



STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Board
FROM: Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing
SUBJECT: Mater Academy of Nevada - Charter Renewal Recommendation
DATE: November 1, 2019

1. Background

Mater Academy of Nevada has submitted an application to renew its charter contract as the current charter contract for Mater Academy of Nevada expires on June 30, 2020. The school currently operates two campuses in Las Vegas:

- Mountain Vista campus, serving grades Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade
- Bonanza campus, serving grades Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade

After a thorough review of the historical data and charter renewal application, staff recommends that the Authority approve the charter renewal of Mater Academy of Nevada for a five-year term, beginning July 1, 2020.

2. The Process Related to Renewal Applications and the Standards Under Which an Application for Renewal of a Charter Contract Will Be Granted

The first step in the renewal process is the submission of a renewal report by SPCSA staff to the charter school.¹ Specifically, on or before June 30 immediately preceding the final school year prior to expiration of a charter school's charter contract, the SPCSA submits to the governing body a report regarding renewal. This document can be found within the supporting documentation for the item.

¹ Charter school regulations provide for an expedited and streamlined renewal process for high-performing charter schools. Generally, charter schools qualifying for expedited renewal review are those charter schools that are consistently rated as four-and five-star schools under the NSPF and have received no notices of concern or notices of breach for academic, organizational or financial performance. See [NAC 388A.415\(2\)](#).

The renewal report summarizes the performance of the charter school under the terms of the charter contract, identifies any deficiencies related to performance of the charter school that might lead to non-renewal of the charter contract, sets forth the requirements for the renewal application, and identifies the criteria that the sponsor will apply in making a determination on the application for renewal. The charter school may submit a response to the renewal report. [See NRS 388A.285\(1\) and \(2\)](#).

Next, the governing body of the charter school must submit a written notice of intent to submit an application for renewal to the SPCSA 45 days prior to submitting a renewal application. [See NAC 388A.415\(1\)](#).

In regard to the renewal application, the window to submit the actual renewal application is October 1 through October 15. [See NRS 388A.285\(3\)](#) and [NAC 388A.415\(1\)](#). The application for renewal must include, without limitation:

- (a) The requirements for the application identified by the sponsor in the performance report prepared by the sponsor;
- (b) A description of the academic, financial and organizational vision and plans for the charter school for the next charter term;
- (c) Any information or data that the governing body of the charter school determines supports the renewal of the charter contract in addition to the information contained in the performance report prepared by the sponsor and any response submitted by the governing body; and
- (d) A description of any improvements to the charter school already undertaken or planned.

[See NRS 388A.285\(3\)](#).

Decisions to renew a charter school contract or deny a renewal application are made and based upon the Nevada's charter school statutes and regulations related to charter school renewal ([see NRS 388A.285](#)) and the collective record of a school's academic, financial, organizational, findings from the site evaluation process, and all data and information provided by the Department of Education.

Note that no factor may be given more weight than the academic performance of pupils at the charter school, and the academic performance of the charter school is the touchstone of any renewal decision. [See NAC 388A.415\(10\)\(b\)](#).

In making its recommendation to the Authority regarding a renewal application, SPCSA staff considers the past performance of the charter school, including information contained in the application for renewal, any site evaluations, academic achievement of pupils, and any other information that is determined to be relevant to whether the charter contract should be renewed. [See NAC 388A.415\(9\)](#).

When determining whether to grant an application for renewal of a charter contract, the Authority Board considers the foregoing factors, any other information that the Authority Board determines is relevant to whether the charter contract should be renewed. The Authority Board will consider the "totality of the evidence" presented to it when making a renewal decision. [See NAC 388A.415\(9\)](#). Again, as stated above, no factor is to be given more weight than the academic performance of pupils at the charter school. ² [See NAC 388A.415\(10\)\(b\)](#).

At its sole discretion, the Authority Board may renew a charter contract for a term of three (3) to ten (10) years, or, alternatively, deny the renewal application. [See Senate Bill 451 \(2019\)](#) and [NAC 388A.415\(11\)](#). Note that a variable term length upon renewal was discretion afforded to the Authority under Senate Bill 451 during the 2019 Legislative Session.

If a charter contract is renewed, that Authority Board may include a provision for a high stakes review during the term of the renewed charter contract which may result in the termination of the renewed charter contract prior to its expiration, or renew the charter contract and include any additional provisions, requirements or

² [See NAC 388A.415\(10\)](#). With regard to a second renewal, the Authority is required to place an even greater weight on academic performance than was assigned to it on the first renewal.

restrictions which the State Public Charter School Authority determines are appropriate. See [NAC 388A.415\(b\) and \(c\)](#).

3. Analysis

Academics

Mater Academy of Nevada currently offers instruction at the elementary and middle school levels across two campuses: Mountain Vista and Bonanza. NSPF results for the 2018 – 2019 school year were released in mid-September. The Mountain Vista campus earned a 4 star rating for the elementary program and a 5 star rating for the middle school while the Bonanza campus earned a 3 star rating for the elementary school while the middle school earned a 4 star rating. While performance in the most recent year is strong, there have been some academic performance concerns in prior years.

