

# *Mater Academy of Northern Nevada*

## *Charter School Application Recommendation Report*

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# Summary

## *School Name*

Mater Academy of Northern Nevada

## *Mission*

The mission of Mater Academy of Northern Nevada is to provide an innovative, challenging, multicultural education, preparing students to be global citizens and have a competitive edge in the 21st century workforce. Mater Academy of Northern Nevada aspires to have students obtain a thirst for knowledge and a belief in the students' self-efficacy. We strive to have the Mater Academy of Northern Nevada community actively involved in the learning of its students.

## *Proposed Location*

Washoe County

## *Enrollment Projections*

	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-23</b>
K	50	50	50	50	50	50
1	50	50	50	50	50	50
2	50	50	50	50	50	50
3	50	50	50	50	50	50
4	75	50	50	50	50	50
5	75	75	75	75	75	75
6	0	75	90	150	150	150
7	0	0	90	90	150	150
8	0	0	0	90	90	150
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>775</b>

# Overview

The Recommendation Report for Mater Academy of Northern Nevada is a summary of the evidence collected by the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) through its interviews and dialogue with the applicant group, review of the school's Charter Application Proposal along with an analysis of performance data for other charter schools implementing the same academic model.

A recommendation to approve a charter for a six-year period is based on a comprehensive review of the proposal, performance data for replicated schools, the applicant capacity interview, follow-up discussion with applicants, and—where possible—site visits, guided by three essential questions:

1. Will the academic program be a success?
2. Will the school be an effective and accountable organization?
3. Will the school be fiscally sound?

**This report is structured around three sections: Academic, Fiscal, and Organizational. Each section contains an overview of key findings based on a the totality of the evidence and concludes with the Authority’s determination on each of the three guiding questions.**

## **Recommendation**

*Overall Recommendation*

***Approve with Significant Conditions to be Addressed Prior to Execution of Charter Contract***

### **Summary of Application Section Ratings**

*Rating options for each section are Meets the Standard; Approaches the Standard; Does Not Meet the Standard*

#### **Section 1. Executive Summary**

- **Approaches the Standard**

#### **Section 2: Meeting the Need**

- **Approaches the Standard**

#### **Section 3: Parent and Community Involvement**

- **Approaches the Standard**

#### **Section 4: Academic Plan – Mission & Vision**

- **Meets the Standard**

#### **Section 5: Transformational Change**

- **Approaches the Standard**

#### **Section 6: Curriculum & Instructional Design**

- **Approaches the Standard**

#### **Section 7: Distance Education**

- **Not Applicable**

#### **Section 8: Pre-K**

- **Not Applicable**

#### **Section 9: High School Graduation Requirements**

- **Not Applicable**

**Section 10: Driving for Results**

- **Meets the Standard**

**Section 11: At-Risk Students and Special Populations**

- **Meets the Standard**

**Section 12: School Structure: Culture**

- **Approaches the Standard**

**Section 13: School Structure: Student Discipline**

- **Approaches the Standard**

**Section 14: School Structure: School Calendar/Schedule**

- **Meets the Standard**

**Section 15: Day in the Life & Scenarios**

- **Approaches the Standard**

**Section 16: Operations Plan– Leadership Team**

- **Approaches the Standard**

**Section 17: Operations Plan– Leadership for Expansion**

- **Not Applicable**

**Section 18: Operations Plan – Staffing**

- **Meets the Standard**

**Section 19: Operations Plan – Human Resources**

- **Meets the Standard**

**Section 20: Operations Plan – Scale Strategy**

- **Not Applicable**

**Section 21: Operations Plan – Student Recruitment and Enrollment**

- **Approaches the Standard**

**Section 22: Operations Plan – Board Governance**

- **Approaches the Standard**

**Section 23: Operations Plan – Incubation Year Development**

- Meets the Standard

**Section 24: Operations Plan – School Management Contracts and Services**

- Meets the Standard

**Section 25: Operations Plan –Services**

- Meets the Standard

**Section 26: Operations Plan – Facilities**

- Meets the Standard

**Section 27: Operations Plan – Ongoing Operations**

- Meets the Standard

**Section 28: Financial Plan**

- Meets the Standard

*Should the Authority Board approve the application on the condition that the areas of improvement identified by addressed to the satisfaction of staff prior to the execution of the charter contract, those non-material revisions will move each element of the application to Meets the Standard.*

# Academic

## *Performance Data:*

For applicants seeking to replicate an existing model—whether as a direct charter management organization applicant, a committee to form partnering with a non-profit or for-profit education management organization, or a committee to form which seeks to independently replicate, primary consideration must be given to the academic track record of the model.

