

Charter School Application Report

# Girls Athletic Leadership School (G.A.L.S.)

*Recommendation from the Summer 2019 Charter Application Cycle*

## General Information

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Proposed Name</b>                | Girls Athletic Leadership School (G.A.L.S.)   |
| <b>Proposed Mission</b>             | To provide high quality education as measured by 4 and 5 stars in a supportive environment that fosters the academic mastery and personal development necessary for every girl to become a powerful advocate for herself and a leader of her community. |
| <b>Proposed CMO</b>                 | Girls Athletic Leadership Schools, Inc. (G.A.L.S.)  |
| <b>Proposed Grade Configuration</b> | Opening: 6 <sup>th</sup> grade<br>Full-Scale: 6 <sup>th</sup> - 8 <sup>th</sup> grade   |
| <b>Proposed Opening</b>             | August 2020   |
| <b>Proposed Location</b>            | 89104, 89102, 89107, 89101 and 89169, 89119, 89120 and 89109 zip codes  |

## Process/Key Dates for G.A.L.S.

- New Charter Application Training
- March 15, 2019 – Notice of Intent is received
- July 15, 2019 – Application is received
- August 7, 2019 – AB 462 Addendum is received
- October 31, 2019 - Capacity Interview is conducted
- December 17, 2019 – Recommendation is presented

# Planned Enrollment Chart

|              | <u>2020-21</u> | <u>2021-22</u> | <u>2022-23</u> | <u>2023-24</u> | <u>2024-25</u> | <u>2025-26</u> |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| <u>K</u>     |                |                |                |                |                |                |
| <u>1</u>     |                |                |                |                |                |                |
| <u>2</u>     |                |                |                |                |                |                |
| <u>3</u>     |                |                |                |                |                |                |
| <u>4</u>     |                |                |                |                |                |                |
| <u>5</u>     |                |                |                |                |                |                |
| <u>6</u>     | 135            | 135            | 135            | 135            | 135            | 135            |
| <u>7</u>     | 0              | 135            | 135            | 135            | 135            | 135            |
| <u>8</u>     | 0              | 0              | 135            | 135            | 135            | 135            |
| <u>9</u>     |                |                |                |                |                |                |
| <u>10</u>    |                |                |                |                |                |                |
| <u>11</u>    |                |                |                |                |                |                |
| <u>12</u>    |                |                |                |                |                |                |
| <b>Total</b> | 135            | 270            | 405            | 405            | 405            | 405            |

## Executive Summary and Recommendation

The review committee and SPCSA staff find that the Girls Athletic Leadership School (G.A.L.S.) charter application exhibits shortcomings within three of the four components of the submitted application. The review committee and SPCSA staff find that the proposed academic, organizational and financial plans do not meet the standards as outlined in the charter application rubric. Because this is a replication of an existing model, results of the original school are scrutinized as past performance is an indicator of future success. A chief deficiency of the proposed school is the relatively weak, recent track record with EL students and those that qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) at the flagship, all-girls middle school that the school is seeking to replicate. These academic performance gaps exist in the exact subgroups underscored in the SPCSA Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment. Coupled with the school’s proposed location and projected student demographic, it is not yet clear that the model will be successful as proposed. Moreover, during the capacity interview, the applicant struggled to detail how recent results of the original school and performance gaps informed the academic model of the proposed school in Las Vegas.

Deficiencies also exist with regard to the proposed staffing plan as it does not appear to fully support the model as presented and does not present a robust plan to serve underperforming demographic subgroups such as EL and FRL students. These negatively impact the proposed budget, which is not fully responsive to serving all students well.

Lastly, there are outstanding reservations about the proposed leadership team’s track

record in working with at-risk students and the proposed agreement between the proposed Board and the Charter Management Organization (CMO). The presented service agreement contains provisions that call into question the authority of the local Board.

The review committee and SPCSA staff find that the Girls Athletic Leadership School charter school academy has satisfactorily met the Geographic component of the Academic Needs within the SPCSA Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment. The applicant demonstrates an intent to create a 4 and 5-star school in a community that has multiple 1 and 2-star schools, and also provides a number of Intent to Enroll forms as well as community letters of support that are tied directly to the proposed community in which the school intends to locate.

For these major reasons, in addition to those outlined throughout this document, staff's recommendation is to deny the Girls Athletic Leadership School charter application.

***Proposed motion:*** *Deny the Girls Athletic Leadership School charter application as submitted during the 2019 Summer Application Cycle based on a finding that the applicant has failed to satisfy the requirements contained in NRS 388A.249(3).*

## Summary of Application Section Ratings

The State Public Charter School Authority is required to assemble a team of reviewers and conduct a thorough evaluation of the application, which includes an in-person interview with the applicant designed to elicit any necessary clarification or additional information about the proposed charter school. The SPCSA is required to adhere to its policies and practices, namely the application guidance, training and rubric, regarding evaluating charter applications. Ultimately, the SPCSA must base its determination on the documented evidence collected through the application process.

