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ACTION MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Board
FROM: Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing, SPCSA
Danny Peltier, Management Analyst III, SPCSA
SUBJECT: **Founders Classical Academy of Las Vegas – Charter Amendment Request to Increase Enrollment and Occupy and Additional Facility on the School’s Current Campus**
DATE: December 16, 2022

Summary of Request and Recommendation

Founders Classical Academy Las Vegas (FCALV) has submitted an amendment application requesting that the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) grant a Good Cause Exemption and approve an enrollment increase in grade levels the school already serves in beginning in the 2023-2024 school year and occupy an additional facility on its existing campus beginning in the 2024-2025 school year.

SPCSA staff has reviewed the application and recommends that the Authority grant the Good Cause Exemption and approve the amendment request. A proposed motion along with proposed conditions can be found on page 6 of this memo.

Background and Overview of the Amendment

FCALV opened in 2014 as is located at 5730 W. Alexander Road, Las Vegas, NV 89130. It serves 940 students as of the 2022 Validation Day in kindergarten through 12th grade and is operating under a charter contract that expires on June 30, 2025. The mission of FCALV Academy of Las Vegas is, “To train the minds and improve the hearts of young people through a rigorous, classical education in the liberal arts and sciences, with instruction in the principles of moral character and civic virtue.” According to the amendment application, FCALV is a classical public charter school engaged in a unique philanthropic relationship with the Barney

Charter School Initiative (BCSI) of Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, Michigan. BCSI employs classical school content and pedagogy specialists who develop curriculum and instructional practices that best serve classically educated students. Also, according to the application, the cultural focus at FCALV is defined as a school community that shares a joint mission and code of conduct – 1) to honor what is good, true, and beautiful; 2) to show respect to others at all times; 3) to do good things for others without being asked; 4) to strive for excellence in all things; and 5) to persevere and fulfill commitments and not give up or act on discouragement. The FCALV faculty, staff, and administrators are expected to exemplify behavior and role models for students and families in the Eight Pillars – Honesty, Respect, Courage, Integrity, Citizenship, Cooperation, Responsibility, and Perseverance.

FCALV seeks an increase of its current enrollment cap of 890 students to 1,082 students for the 2023-2024 school year and incrementally each year thereafter through the 2028-2029 school year. If approved, FCALV’s enrollment cap would be for the next six years:

Year	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029
Enrollment	1082	1166	<i>1222</i>	<i>1278</i>	<i>1306</i>	<i>1334</i>

**Italics are beyond the current charter contract term. FCALV will be required to submit a renewal application to operate beyond the 2024 – 25 school year, and renewal would require separate Authority action at that time.*

In addition to the enrollment increase FCALV seeks to construct a two-story annex classroom building of approximately 20,017 sq. ft. with 17 additional classrooms (including specialty classrooms in science classrooms, computer lab, art classroom, and music classroom). The proposed annex would primarily be occupied by high school level students/courses with its own multipurpose room/cafeteria, administrative offices, staff workroom and restroom, food service areas, storage, and six single-use and two multi-use student restrooms. This construction would be on the current campus of FCALV on the east side of the property adjacent to the gymnasium. The proposed two-story annex classroom building would be connected to the second floor of the main building by an elevated pedestrian bridge. Additionally, all remaining natural grass would be replaced with artificial turf. Additional parking would be on the east side of the property (35 spaces) according to information provided in the amendment.

The amendment application also outlines work done by FCALV to address demographic gaps between the school and traditional public schools in the area, CCSD, and the SPSCA over the past 18 months. Specifically, FCALV has completed and submitted an Enrollment and Recruitment Plan to recruit and retain a more-diversified student population. In addition, FCALV has collected a significant amount of data to better know its community and the zip codes in which current students reside. FCALV was also approved by the Authority to implement a weighted lottery beginning in the 2022-2023 school year with weights for students eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch students (FRL) and Special Education students. As of Validation Day 2022, FCALV has seen an increase of five percentage points in FRL students compared to 2021, and nearly a two percentage point increase in its special education population. The amendment indicates that much of the community work to ensure the school serves a representative student population will continue in future years.

FCALV described a number of partnerships and events it has held as part of the school's work to strengthen community ties, raise awareness of FCALV as a public school option, and serve a more representative student population. Partnerships include Project 150 to provide opportunities to students to assist in the charity's efforts, Northwest Area Residential Association (NARA) which facilitates events in the local community, City of the World Art Co-Op at Meadows Mall which encouraged students to participate and assist with *Art in the Park* activities sponsored by the City and County, and the YMCA.