Staff reviewed Mater academic performance data provided by the applicant and verified it via spot checks of publicly available information. No inconsistencies were found. Staff also supplemented the supplied data with a review of other publicly available data. The findings are below:

- Under Florida’s school grading system, 13 of the 20 Mater Academy model schools in Florida were rated at the A level in 2014-15. Seven other schools were rated at the B level; two were rated at the C level. Over 90 percent of Mater model schools in Florida received one of the two highest grades in that year and no school was rated below a C.
- Mater Academy of Las Vegas has not received an accountability rating as it opened in 2015. Due to the 2015 Nevada statewide testing irregularity, there will be no growth data with which to calculate either an NSPF Star rating or an SPCSA Academic Performance Framework rating based on statewide testing data until no earlier than the fall of 2018. Baseline data for Mater on last year’s SBAC was lower than the state average but did not merit any performance intervention by the state.

Conclusion: The proposed academic model has a strong track record of academic performance in Florida. The data on the Nevada implementation is inconclusive due to only one year of data and the emphasis on growth in the Nevada School Performance Framework.

## *Areas of Strength:*

As noted above, the applicant has selected a model with a strong track record of academic success in Florida across 20 campuses. The applicant has a strong understanding of what it takes to oversee a successful academic program and has articulated systems to oversee the implementation of the model. In response to their own observations regarding the initial Nevada implementation, the applicant group identified the significant expansion of Mater Las Vegas, which doubled in size in 2015 as a lesson learned, observing that the baseline proficiency data for the school suffered due to an immoderate level of growth in a high need community between the first and second year of operation. The growth plan for Mater Academy of Northern Nevada reflects a much more moderate and disciplined approach which is intended to ensure a more cohesive school culture, limit the need to recruit large numbers of new staff each year, and support a more stable cohort of students.

Key strengths include:

- The response provided articulates a meaningful vision and mission for the school and incorporates the goal of helping students develop a sense of self-efficacy and active community involvement with the school. The Summary identifies that the school seeks to replicate a model it reports as being successful in Florida with diverse, at-risk student populations (p1). This location the vision and mission well with the core goals of the Nevada Public Charter School Authority to increase the number of schools serving these populations.
- The summary provided also articulates a clear academic need within the target area served by the Washoe County School District with detailed data related to low rates of academic achievement in the target area schools, as well as a partnership with an established community organization, the Boys & Girls Club of the Truckee Meadows (p3), that will likely benefit the school well, including through provision of a facility in which to house the school.
- The summary provided also articulates clear academic, organizational, and financial goals, key components of their model, and also demonstrates how the school can benefit the Boys & Girls Club and the community, such as by offering before and after school programs for area students.
- The applicant's evaluation of the needs of the community clearly indicates a clear and compelling mission of significant academic achievement gaps that exist on the targeted area of Reno-Sparks, including among students that are 'economically-disadvantaged' and/or ELL, as well as to alleviate the severe overcrowding in schools in that area.
- The applicants have illustrated that there is a need, particularly for students requiring ELL services. They intend to replicate the model from Mater Florida in order to show gains for these children.
- The applicant also describes how the proposed model has demonstrated success in reducing achievement gaps in multiple Mater campuses and how this model directly connects with and supports the established goals of the SPCSA.
- The school's stated goals and mission seem to align well with those of the SPCSA to expand 'high quality' options to "high need populations," as well as to the statutory goal of increasing student achievement.
- The MANN proposal highlights a broad network of community members involved in the Committee to Form, as well as a vital relationship the school has and will strengthen with the Boys & Girls Club of Truckee Meadows, including space in which the school will operate. Response indicates MANN will also partner with other community resources to support their arts-focused mission, including the Sierra Arts Foundation.
- The applicant identifies the challenges in communicating with the families they hope to serve and details a broad communications/outreach plan for doing so, including hosting events in partnership with community-based organizations.
- The applicant articulates a clear vision and mission for the proposed school, and defines a core purpose as improving the academic achievement of students, with a specific focus on those who are at-risk.
- The inclusion of the "super skills" (page 10) as guiding principles is strong, as they will be really important to the students moving forward.

