged in marketing the school to zip codes in its community, including 89002 and 89015, which are identified in the SPCSA Academic and Geographic Needs Assessment. The application notes that marketing techniques such as geo-fencing advertising, maintaining a presence at food distribution lines, and partnering with community organizations such as Acelero learning has attracted students and families to the Pinecrest network.

The amendment application also states that the proposed expansion will help the network continue to expand opportunities for students including CTE and Dual Enrollment options. At Pinecrest – Cadence specifically, the proposed growth will be for secondary students. The application states that both the Cadence and Sloan Canyon campuses have received praise for access given to students and the administrators from both campuses are continuing to expand dual language communication to the community and marketing efforts to increase opportunities for all students.

Finally, the amendment application states that Pinecrest will continue to focus on individual student performance and implement targeted responses where needed. Pinecrest plans to close any achievement gaps through data-driven instruction, assessments, intervention, and a monitoring system to guide and ensure all students succeed.

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. 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

At this time, SPCSA staff finds that schools within the Pinecrest Academy of Nevada network are meeting expectations in regard to academic expectations, are compliant in regard to the SPCSA’s Organizational Framework, and are fiscally sound. More information on past performance can be found on page 5 of this memo.

Additionally, the contract between the SPCSA and Pinecrest Academy of Nevada governing board includes the following provisions:

- 2.3.1 – The Charter School shall provide instruction to pupils in such grades and numbers in each year of operation under the Charter Contract as identified in the Charter Application appearing in Exhibit #3
- 2.3.3 – Elimination of a grade level that the Charter School was scheduled to serve, expansion to serve grade levels not identified in 2.3.1, or an annual increase/decrease in total enrollment by more than 10% shall be a material amendment of this Charter Contract and shall not become effective and the Charter School shall not take action or implement the change requested in the amendment until the amendment is approved ,in writing, but the Authority. Authorization to expand may require the Charter School to demonstrate satisfactory academic and financial performance, and organizational compliance.

Staff Analysis & Recommendation: Approve

As previously mentioned, Pinecrest Academy has already exceeded its student enrollment cap by more than 10% at both the Cadence and Inspirada campuses for the 2021 – 22 school year. SPCSA staff learned of Pinecrest’s increased enrollment during its review of this amendment application, contacted the school to confirm their current enrollment figures, and then compared these to approved enrollment caps for each campus. While the 2021 – 22 school year has not begun, a large number of students have already been enrolled and plan to attend both the Cadence and Inspirada campuses.

It is also important to note that the proposed growth over the next several years is quite substantial. While Pinecrest Academy of Nevada has historically demonstrated strong academic and financial performance, and has had few compliance concerns, available demographic data² from the 2020 -21 school year indicates that the school lags behind the Clark County School District (CCSD), SPCSA and statewide average in serving historically underserved groups as identified in the SPCSA’s Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment:

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.

² * indicates a population size >0 and <10; count and rate data are suppressed to protect privacy. <5 is shown for rates below 5% to protect student privacy.

	Cadence	Horizon	Inspirada	Sloan Canyon	St. Rose	CCSD	SPCSA	Nevada
FRL	28.8%	32.3%	12.5%	17.5%	26%	85.6%	39.4%	72.5%
IEP	12.1%	9.9%	8.3%	9.0%	8.1%	12.4%	9.5%	12.4%
ELL	<5	<5	*	<5	<5	15.1%	7.7%	13.3%

These demographic gaps are significant, particularly for FRL and ELL students. Additionally, SPCSA staff has concerns about recommending approval of a significant number of seats without strong evidence that the Pinecrest network has engaged in targeted marketing and community outreach prior to this request, or a concrete plan to continue this work in the months and years ahead. SPCSA staff finds that the Pinecrest amendment submission includes limited evidence of recruitment strategies that can close the above identified gaps, with a heavy reliance on passive tactics which disproportionately benefit more advantaged populations. More information that demonstrates Pinecrest has leveraged grassroots, data-driven outreach and recruitment strategies such as door-to-door visits, open houses and forums, and community conversations is needed to endorse the level of proposed growth in the submitted amendment.

Furthermore, SPCSA staff does not see clear alignment to the agency’s Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment. While the application states that Pinecrest Academy of Nevada has already engaged in marketing the school to zip codes in its community, including 89002 and 89015 which are identified in the SPCSA Academic and Geographic Needs Assessment, of the 15 schools in these two zip codes, only five are rated as 1 or 2-stars. The total enrollment of these schools is approximately 3,100 of the approximately 13,000 available seats in these zip codes combined. SPCSA staff does not find this to be a compelling argument to justify the levels of proposed expansion, especially when combined with a thin targeted marketing and outreach plan and current demographic gaps as highlighted above.

SPCSA staff also encourages Pinecrest Academy of Nevada to consider the implementation of a weighted lottery to supplement a more thorough and robust community engagement plan.

For all of these reasons, SPCSA staff recommends the Authority approve a modified version of the expansion requested by Pinecrest Academy of Nevada. SPCSA staff is confident that the recommended cap figures below will provide a stopgap solution for the students and families of Pinecrest Academy of Nevada for the 2021 – 22 school year. SPCSA staff is also prepared to work with the governing board and leadership team of the network to develop a more thorough and concrete plan as noted above should the school wish to continue to pursue additional expansion beyond the upcoming school year.

Finally, SPCSA staff will note the above compliance concerns for both the Cadence and Inspirada campuses in the SY2021 and SY2022 Organizational Performance Frameworks and will present those recommendations at a later date.