FCALV also provided a detailed timeline for completion of the facility expansion. The FCALV's governing board set up a facility sub-committee which has been deeply involved with the project timelines. According to the amendment application, FCALV has contracted with Encompass Studio which put together the construction plan and timeline that outlines the design phases and the necessary approvals for permit and construction start and finish. Within the document FCALV provided details of each construction task on a Gantt chart. These tasks show the facility development activities and the sequence of events to obtain a certificate of occupancy prior the first day of school in the 2024-25 school year.

Legal Authority

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. When determining whether to approve an amendment request, the sponsor considers the charter school's compliance with applicable local, state and federal laws and regulations and evidence relating to the academics, finance and organization of the charter school. (See NAC 388A.400(8) and NRS 388A.276).

Analysis and Staff Recommendation

As previously noted, FCALV is seeking to expand at its existing campus and increase enrollment beginning in the 2023-2024 school year. FCALV has shown strong academic, organizational, and financial results during the course of its charter terms. As part of its analysis of academic performance, SPCSA staff reviewed the 2021 – 2022 results of FCALV under the SPCSA Academic Performance Framework as well as the most recent star rating under the NSPF. As stated before, FCALV ES, MS, and HS campuses earned index scores of 56.0, 66.2, and 64.2, respectively, for the 2021 – 22 school year. According to the 2018 – 19 star ratings, the FCALV ES was 4-stars, MS was 5-stars, and HS was 3-stars. FCALV has also shown strong organizational and financial performance which was included previously in this memo. Under the Organizational framework, FCALV has earned perfect 100 out of 100 scores in each of the past two years. Under the Financial framework, FCALV met the standard in each of the last two years and met standard on all of the Financial framework indicators as well.

In addition, SPCSA staff was encouraged by the proactiveness of FCALV to implement a weighted lottery prior to the submission of this amendment application. Due to a significant gap in the number of FRL students served when compared to the local school district, the Authority

required FCALV to develop and submit a Student Recruitment and Enrollment plan, which was submitted in the fall of 2022. FCALV submitted a thoughtful, detailed plan in response to that requirement with goals that were both realistic and intentional. The first goal included as part of the recruitment plan included the recruitment and retention of a diversified student population and to increase its percentage of FRL student population by 5% per year until the school's FRL student population is 39.5% as measured by both Infinite Campus and the Nevada Report Card. FCALV's second goal is to recruit and retain a diversified student population and increase its percentage of Students with Disabilities population by 5% per year until the school's SPED student population is 10% as measured by both Infinite Campus and the Nevada Report Card. FCALV has been thoughtful in its approach to achieving these goals and provided thorough research and objectives that detailed a realistic plan for progress. As of Validation Day 2022, FCALV had seen a five percentage point increase in FRL students compared to 2021, and nearly a two percentage point increase in its SPED population. By continuing the use of the FRL and SPED weighted lottery, staff sees no reason why these numbers will not continue to grow.

FCALV has been operating at its current site since 2014 and in that time, has built strong relationships within the community. However, the school noticed the strengths in partnerships were not the equal across different demographic and socioeconomic groups. FCALV continues to work toward becoming more representative of its communities, and has made appropriate accommodations in, and modifications to, instruction and materials to serve a more diverse student population. FCALV has also implemented the National School Lunch Program and according to the application the number of lunches served has multiplied since becoming free for all students and has gone from an average of about 15% of its students getting lunch to now around 59%.

As previously discussed, FCALV provided evidence of a number of community partnerships it has engaged in. From Project 150 food drives and City of the World the school has provided opportunities for students to give back to their community and share their work in art and music. FCALV continues to work closely with NARA and has presented its plans for expansions at their meetings and through its community outreach program. FCALV also continues to work with other groups in the community including local day-cares and the YMCA.

Throughout the existence of FCALV, the school has been mindful, and deliberate, with its plans for growth in order to ensure proper staffing, training, while maintaining the academy's educational programming quality, and culture. The school initially expanded in 2017 by transitioning students from portables classrooms to newly built classrooms. In 2019, FCALV built a two-story main campus on its current site and additional one-story annex in 2020. These projects included successful bonding and were built on time with minimal disruption to ongoing classes at the operating buildings. FCALV was cognizant of these potential issues in this application, and provided staff with detailed plans, a thorough timeline, facility plans, meetings and agendas from the facility subcommittee and full board meetings, projected costs, and complete construction schedules.