- The school’s discussion of transformational change begins to operationalize the proposed instructional program, including connections to core standards and details about the proposed curriculum plan (i.e., scope and sequence documents that will be developed and instructional strategies that will be used).
- The narrative connects the proposed instructional model to that developed and implemented in other Mater schools and details many ways in which the Mater model has been recognized (13), as well as support that the larger network will provide the school at startup.
- The applicant also details how additional programs, such as Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) and RTI, will be utilized to support the school’s instructional goals. Similarly, the application also indicates how additional blocks of time will be allocated for middle school students, when those grades are added, to support both students in need of remediation as well as acceleration and increased instructional rigor (p19).
- The narrative includes a detailed set of measurable annual performance goals, including a focus of increasing student’s Grade Level Equivalence (GLE) in Reading and Math, and baseline measures and targets that can be refined as the school begins to generate assessment data (i.e. SBAC) (pp27-28). The plan also indicates a set of supplemental assessment tools that will be used that school reports have been successful in other Mater schools, such as STAR, DIBELS and TenMarks for Math.
- The applicant also details a plan for how the school will respond to potential academic gaps among subgroups, including through the use and monitoring of ELL-specific assessments from the WIDA consortium.
- The applicant clearly connects the school’s plans to the goals of Nevada statutes (e.g., NRS 388A.045) and references a “highly involved” system of assessment, progress monitoring and intervention to support all students identified as being “at-risk.” The application also acknowledges that an identifiable learning disability is not a factor to be considered as placing a child “at-risk.” (p 31).
- The narrative also demonstrates a detailed understanding of the requirements placed upon it by Nevada statutes, such as for identifying and supporting students who may be or become homeless, and of the challenges that may exist in identifying such students, especially those whose circumstances have changed following initial enrollment (p 41).
- The applicant indicates the school will be using data to monitor at risk and special population student progress, as well as for universal screening (p 19).
- The applicant articulates a positive, student-centered school culture and details many actions the school will utilize to foster the culture described, going so far as to describe how students entering mid-year will be supported (i.e., peer partnerships with experienced Mater students) (p43).
- The narrative details how research-based plans, included RTI, PBS and mentoring approaches incorporating a ‘check-in, check-out’ system, will provide additional supports for a positive school culture.
- The narrative articulates a comprehensive approach to student discipline that is based on a schoolwide PBS program, including clear designation of the staff that will implement the policies described herein as well as identification of the school staff who will be responsible (Principal or designee) for providing necessary training to staff (p46). The response also outlines workable procedures for ensuring due process in cases of student discipline and a commitment to track and



analyze data on student discipline to ensure that disciplinary consequences are not disproportionately administered to minority subgroups. (p 48).

- Elements such as the school uniform policy are outlined in significant detail.
- The discussion of school calendars indicates a commitment to requirements specified in Nevada statutes (NAC 387.120) and a plan to adhere to the calendar of the surrounding Washoe County School District (p50).
- The applicant details how the school will plan their schedule to support important school goals, such as the provision of professional development throughout the year.
- The daily student schedules provided are detailed. The applicant provided sample schedules for all proposed grades.
- The Day in the Life responses are detailed and provide a strong understanding of the proposed school experience for Mater students, including details such as how students will write thank you notes and the fact that middle school students running a little late have the option to take their breakfast to homeroom to finish it there (p55).
- Additional details are provided as to how the school would approach serving students who present with special needs, such as students with disabilities and English Language Learners.
- In addition, the response provides is very detailed and actionable in regards to the analysis of performance data through the lens of students with disabilities on pages 59-61, and demonstrates deep insight into the school's potential ability to engage in data analysis and action.

#### *Areas for Improvement:*

- The applicants state that “the Mater Academy model is tailored to help bridge the achievement gap for at-risk students” (page 4), but does not specifically enumerate how it will meet the community need. There is a link between the current proficiency rates at neighboring schools and the past successes of the model used by Mater in Florida in reducing the achievement gap, but the analysis and argument could be strengthened.
- Several responses use several terms popular in education today (e.g., global citizens, complete edge in 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, etc.); providing examples of how the proposed model would help students achieve these broad goals would have been more responsive.
- The applicant group did not explain whether the determination of the need for this school is based solely based on the Washoe County comparable data, or whether there were any discussion with local parents/families about their needs and desires.
- While the response details an extensive outreach plan, no explicit mention is made of translating materials, interpretive services, or native language outreach to families whose home language is other than English, even though these students are a significant part of the target populations for the school.
- There is an overreliance on technology to facilitate outreach (i.e. emails, school website, etc.), especially to potential communities that may have limited access, and without attention to providing access for non-English speakers (p5) and adults with disabilities.
- There was a lack of clarity related to the specific contributions of the community organizations (p7) that have submitted letters of support.

