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ACTION MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Board
FROM: Mike Dang, Manager of Organizational and Financial Performance
Jennifer Bauer, Interim Executive Director
SUBJECT: Transportation Plan: Quest Academy
DATE: October 13, 2023

Background

[Assembly Bill 400 \(2023 Session of the Nevada Legislature\)](#) appropriated \$7 million to the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) for each year of the upcoming biennium (the 2023-24 fiscal year and the 2024-25 fiscal year) to award to charter schools, including SPCSA-sponsored and district-sponsored charter schools, to fund student transportation. To receive funding, a charter school must submit a Transportation Plan to the SPCSA and the SPCSA may approve the Transportation Plan and award funding to the charter school if the plan meets the following criteria:

1. “The transportation plan is comprehensive and likely to be successfully implemented;
2. The transportation plan will materially improve access to education in the region served by the transportation plan;
3. The transportation plan demonstrates that the charter school will be able to comply with statutory and regulatory transportation requirements, including, without limitation, the certification of bus drivers and vehicle safety;
4. The transportation plan is financially viable;
5. The transportation plan would not cost more, on a per pupil basis, than the average cost for transportation for other public schools operating in the school district in which the charter school is located; and

6. The academic, financial and organizational performance of the charter school indicate that the transportation plan is in the interest of pupils who will be served by the transportation plan.”¹

It is important to note that pursuant to NAC 388A.330(4), a charter school is only permitted to provide transportation to pupils if the school has approval to do so from its sponsor. Therefore, charter schools that are not already approved to provide student transportation will be required to submit to their sponsor a contract amendment request in order to implement the Transportation Plan. For those schools sponsored by the SPCSA, the amendment request to provide student transportation was incorporated into the application process, and the SPCSA Board will consider approval of the amendment request in conjunction with the Transportation Plan.

Applications for the 2023-24 school year will be accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis from July 7, 2023 and through September 30, 2023². While the SPCSA hopes to fund all applicants that submit a compliant transportation plan, because there is only \$7 million available in each school year, the SPCSA may prioritize funding Title I charter schools.

Additional details and form associated with the Transportation Plan and Funding Application can be found on the [SPCSA’s website](#).

Transportation Plan Overview

Quest Academy (Quest) is requesting a total of \$212,363 to implement the school’s Transportation Plan. Below is an overview of the proposed Transportation Plan for Quest, as provided in the application.

“Quest Academy plans to establish transportation services to and from school. The plan prioritizes students eligible for McKinney-Vento whose families experience the biggest financial and logistical hurdles to get to our school and who have the greatest need for highly accommodating services with a keen focus on ensuring safety. The plan includes purchasing three minivans and having each minivan complete 1 to 2 routes in the morning and afterschool for a total of 2 to 4 routes. Quest would utilize the requested funding for the following: the purchase of three minivans and the associated cost of the purchase, salary and fringe benefits for drivers, insurance on the vehicles, gas, maintenance, and safety-enhancing technology.”

Analysis and Recommendation

Quest is a Title I School and is requesting approval of its Transportation Plan and funding to implement the Transportation Plan. In addition, because Quest is not currently approved to provide transportation, the school is also requesting to amend its charter contract to provide

¹ Section 28.5 of Assembly Bill 400 (2023 Session of the Nevada Legislature)

² After September 30, 2023, the SPCSA will determine if there are remaining funds that have not yet been awarded. If funds remain, the SPCSA will re-open the transportation application.

transportation and has submitted a good cause exemption request to have this amendment considered outside of the established amendment windows.

SPCSA staff has reviewed the Transportation Plan and find that the Plan meets the requirements set forth in Assembly Bill 400.