According to the NSPF ratings for the 2017 – 2018 school year, the elementary school at the Mountain Vista campus was rated as a 3 star program while the middle school was rated as a 4 star program. At the Bonanza campus, the elementary school was rated as a 1 star program while the middle school was rated as a 3star program according to the 2017 – 2018 NSPF ratings.

As noted in the NSPF guidance document, a 1 star elementary school program identifies a school that has not met the state’s standard for performance. Students and subgroups are inconsistent in achieving performance standards. A 3 star school identifies an adequate school that has met the state’s standard for performance. The all-students group has met expectations for academic achievement or growth. Subgroups meet expectations for academic achievement or growth with little exception; however, no group is far below standard. A 4 star program recognizes a commendable school that has performed well for all students and subgroups. A 4 star school demonstrates satisfactory to strong academic performance for all students. A 5 star program recognizes a superior school that exceeds expectations for all students and subgroups on every indicator category with little or no exception.

Due to underperformance at Mater Academy in 2017 and 2018, the Authority issued separate Notices of Concern in both years, respectively. In 2017, this notice was issued to the entire network at the elementary level whereas the 2018 notice applied specifically to the Bonanza campus as NSPF ratings were campus-specific that year and moving forward.

To summarize, the school is on a positive academic trajectory according to the NSPF results summarized above and provided in the table below:

Year	NSPF Rating
2019	Mountain Vista Campus elementary: 4 stars Mountain Vista Campus middle: 5 stars Bonanza Campus elementary: 3 stars Bonanza Campus middle: 4 stars
2018	Mountain Vista Campus elementary: 3 stars Mountain Vista Campus middle: 4 stars Bonanza Campus elementary: 1 star Bonanza Campus middle: 3 stars
2017	Elementary: 2 stars Middle: 3 stars
2016	No Star Ratings published by the Nevada Department of Education
2015	Elementary: Not Rated (new school) Middle: Not Rated (new school)

Organizational

Until the Authority approved a more robust organizational framework this past summer, the previous version of the SPCSA Organizational Framework was a rolling evaluation of school organizational performance. Based on verified complaints and spot checks of school organizational performance, the Authority issues Notices of Concern or Notices of Breach for Organizational Performance. Schools which have not received such notices are presumed to be in Good Standing. Mater Academy of Nevada has not received a Notice of Breach or Notice of Concern under this framework during the current charter term.

SPCSA Organizational Programmatic Audit Findings

2018	Good Standing
2017	Good Standing
2016	Good Standing
2015	Good Standing

Financial

The SPCSA Financial Framework monitors a variety of indicators of financial health. Mater Academy of Nevada has a history of clean audit findings, but performance against certain standards within the previous financial framework resulted in the Authority issuing the school a Notice of Concern in 2017 due to financial underperformance during the 2015 – 2016 school year. The school was returned to good standing the following year.

SPCSA Financial Programmatic Audit Findings

2018	Good Standing
2017	Good Standing
2016	Notice of Concern
2015	Good Standing

4. Recommendation: Approve Renewal

Despite the issuance of a multiple Notices of Concern due to financial and academic underperformance, Mater Academy of Nevada has rectified these issues in the eyes of staff. This is best exemplified in its return to good standing as a result of the 2018 – 2019 NSPF ratings which show commendable academic improvement. It is also noteworthy that the school has served historically underperforming subgroups well since its inception. SPCSA staff is confident the school will continue its current trajectory and performance outcomes. They currently have strong enrollment and are financially viable.

This upward trajectory supports staff’s recommendation that the Authority renew Mater Academy of Nevada for a five-year term, beginning July 1, 2020.

School Demographic since 2017

Mater Academy- Bonanza

Year	Total Enrollment ^[1]	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
17-18	760	1.1%	9.5%	9.2%	77.5%	0.4%	2.1%	0.3%	6.8%	52.2%	80.3%
18-19	906	0.9%	9.3%	7.8%	78.6%	0.3%	2.4%	0.7%	8.9%	43.3%	86.0%

Mater Academy- Mt. Vista

Year	Total Enrollment ^[1]	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
17-18	996	0.8%	9.0%	10.2%	75.5%	0.1%	4.3%	0.3%	6.8%	52.2%	80.3%
18-19	1056	1.2%	7.8%	8.1%	78.6%	0.2%	3.6%	0.5%	8.4%	46.0%	100.0%

A – Asian

B – Black

C – Caucasian

H – Hispanic

I – American Indian/Alaskan Native

M – Mixed/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

Additionally, Mater Academy projects strong continued enrollment through a renewed charter term.

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-2026
Planned Total Enrollment	3078	3463	3809	4079	4139	4254
Grades Served	PK – 9 ³	PK – 10	PK – 11	PK – 12	PK – 12	PK – 12

^[1] Enrollment as of Validation Day each year (October 1).

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³ Mater Academy has applied to expand to a high school beginning in the 2020 – 2021 school year. SPCSA staff plans to bring a recommendation forward to the Authority in December 2019.