- While the applicant clearly articulates a purpose around increasing academic achievement for students, with a focus on those who may be at-risk, the narrative does not provide a clear definition of what students they consider to be ‘at-risk.’
- The mission and vision statements offer several uses of broad terminology, such as “to have students obtain a thirst for knowledge” (p9), that are positive yet hard to measure. It is advisable to supplement cultural/behavioral goals with more measurable aspirations.
- Given the broad and ambitious goals put forth for the proposed school (e.g., pg. 10), clearer connections to more of the statutory goals of NRS 386.520 seem to be relevant. For example, the programs of the proposed school and the connection to a national network of established Mater schools seem like they could benefit from an emphasis on providing MANN teachers with new professional opportunities (statuary purpose f).
- The response that “the faculty of the school will develop a scope and sequence or pacing guide for each course” (page 11) appears contradictory to the outlined supportive model from Mater in Florida. The Affiliation Agreement is listed as providing “support for best practices while implementing this cross cultural curriculum model” (page 14), which seems to indicate that Mater Florida has the information and will be disseminating and providing back-end coaching. On page 15, it flips back to “MANN will also have the freedom to plan its own course scope and sequence”. During the course of the capacity interview, the team could not articulate what academic plan is already truly in place.
- It’s unclear at this point whether there is a plan for the school to expand to 9-12 at some point – the line “the current application is for a K-8 school” on page 10, coupled with an additional reference to high school on page 10, gives the impression that there is an unspoken plan to expand. As such an expansion would necessitate a formal amendment process and Authority board approval; such forward looking statements should be removed from the application to avoid any ambiguity regarding the approved grade levels.
- The applicant does not describe in detail how the proposed model will meet the Authority’s stated commitment to transformational change for the target community or the goal of double-digit gains for all demographic subgroups.
- There is insufficient detail on how some of the actions described will facilitate accelerated academic growth (e.g., the details about the Common Board Configuration on pages 11-12—a helpful, but ultimately superficial strategy in isolation). Details provided lacked a foundation in research that would define how they would contribute to high levels of academic achievement for the targeted populations of students (e.g. a reference to Reuters article on p11 and Sizer on p12 to describe the Sizer model).
- An assessment plan is not fully outlined for remediation (page 19 – “using real-time data from frequent assessment results”, without indicating which ones).
- There is mention of a nationally standardized achievement test but it is not identified by the applicant (page 22), and the CTF consistently does not illustrate what measurement tools they will be using (page 35 references “progress monitoring assessment monthly”, but does not mention what assessment). Elsewhere, the applicant mentions a menu of assessments, including STAR, DIBELS and TenMarks for Math. One key purpose of progress monitoring in a charter school is to inform the governing body of whether the school is on track to meet its academic targets. Consequently, the board should drive the selection of the assessments based on its performance management plan and priorities, the predictive value of the assessment, and the overarching goal of limiting testing, the number of tests, and their frequency to what is needed to inform those

decisions. Given the various assessments already required by NDE and SPCSA for various purposes, it is particularly important to be selective and strategic about these decisions. Given the importance of this information and the impact on the program, this is not an appropriate activity to delegate to staff or postpone to a future date.

- It is unclear why Beginning Spanish will be offered as an elective, if the plan is for the student body to have an already high Spanish-speaking population (page 18). Due on the baseline level of language proficiency assumed, the applicant should consider Spanish for Business or Academics or other content designed to increase the CALP level of native Spanish speakers so that they will be proficient in written and spoken academic and professional Spanish as well as in the more informal registers appropriate for social and family settings.
- The statement that the “board with input from the Pupil Promotion/Retention Team will adopt benchmarks and procedures for promotion at each grade level” (page 24) is confusing. The team does not articulate whether this is an individual child benchmark, made specifically when discussing promotion/retention, or a plan for pre-opening, to set the standards. Without a clear plan in place pre-opening, too many decisions could be made at the instance, hindering the team’s ability to do the job appropriately.
- Certain elements of the school’s proposed curriculum model have yet to be finalized, such as the specific texts that will be used (p14). It is clear that the applicant group proposes to continue the Mater model’s history on strong, autonomous school leaders who have significant discretion over academic programming and curriculum selection. The applicant indicated that principal will have significant input into curriculum selection and will have discretion to supplement or modify the board-selected curricula to ensure that he or she is fully invested in the academic program and that the program fully meets the new standards. This embrace of flexibility and autonomy is a hallmark of the Mater model, but it also raises replication risks which are mitigated by a standards-based approach to designing a school-wide curriculum which more agnostic to commercially available instructional materials. Given the recent selection of a school leader, the selected instructional materials should be proposed by the leader, approved by the governing body, submitted to the Authority, and codified into the academic plan prior to execution of the charter contract.
- Given that state-level data does not exist (as mentioned on pages 27-28), the proposed governing body did not articulate that there was a plan in place for establishing interim benchmarks in 2017-18. Now that baseline state data exists and the applicant will be selecting its assessments prior to execution of the contract, the applicant should also develop benchmarks which are predictive of strong year over year proficiency gains across all grades and subgroups.
- The applicant did not detail from whom they will receive trainings on leadership development and school improvement (page 29). To the degree that such training is being provided primarily by the EMO, the board development plan in the application should be supplemented with ongoing training by experienced third parties to avoid perceived or real conflicts of interest.
- The proposed instructional model assumes a high degree of teacher ability to understand and implement the model, but it is not clear that the supports are in place to bring their staff up to speed through direct training. (i.e. the ‘gradual release’ described in the math program on page 14).
- The discussion of the limits within Nevada state law as to the school’s ability to “enforce” parental involvement was both (a) confusingly worded and (b) sharply at odds with the rest of the positive vision this application puts forth (p.19). Requiring parents to provide a specific number of service hours or other support is antithetical to public education, as it effectively “costs” parents time and hence is a form of tuition. In contrast, strategies to encourage and support parental involvement, coupled with performance targets for staff accountable for building authentic relationships with

families, are both appropriate and encouraged. The current language should be removed, at minimum.