Regarding financing of the facility, FCALV intends to continue to work with the financing team that led the most recent bonding effort. According to the amendment application, the financing

will be in the form of Bonds sold to institutional and accredited investors. The 2023 Bonds will be structured to create overall level annual payments for both this financing and the existing Series 2020 Bonds. The 2023 Bonds will have a final maturity of 35 to 40 years and will be fixed-rate. The 2023 Bonds will be structured with lower payments over the next 4-5 years, while the new building is being constructed and then while enrollment is growing. The combined debt service payments on the Series 2020 and Series 2023 Bonds will be level (non-escalating) thereafter until final maturity.

SPCSA staff finds the proposed financing and constructions timelines reasonable and sees no reason the FCALV team will not be able to complete this project, particularly given the track record of completion of prior projects. FCALV also has a strong academic track record and has no ratings below 3-star as of the 2018-2019 ratings (the last before the pause in ratings due to COVID-19) and their 2022 index scores met standards as well. As such, SPCSA staff recommends the SPCSA board approve the request of Founders Classical Academy of Las Vegas increase enrollment in beginning in the 2023-2024 school year and expand facilities on its existing campus for the 2024-2025 school year with conditions outlined below.

Proposed Motion: grant the Good Cause Exemption request and approve Founders Classical Academy of Las Vegas’ increase in enrollment beginning with the 2023-2024 school year and expand facilities on its existing campus beginning in the 2024-2025 school year with the following conditions:

- **That the school complete the pre-opening process, which requires permitting and a Certificate of Occupancy be provided to the SPCSA, and a walkthrough of the facility by SPCSA staff prior use by students**

If approved, the enrollment caps for Founders Academy will be as follows for the remainder of the current charter term:

School Year	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Grade Levels	K-12	K-12	K-12
Total Enrollment	855	1082	1166

If approved, enrollment caps for Founders Academy are as follows:

School Year	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25				
Grade Levels	K-12	K-12	K-12				
Total Enrollment	855	1082	1166				

**Italics are beyond the current charter contract term*

School Demographic Change since 2017 – Founders Classical Academy of Las Vegas

Year	Enrollment	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
17-18	618	2.9%	6.6%	54.9%	25.1%	0.3%	9.7%	0.5%	8.1%	2.6%	18.6%
18-19	714	2.9%	7.0%	49.6%	29.7%	0.1%	10.5%	0.1%	6.3%	5.0%	17.1%
19-20	779	3.5%	7.6%	44.9%	34.8%	0.0%	9.1%	0.1%	6.4%	4.9%	27.0%
20-21	830	3.9%	7.1%	41.8%	36.9%	0.0%	10.1%	0.0%	<5%	6.7%	24.2%
21-22	900	3.8%	7.5%	39.6%	38.6%	0.3%	9.8%	0.0%	5.2%	6.8%	23.7%
22-23	940	4.5%	6.7%	38.5%	40.2%	0.3%	9.5%	0.1%	6.8%	6.2%	28.8%

A – Asian
 B – Black
 C – Caucasian
 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
 * - Suppressed data due to n-count

Founders Classical Academy of Las Vegas Charter School Financial Performance

Year	Rating
2019 – 2020	Meets the Standard
2020 – 2021	Meets the Standard

Founders Classical Academy of Las Vegas Charter School Organizational Performance

Year	Rating
2019 – 2020	Meets the Standard
2020 – 2021	Meets the Standard

Founders Classical Academy of Las Vegas Academic Performance – Nevada School Performance Framework

Year	Rating
2018	ES: 2 - stars MS: 3 – stars HS: 5 - stars

2019	ES: 4 – stars MS: 5 – stars HS: 3 – stars
2020 ¹	ES: 4 – stars MS: 5 – stars HS: 3 - stars
2021 ²	ES: 4 – stars MS: 5 – stars HS: 3 - stars

Founders Classical Academy Las Vegas 2021-22 SPCSA Academic Performance Results³

	2021-22 SPCSA Academic Framework Score	2021-22 SPCSA Academic Framework Rating
Elementary	56.0	Meets Standard
Middle	66.2	Meets Standard
High School	64.2	Meets Standard

¹ 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

² Due to COVID-19, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) applied for and was granted a 2020 – 21 school year waiver from the US Department of Education for certain requirements established by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Nevada statewide assessments were administered in the 2020 – 21 school year, but the NDE did not calculate Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) school ratings for the 2020 – 21 school year.

³ The Nevada Department of Education (NDE) calculated NSPF index scores for the 2021-22 school year but did not calculate corresponding star ratings (shown as N/A). 2021-22 NSPF details and rules can be found at: <http://nevadareportcard.nv.gov/DI/MoreDownload?filename=Nevada%20School%20Performance%20Framework%20Manual%202021-22%20School%20Year.pdf>