Proposed Motion:

Approve a modified version of the Pinecrest Academy of Nevada amendment request to increase the enrollment caps for the Cadence, Inspirada and Sloan Canyon. Under this modified proposal, the enrollment cap for the Cadence campus would increase by 50 seats, and the enrollment cap for the Inspirada campus would increase by 20 seats for the 2021 -22 school year and the remainder of the current charter term. These adjusted numbers will allow the school to serve students and families already enrolled at these campuses for the 2021 – 22 school year as current enrollment levels fall within 10% of the recommended caps. Pinecrest Academy of Nevada may submit a

RFA to modify the enrollment cap for future years in advance of conducting their lottery and subject to the typical review and approval process.

	Current Cap	Requested Cap	Enrollment as of 6/3/21	SPCSA Staff Recommended Cap
Cadence	1,860	2,153	2,093	1,910 (increase of 50 seats)
Inspirada	1,070	1,235	1,198	1,090 (increase of 20 seats)
Sloan Canyon	1,595	1,792	1,654	1,595 (no change)

If approved, the enrollment caps for each Pinecrest campus will be as follows for the remainder of the charter term:

School Year/Campus	2021 – 22	2022 – 23	2023 – 24
Cadence	1,910	1,910	1,910
Horizon	910 (no change)	910	910
Inspirada	1,090	1,090	1,090
Sloan Canyon	1,595 (no change)	1,829	2,025
St. Rose	1,010 (no change)	1,010	1,010
TOTAL	6,515	6,749	6,945

Historical Performance and Demographic Information

Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) – Pinecrest Academy of Nevada

Year	Ratings		
2020³	Cadence ES: 4-star Horizon ES: 4-star Inspirada ES: 5-star St. Rose ES: 4-star	Cadence MS: 5-star Inspirada MS: 5-star St. Rose MS: 5-star	Cadence HS: Not Rated
2019	Cadence ES: 4-star Horizon ES: 4-star Inspirada ES: 5-star St. Rose ES: 4-star	Cadence MS: 5-star Inspirada MS: 5-star St. Rose MS: 5-star	Cadence HS: Not Rated
2018	Cadence ES: 5-star Horizon ES: 5-star Inspirada ES: 5-star St. Rose ES: 5-star	Cadence MS: 5-star Horizon MS: 5-star Inspirada MS: 5-star St. Rose MS: 5-star	Cadence HS: Not Rated
2017	Network ES: 5-star	Network MS: 5-star	Network HS: N/A

Note: the Sloan Canyon campus opened for the 2019 – 2020 school year and has yet to earn an NSPF rating.

Validated Four-Year Graduation Rates – Pinecrest Academy of Nevada

2020	93.6%
2019	n<10
2018	N/A
2017	N/A

³ Due to COVID-19, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) applied for and was granted a 2019 – 20 school year waiver from the US Department of Education for certain assessment, accountability, school identification, and reporting requirements established by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Accordingly, for the 2019 – 20 school year, Nevada statewide assessments were not administered and the NDE did not calculate Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) school ratings.

School Total Enrollment and Demographics since 2017⁴

Cadence

Year	Enrollment	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
17-18	1261	5.2%	6.5%	53.0%	25.3%	0.2%	8.5%	0.9%	11.4%	<5	18.0%
18-19	1628	5.8%	7.2%	49.2%	26.9%	0.3%	8.7%	1.5%	11.6%	<5	30.8%
19-20	1814	5.4%	7.2%	48.3%	27.9%	0.4%	8.9%	1.5%	12.5%	<5	30.8%
20-21	1941	5.4%	7.7%	45.7%	28.9%	0.5%	9.5%	2.0%	12.1%	<5	28.8%

Horizon

Year	Enrollment	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
17-18	866	3.8%	8.1%	55.1%	25.2%	0.3%	6.0%	1.1%	11.2%	<5	17.6%
18-19	703	4.5%	5.1%	51.6%	29.8%	0.2%	7.8%	0.7%	10.2%	<5	27.7%
19-20	771	3.6%	7.2%	47.4%	31.6%	0.3%	8.6%	0.9%	12.0%	*	31.1%
20-21	816	3.9%	7.1%	45.7%	33.3%	0.3%	8.7%	0.8%	9.9%	<5	32.3%

Inspirada

Year	Enrollment	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
17-18	1017	10.4%	3.9%	52.0%	18.5%	0.6%	12.8%	1.4%	9.6%	*	<5
18-19	1099	10.6%	4.5%	50.3%	19.1%	0.3%	13.2%	1.6%	8.4%	*	11.0%
19-20	1193	12.0%	4.5%	49.8%	18.4%	0.4%	12.9%	1.7%	9.0%	<5	9.8%
20-21	1224	12.7%	4.2%	47.7%	19.9%	0.3%	13.2%	1.7%	8.3%	*	12.5%

Sloan Canyon

Year	Enrollment	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
19-20	1236	14.0%	4.9%	38.4%	25.8%	0.1%	14.4%	2.1%	8.8%	<5	17.0%
20-21	1473	15.1%	4.4%	37.2%	25.9%	0.3%	14.7%	2.1%	9.0%	<5	17.5%

St. Rose

Year	Enrollment	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
17-18	982	12.0%	5.2%	44.7%	23.0%	0.4%	10.4%	4.0%	7.3%	<5	8.2%
18-19	992	13.2%	5.0%	42.1%	23.8%	0.2%	11.6%	3.8%	8.5%	<5	19.5%
19-20	980	15.8%	6.6%	34.1%	27.5%	0.2%	12.6%	2.9%	8.5%	<5	26.0%
20-21	1007	15%	7.7%	33.5%	28.0%	0.1%	11.8%	3.5%	8.1%	<5	26.0%

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

⁴ * indicates a population size >0 and <10; count and rate data are suppressed to protect privacy. <5 is shown for rates below 5% to protect student privacy.