- While the school’s academic plan is specific regarding interim benchmarks for assessments to be used, focusing on increasing student’s GLE using STAR Math and STAR Literacy, among others, the school will need to develop a much deeper understanding of how these systems report data to establish clear benchmarks applicable to all students and that indicate expected progress at each grade level.
- The applicant indicates (p30) that a detailed plan for collecting and storing student-identifiable data will be provided in the Operation Plan’s Ongoing Operations Section, but the indicated response could not be located in this section. While the school’s proposed plans are provided in great detail in other sections and seem to address all statutory requirements, this errant cross reference should be edited for greater clarity and transparency. (see “Data Security” on pages 94-95).
- Given the high percentage of ELL students projected, one half-time staffer does not appear sufficient to service all children (page 39).
- The application describes a continuum of services plan that includes references to inclusion of students with severe intellectual disabilities in the general education setting and details peer assistance and online programs as supports for these students (p35). Such programs are costly and will not meet the needs of all such students. It is unclear that the budget reflects the additional staffing that will be needed to support this kind of inclusion (i.e. one-to-one aides, etc.) and how this could impact budget considerations, as a school cannot rely on peer assistance as anything other than a supplement to the support of a trained adult accountable for providing such services.
- The school’s plans could benefit from additional considerations and detail regarding (a) the implementation of the schoolwide PBS program (e.g., will the school use a token economy) and (b) age-appropriate approaches to developing school culture that reflect an understating of the differences between students in primary grades (k-3) and older students.
- The discussion of school culture model development does not explicitly connect to the school’s larger social justice goals and other elements of their proposed vision and mission statements. This presents a missed opportunity to develop a more distinctive and well-run school.
- Staffing levels may not be sufficient to support the school’s culture plans, especially in year 1. For example, the application describes the counselor as vital to the school design (listed in note 9 on page 44), but does not make it a position in years 1 and 2. That seems like a miscue, particularly when setting student culture for the first time in a startup environment.
- The applicant describes providing Mater of Northern Nevada staff with the “opportunity” to visit experienced Mater staff in other schools through a affiliation agreement through the EMO (44), but it is unclear from the narrative and budget if sufficient consideration has been given to how to operationalize this, including through budget considerations for substitutes, travel costs, etc.
- There is a minimal student discipline policy outlined, mainly just stating that the school will maintain a Positive Behavioral Support plan (page 45).
- While the description of the purpose and rationale for the proposed schoolwide PBS system is detailed, additional consideration should be given to how the program will be operationalized on a day-to-day basis (i.e., a process for identifying school ‘hot spots’ or establishment of consistent PBS values in student-friendly language).
- The discipline plan articulates a level of staffing that may not be sufficient in the initial years.

- The discipline model does not adequately connect to the school’s stated vision of social justice vis a vis underserved student populations, presenting a missed opportunity to align the day-to-day operations with the larger vision and mission.
- The CTF does not explain the rationale for providing less time for literacy in grades 4-5 (55 minutes for Reading, 1 hour for Writing/Language Arts), than in grades K-3 (2 hours for Reading/Language Arts, 25 minutes for Writing) (pages 51-52). This is especially important during the first few years, when many older students will enroll who require remediation.
- Important details regarding the school calendar and have yet to be finalized, such as whether school vacations will be shortened to facilitate the school’s commitment to professional development days throughout the year (p50). Clarity for these details will be essential for Mater families and for prospective leadership and staff. The state’s expectations for district and charter school administrators and support-staff to provide timely and accurate information do not take into account school vacations, as such staff in districts are 220 day employees.
- Sample teacher schedules were omitted.
- The school discusses providing a one-to-one aide for students with severe needs, such as they hypothetical example with Ruby detailed on pages 56-57, but indicates that a peer partner is an acceptable alternative, without specifying other options considered or the supports such a peer would need in order to successfully assist a peer with severe needs. Peer mentoring for high needs students is not a sufficient alternative to required supports.
- In some instances, some of the provided schedules under the previous section do not match the ‘day of’ narratives provided. The narratives and schedules should align.
- Parenting classes are only referenced as a service for families of ELL students (p58). It is unclear why other families are not eligible to receive this service.

*Essential Question: Will the academic program be a success?*

**Yes.** The academic program outlined in the application is consistent with the core elements of the successful Florida implementation. The application, capacity, interview, and follow-up discussion with members of the applicant team effectively articulate an academic program which can be successful with northern Nevada students. The applicant and the model have demonstrated capacity for continued academic growth and a clear focus on continuous improvement. To that end, staff has identified areas of improvement which should be addressed by the applicant to the satisfaction of staff following board approval and prior to the issuance of the charter contract.

Should the board approve the application based on the totality of evidence related to all three domains, staff proposes to work with the applicant to address the areas for improvement prior to the formal issuance of a charter contract by the Director based on this approval.

