



STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Board
FROM: Patrick Gavin
SUBJECT: Agenda Item 7: Beacon Amendment Requests
DATE: May 20, 2016

Beacon Academy has requested two contract amendments, the first of which is a request to limit enrollment to only Clark County Students and the second of which requests 6 additional measurements for its performance framework. As the Board is aware, Beacon Academy and SPCSA staff have not yet executed an amended contract incorporating the last contract revisions (including alignment of the contract with the provisions of SB 509, as directed by the Board at the time the amendment request was approved).

Recommendations:

Staff recommends that any approved contractual changes by the Board today be incorporated into and effective only upon the execution of the amended contract.

Staff recommends approval of amendment request #1 and supports the school's efforts to transition to a blended model while preserving the rights of current students to remain enrolled.

Staff recommends denial of amendment request #2. NRS 386.528 allows for a school's performance framework to include additional rigorous, valid and reliable performance indicators, measures and metrics in the performance framework that are specific to the mission of the charter school and that are consistent with NRS 386.490 to 386.649, inclusive. This section is intended to allow schools to add metrics to the statutorily required metrics to allow school to measure progress in additional areas. Any additional performance measures must be rigorous, valid, and reliable. Thus, any proposed performance indicators, measures, and metrics must supplement and not supplant those of the Authority's primary framework; such indicator,s measures, and metrics cannot undermine or water down those of the core framework.

The performance measures proposed by Beacon academy are neither reliable nor rigorous and thus should not be included in the school's performance framework. With regard to reliability the school makes no provision for how the additional metrics would be measured or independently verified. As a result, staff does not view the proposed metrics to be reliable.

With regarding to rigor, the proposed metrics would serve to measure sub-population graduation rates and the percentages of students who decrease their level of credit deficiency or re-enroll in and complete a school year. The graduation rate of pupils in a school must be included in the school's performance framework pursuant to NRS 386.528(1)(a)(3). The School's request for the measurement of the graduation rates of sub-populations is not more rigorous than the existing graduation rate metric and should not be incorporated.

Moreover, as the Department of Education has not yet finalized how the 5th year cohort graduation rate will be calculated, it is unclear at this time if the inclusion of the 5th year cohort graduation rate into Beacon's performance framework is as rigorous as the present calculation. Additionally, the requests for measuring re-engagement of students and decrease in credit deficiency do not provide enough detail regarding how the measures would be evaluated and objectively validated for staff to be able to recommend their inclusion at this time.

As the Board is aware, staff has previously recommended that Beacon be notified of the Authority's intent to terminate the school's charter contract due to persistent underperformance. The school's history of poor performance related to its graduation rate can be found in the table below.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
4 Year Cohort Graduation Rate	16.38%	14.30%	37.61%	56.52%	52.63%
Rank Among All High Schools	104/106	108/110	100/111	104/117	104/117
Percentile Among All High Schools	3rd	3rd	11th	12th	12th

As indicated in the table, the school's graduation rate has been below the statutory cutoff of 60 percent. While the school has made gains in the overall percentage of students who graduate on time over the past five years, the school remains low performing. It ranks in the bottom quintile of all schools statewide. While Beacon has made progress, many other schools statewide have also made gains, resulting in a dramatic increase in graduation rates statewide.

As noted in another agenda item, a preliminary analysis of Beacon's student population, coupled with a lack of a mission to exclusively serve opportunity youth and a mission-specific admissions policy which limits enrollment exclusively to at risk populations (per NRS 386.580(8), argues against the school's classification as an alternative school for the purposes of accountability. In order for this Authority to seriously consider a performance standard which falls far below that required of all other public schools in the state, the school would need to make significant additional changes to its mission, policies, and academic model. Consequently, staff recommends against the approval of Amendment # 2 until such time as the school proposes such changes.