1. The Transportation Plan is comprehensive and likely to be successfully implemented.
2. The narrative provided by the school explains that:

“Quest Academy’s Transportation Plan to use minivans to transport students to and from school is likely to materially improve access to education in the region served by the transportation plan for several reasons:

 - **Increased Accessibility:** Using minivans allows for more flexibility in navigating a broader geographic region and low student geographic density which occurs when serving a school of choice. By utilizing minivans, the school can economically reach a broader range of students and provide transportation services to students that might otherwise have limited access to education due to hardships.
 - **Door-to-Door Service:** Minivans provide the opportunity for door-to-door service, meaning students can be picked up and dropped off directly at their homes or designated locations. This level of convenience, safety, and personalized service is particularly advantageous for students who are homeless or in underserved areas. It reduces the burden on students and their families by eliminating the need for long walks, crossing streets, or reliance on public transportation to reach the school, thus enhancing their access to education. Minivans being able to pull directly into driveways where drivers can alert families when they arrive ensures that, even in circumstances when parents are unable to accompany their students to a stop, students can safely board the vehicles on their own and drivers can ensure they’re safely in their homes after being dropped off.
 - **Efficient Utilization of Resources:** Minivans offer a more efficient use of resources than operating large buses with higher operating and maintenance costs, especially when serving a smaller student population as geographically dispersed such as the school population of Quest. This enables the school to plan routes and schedules more effectively, ensuring that transportation services are tailored to meet the specific needs of the students in the region and that vehicle and driver times are well utilized. The efficient utilization of resources also contributes to cost-effectiveness, allowing the school to allocate funds to other educational initiatives.
 - **Enhanced Safety and Comfort:** Minivans can provide a safer and more comfortable transportation experience for students – even while minivans might be less crash-worthy than school buses. With a smaller number of students per vehicle, it becomes easier to maintain order and ensure the well-being of each student during transit. All students will be able to have lap and shoulder belts – not present on all used school buses in NV today. Additionally, the size and maneuverability of minivans may allow for a smoother ride, which can be particularly beneficial for younger students or those with special needs. Air conditioning in minivans will help students beat the heat better than they could on a bus, and finally enabling GPS tracking and cameras as part of our

plan on our minivans will ensure we will be always able to locate our vehicles and students and capture any incidents that may occur to support swift resolution and to deter issues before they occur. By prioritizing student safety and comfort, the transportation plan fosters a conducive learning environment by reducing stress and potential transportation-related issues.

By implementing the proposed transportation plan, Quest can significantly improve access to education in the region it serves. It enables the school to reach a wider student population, particularly those in various housing situations or underserved areas, while offering personalized, efficient, and safe transportation services. This improved accessibility removes barriers to education, ensuring that more students have the opportunity to attend school regularly and participate fully in their educational journey.” This demonstrates that the Transportation Plan will materially improve access to education in the region.

3. The Transportation Plan includes details regarding how the charter school will ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory transportation requirements.
4. The budget provided within the Transportation Plan demonstrates that the Transportation Plan is financially viable.
5. The average daily enrollment for Quest during the first quarter of the 2023-24 school year was 450. Quest is located in Clark County where the four-year average (per pupil) transportation funding allocation for the 2023-24 school year is \$481. The total funding request for Quest was \$212,363, which is less than or equal to the average cost, per pupil, for transportation within the Clark County School District.
6. The academic, financial and organizational performance of the charter school indicate that the transportation plan is in the interest of pupils who will be served by the transportation plan. Specifically, the Transportation Plan indicates that transportation will utilize three minivans to provide transportation to approximately 18-36 students per day, with priority given to McKinney-Vento students between 1 and 6 miles, followed by McKinney-Vento students between 6 and 10 miles, and any remaining capacity being given to students within a 1-3 mile radius zoned for a severely underperforming school.

Therefore, SPCSA staff recommend approval of the Quest Academy Transportation Plan, along with funding to implement the plan. Furthermore, SPCSA staff recommend approval of the good cause exemption and amendment request to enable the school to provide transportation to students.

Proposed Motion:

1. Approve the Quest Academy Transportation Plan, along with funding to implement the Plan and allow SPCSA staff to work with the school to make budget revisions as long as the total funding does not exceed the average per pupil cost in the local school district.
2. Approve the charter contract amendment request for Quest Academy to allow the school to provide student transportation.

3. Require the school to provide SPCSA staff with documentation to demonstrate that the school is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations prior to beginning to transport students.

If approved, the enrollment for the remainder of the contract term will remain unchanged:

School Year	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Grade Levels	K-8	K-8	K-8	K-8
Total Enrollment	500	500	500	500