# Organization

## *Performance Data*

For applicants seeking to replicate an existing model—whether as a direct charter management organization applicant, a committee to form partnering with a non-profit or for-profit education management organization, or a committee to form which seeks to independently replicate, consideration must be given to the organizational track record of the model. For models with a current Nevada presence, the primary criteria will be performance within the Nevada legal and regulatory context. For models which are not currently implemented in Nevada, the criteria will be performance within the context of the home state’s legal and regulatory context.

Mater Academy of Nevada, the southern Nevada charter holder implementing the model, has had no Notices of Concern or Notices of Breach for organizational performance. The current charter holder is viewed as collaborative and responsive to feedback and inquiries.

Conclusion: The proposed organizational model has a strong track record of organizational performance in Nevada and has been effectively adapted to meet the needs of the Nevada context while continuing to deliver strong academic results.

## *Areas of Strength:*

As noted above, the applicant has selected a model with a strong track record of organizational success. The applicant has a strong understanding of what it takes to oversee an effective and accountable organization and has articulated systems to oversee the implementation of the model. In response to feedback and areas of concern, the applicant has amply demonstrated a growth mindset and a capacity and desire for continuous improvement.

Specific Strengths include:

- In most cases,, the staffing tables on pages 64-65 seem to indicate a realistic understanding of leadership roles and how they will grow as the school expands.
- The staff recruitment plan specifies steps that will be taken to advertise open positions on a local as well as national level, as well as specific roles and responsibilities for hiring and training that will be shared between the EMO and the school.
- No current plans are in place for expansion, thereby obviating the need for hiring into network positions (p 63).
- The staffing plan presented is aligned to the proposed vision and mission for the school and it indicate appropriate staffing for the student population to be served when the school expands in later years.

- The proposed Human Resources plans are detailed and indicate a high level of awareness of statutory requirements, such as for hiring and dismissal of personnel (p69). In addition, the school will likely benefit from their relationship with the EMO, which has demonstrated ability to support multiple schools under the Nevada’s legal and regulatory framework.
- The proposed support plan is detailed and highlights several areas in which support will be provided, such as for curriculum implementation and supporting students with special needs (p.71).
- The enrollment discussion demonstrates a generally broad understanding of Nevada statutory requirements and details a communications strategy that will operate across multiple marketing strategies to help with recruitment, as well as a commitment to ensuring that all potential students and families receive equal opportunities to learn about the proposed school.
- The proposed recruitment plan also builds on a close connection to the Boys & Girls Club and other community resources that will no doubt aid in their efforts (p81).
- The proposed Board Governance plans demonstrate understanding of charter governance and a commitment to local representation from a broad section of the community they serve (pp84-85). There are no potential for conflicts of interest between the current Committee to Form (CTF) members who will likely transition to Board membership. There is a clear delineation of responsibilities between the Board and school leadership.
- The governance plan proposes a clear process for resolving potential objections from Mater students or families, with the Board not becoming involved directly until the last stage of the delineated process.
- The proposed incubation year plan provides a detailed snapshot of planned activities in the 2016-2017 school year to support a school launch for the 2017-2018 school year.
- The application includes a discussion of training for the school leader by the EMO and to begin immediately upon hire. The budget includes a stipend to cover work done by a Principal hired during the incubation year, with no incurred costs for work done by EMO personnel. (p89)
- The narrative indicates that the CTF identified Mater Academy, Inc., based on their demonstrated track record of working with similar students to the proposed target population (p89) and partnered with Academic Nevada as an EMO based on the range of services they would provide and for their perceived value as compared to other EMO services providers. No indication is given that Academic Nevada, which partners with a national EMO services network, will contract with additional providers for the services outlined herein, aside from basic services like electricity, internet, software tools, such as Infinite Campus, etc.
- The proposed management contract details a variety of services to be provided to the school, as well as some timelines for said services (p255). The proposed contract also does not seem to contain leverage upon the school by the EMO to facilitate renewal by school at the end of the contract term, and includes language to give school the opportunity to immediately terminate contract without undue costs beyond those related to services already provided. (p256-257) The

contract also indicates that school funds will not be used by the EMO to support school programs outside of the state of Nevada.

- The proposed services plan covers all of the required areas (i.e., transportation, food services, etc.), and even includes a detailed plan for how the Board will handle the school's food programs given its unique relationship to the SPCSA in terms of needing to become their own School Food Authority in order to participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) (p269).
- The proposal details plans for school health and nursing services, general purchasing procedures as well as facilities expenses. Additionally, the proposed plan specifies steps required by school staff to trigger payment of justified expenses by the EMO, with associated oversight by the Board (pp270-271).
- The application outlines a plan to occupy space within the Boys & Girls Club of Truckee Meadows, at least during the school's startup years. Such a relationship could potentially benefit the school by helping it establish connects to families of potential enrollees and other community resources. The narrative also outlines a plan for financing projected tenant improvements.
- The applicant addresses the requirements for ongoing operations, some of which are dependent on indentation of a site for occupancy, such as the Boys & Girls Club facility. The narrative also provides detailed plans to purchase required insurance premiums at or above those required by Nevada code.

#### *Areas for Improvement:*

- Because a leader was not identified at the time of the written application (but was between the application and capacity interview), it remained unclear what specific competencies the team was looking for in a principal (attachment 4, page 119). The CTF could not articulate which strategic vision pieces are important to the leader, other than leaning on past successes (albeit in slightly different contexts).
- Given that the CTF is moving forward with replicating the Mater Florida model, it would have been beneficial to understand which metrics are used in Florida to determine school grades (attachment 3, page 117).
- Based on the narrative, at least two of the members of the Committee to Form currently serve in some capacity on a committee for the Boys & Girls Club of Truckee Meadows, the likely provider of a facility for the proposed school, and this may create the appearance of a conflict of interest, especially if Mater CTF members have some degree of financial interest in B&G through their committee roles. While this concern was addressed in the capacity interview and seems to be less of a problem area based on the detail provided, it is important that that information be included in the revised narrative.
- The discussion of the role of the EMO in supporting the school is underdeveloped and lacks sufficient details.
- The competencies in the provided job descriptions do not sufficiently articulate difference between essential skills and behaviors for a startup non-profit school model verse those required for running a developed school. Similarly, some elements of the competencies appear more suitable for a principal in a larger district context versus what is necessary to drive performance and achieve excellence in a stand-alone school.



- The proposed staffing tables and associated narrative do not explicitly state an intent to comply with statutory requirements of see NAC 388.150, and indicates on page 68 a proposed staffing level of 1:25 for grades K through 5, which contradicts the expected staffing level of 21:1 in Kindergarten without any mention of the waiver provision in the CSR statute.
- The information provided indicates several key 0.5 positions, which can be difficult to realize in the real world of schools.
- There is not a real explanation or breakdown of the people from the EMO who will be directly supporting the school, versus those whose salaries are supported by the management fee. It is unclear, for example, whether there is really a necessity for 3 bookkeepers and a procurement director for 1 school (page 64).
- The supports outlined for students who require specialized services (ELL and special education) appears small, as well as potentially difficult to staff, since the school intends to hire half-time people (page 64).
- There is insufficient detail about the instructional professional development (page 71) and the evaluation tool (attachment 6, page 126) being provided by Mater Academy.
- The proposed professional support plan could benefit from consideration of additional resources available to support professional growth of staff, including the broad body of research and tools related to fostering purposeful Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).
- Little indication was given as to how recruitment strategies will be adapted to address the needs of families whose home language is other than English, such as through translation of important documents and developing relationships with community based organizations that may be able to help.
- The applicant indicated that open enrollment will run from 1/9/17 to 2/28/17 – this window of two months comes during the application evaluation period, and does not seem sufficient for public notice to get to the planned enrollment figures.
- There’s no articulated plan for staff surplussing if the school is unable to hit the minimum enrollment numbers page 82), and what plan – if any –there is to add staff if the team hits maximum capacity (page 84).
- The enrollment targets may be difficult to attain given the timeline prior to launch absent a strong advertising program.
- Additional supports for Board development beyond those provided by the EMO do not seem to have been considered.
- The answers on a few of the board members’ essays do not seem to be very robust or evocative of wanting to change the landscape (attachment 10 – page 164). This is a missed opportunity to demonstrate commitment to this project.
- The team has not yet outlined what data the board will use to “determine the principal’s success” (page 85).
- Consistent with best practice, trainings on “fiscal management for non profit organizations” (page 86) should occur before the school opens. It is unclear what plans the board has to obtain objective, third party professional development between approval and school opening.
- One member of the committee to form marked “not applicable” on question 5 of the board questionnaire. Given that the question pertains to the school’s relationship with the educational management organization, this oversight should be remedied.
- Another member of the committee to form mentions adequate performance. Given the performance expectations for charter schools, merely adequate performance is insufficient to achieve the desired targets, as that would effectively mean the school is doing no better than its surrounding schools.

- The incubation year budget indicates a \$12,000 stipend has been made available, while the budget spreadsheet indicates \$6,500 has been budgeted ('School Inputs' tab, line 1417). No other startup expenses are indicated in the budget workbook, and the 'Budget Summary' tab indicates \$20,500 for 'General Operating Expenses' on line 30 but \$0 under 'Personnel' on 29.
- The description of the relationship with Mater Academy, Inc. seems to change frequently. There is discussion of them being involved in professional development only in some places, but it is also noted that they provide on curriculum design. Consequently, it is unclear if the parties are combining curriculum into PD plans? The CTF could not articulate why they wouldn't want to take the proven curriculum wholesale (page 89) instead of going through the expense and trial and error of developing or purchasing additional resources.
- The contract language indicates that the EMO will provide the Board with "due written notice" of expenses occurred, but does not indicate the specific times for reporting for certain important items (see section on fees/costs that may be deferred by the EMO until the following year, as detailed in item #25 of the proposed contract. The contract specifies these expenses will be duly noted in the school's financial records with no clear indication given as to how and when they will be noted and how these developments will be reported to the school Board (p258).
- The reimbursement schedule from school to EMO for services, outlined in item #22, Base Compensation, details a payment of \$450 per each unit of student Full Time Enrollment"; no information was provided to assess the reasonableness and competitiveness of this rate for Nevada charter schools.
- The proposal does not appear to indicate what steps were taken to ensure that budgeted costs for essential services, such as for IT, were determined so as to ensure good value for the school. The school should create a policy and procedure whereby it seeks such information from EMO as needed when approving key expenses and contracts.
- The application indicates that the CTF is currently working with the B&G Club to determine specific costs for maintenance of the proposed facility as a school and to determine primary responsibility for these costs; additional information regarding specific renovations that would be necessary would help illustrate the scope of cost for the needed renovations in any revisions.
- The narrative does not specifically reference requirements that will need to be addressed prior to occupancy, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (pp 95-96).

*Essential Question: Will the school be an effective and accountable organization?*

**Yes.** The organizational program outlined in the application is consistent with the core elements of the other successful implementations. The application, capacity, interview, and follow-up discussion with members of the applicant team effectively articulate an organizational plan which can be successful with northern Nevada students. The applicant group has embraced feedback and committed to additional charter school board development training following charter approval to supplement their existing expertise.

## Fiscal

The applicant budget is designed primarily as a performance task to evaluate the applicant's ability to design a budget which accurately reflects the Nevada context, contains reasonable expense assumptions which are correctly calculated, and incorporates the personnel and operating costs specific to the academic model. While many of these assumptions and priorities will serve as the basis for the operating budget adopted by the governing body, is not intended to contractually bind the applicant to a specific set of revenues or expenditures.

### *Performance Data*

For applicants seeking to replicate an existing model—whether as a direct charter management organization applicant, a committee to form partnering with a non-profit or for-profit education management organization, or a committee to form which seeks to independently replicate, consideration must be given to the financial track record of the model. For models with a current Nevada presence, the primary criteria will be performance within the Nevada legal and regulatory context. For models which are not currently implemented in Nevada, the criteria will be performance within the context of the home state's legal and regulatory context.

The applicant provided financial data, including audited financial statements, for other schools implementing the academic program and for other schools which receive financial management services from Academica Nevada, the applicant's chosen education management organization. Staff also supplemented the supplied data with a review of previously produced financial frameworks for the southern Nevada Mater implementation and other Nevada charter schools which partner with Academica Nevada.

The most recent independent audit report for Mater Academy of Nevada (the Las Vegas charter holder) shows that their financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the respective financial position of the governmental activities, the aggregate remaining fund information, and the respective changes in financial position in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America. The auditor's consideration of internal control over financial reporting did not identify any deficiencies in internal control considered to be material weaknesses. Multiple years of similarly strong audit results were furnished for Pinecrest Academy of Nevada and Somerset Academy of Nevada, two other Nevada charter holders which contract with Academica Nevada for financial management services. As the Florida-based Mater Academy model receives services from a separate, Academica-affiliated financial management company which is legally and operationally separate from the Nevada finance office, the review of audit results from those schools was not conducted.

Conclusion: The proposed financial model has a strong track record of academic performance in both Florida and Nevada and has been effectively adapted to meet the needs of the Nevada context while continuing to deliver strong academic results.

### *Areas of Strength:*

- The financial plan is detailed and addresses statutory requirements with the exception of a detail noted below under 'Weaknesses.'
- There is appropriate separation of financial responsibilities.

### *Areas of Weakness:*

- The budget spreadsheet indicates an operating deficit for the proposed planning year (2016-2017) of up to \$20,500 (see 'Budget Summary' tab, line 37), and the attached budget narrative indicates that Academica will not charge the school for personnel costs associated with the start-up phase (p 89). While further reading specifies that the school has agreed to cover these startup costs through a loan from Academica to be repayed at a 5% annual interest rate over two years with no prepayment penalties, (p.292) it would appear that this contradicts the earlier attestation on page 89 that "Academica will not charge the school for any personnel costs incurred during the start-up phase." The narrative should be modified to either clarify the arrangement or provide a appropriate explanation for the discrepancy.

### *Essential Question: Will the school be fiscally viable.*

**Yes.** The budget and operating plan outlined in the application is consistent with the core elements of the successful Mater Las Vegas implementation and other Academica Nevada clients. The application and capacity interview effectively demonstrated a strong business plan which will result in a financially viable school.