Rating options for each section are Meets the Standard; Approaches the Standard; Does not Meet the Standard. These are defined as follows:

- **Meets the Standard:** The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It addresses the topic with specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation; presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; and inspires confidence in the applicant's capacity to carry out the plan effectively in a way which will result in a 4- or 5-star school.
- **Approaches the Standard:** The response meets the criteria in many respects but lacks detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.
- **Does Not Meet the Standard:** The response is undeveloped or incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant's ability to carry it out.

The rubric is broken into four major sections as outlined below and detailed descriptions of each rubric item can be found in the full rubric located on the SPCSA Application website:

[http://charterschools.nv.gov/OpenASchool/Application\\_Packet/](http://charterschools.nv.gov/OpenASchool/Application_Packet/)

### Meeting the Need: Meets the Standard

- Targeted Plan
  - Meets the Standard
- Parent and Community Involvement
  - Meets the Standard

### Academic Plan: Approaches the Standard

- Mission and Vision
  - Meets the Standard
- Transformational Change
  - Approaches the Standard

- Curriculum & Instructional Design
  - **Approaches the Standard**
- Distance Education Requirements
  - **N/A**
- Pre-K Requirements
  - **N/A**
- High School Graduation Requirements
  - **N/A**
- Driving for Results
  - **Approaches the Standard**
- At Risk Students and Special Populations
  - **Does Not Meet the Standard**
- School Structure (Culture)
  - **Approaches the Standard**
- School Structure (Student Discipline)
  - **Approaches the Standard**
- School Structure (Calendar and Schedule)
  - **Approaches the Standard**
- A Day in the Life & Scenarios
  - **Approaches the Standard**

#### **Operations Plan: Does Not Meet the Standard**

- Leadership Team
  - **Approaches the Standard**
- Leadership for Expansion (Experienced Operators Only)
  - **N/A**
- Staffing
  - **Does Not Meet the Standard**
- Human Resources
  - **Does Not Meet the Standard**

- Scale Strategy (Experienced Operators Only)
  - N/A
- Student Recruitment and Enrollment
  - **Meets the Standard**
- Board Governance
  - **Approaches the Standard**
- Incubation Year Development
  - **Approaches the Standard**
- EMO Relationships and School Management Contracts (If Applicable)
  - **Does Not Meet the Standard**
- Services
  - **Approaches the Standard**
- Facilities
  - **Meets the Standard**
- Ongoing Operations
  - **Approaches the Standard**

**Financial Plan: Approaches the Standard**

## Meeting the Need Section

The Committee to Form (CTF) articulates that the proposed school aims to satisfy the geographic need within the SPCSA Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment by creating a 3, 4 or 5-star school to intentionally serve students that are currently attending a 1- or 2-star school. Statements during the capacity interview reinforced the applicant's commitment to locate in a community with a substantial number of 1 and 2-star schools. The CTF also shared that of the Intent to Enroll forms collected, over half come from the immediate community. This signals that community engagement and outreach efforts have been underway for some time and that families are supportive of the proposed model.

### Areas of Strength

- The applicant provided a clear description in the application about how the proposed school would meet the need, specifically the geographic need as described in the SPCSA's Demographic and Needs Assessment. The applicant proposes to locate in an area of Las Vegas where 15 schools in the surrounding area are all one or two star schools. This commitment was reaffirmed during the capacity interview.
- During the capacity interview, the applicant noted that the community in which the school proposes to locate has a high dropout rate, which is another need as describe in the Demographic and Needs Assessment. The Committee to Form believes that the school aims to equip students with the skills to succeed and persist in school.
- The proposed location is close to UNLV which is an important component of their community engagement plan. Additionally, the CTF has identified a temporary facility, proposing to locate within the Boys and Girls Club. This is a well-established organization in the area that confirms that the applicant team has engaged with the community.
- During the capacity interview, the applicant substantiated that a large number of the Intent to Enroll forms received thus far come from the immediate community, a sign that the Committee to Form has been actively working to build their name, brand and reputation in the area. This also reaffirms their commitment to serving this community.
- The CTF stated that door-to-door outreach is underway to engage families as well as meetings at the community center in the neighborhood. Additionally, the applicant recognizes that that the community has a large immigrant population, so there are efforts to establish relationships with key community organizations to ensure the school is seen as a trusted provider in the neighborhood.

### Areas of Concern

- During the capacity interview, the CTF explained that the proposed enrollment plan has evolved and no longer intends to offer preferential enrollment to students living within a two-mile radius, citing constraints under the Charter School Program Grant. This may have an adverse impact on the ability to enroll young women at the school and should be communicated to interested families, but the school remains committed to continuing outreach to prospective applicants within the two-mile radius.

## Academic Section

The academic component of the application details the unique, single-sex school model approach that the school seeks to implement. Additionally, the academic plan outlines the accountability metrics that will be used to ensure adherence to the proposed model. When reviewing the results from other affiliate schools within the GALS network, specifically for at-risk populations, significant concerns arose about specific steps the network and local team would take to prevent similar performance issues in Las Vegas. The plan does not address how past results, specifically for at-risk student subgroups, fully informed the proposed academic plan for the Las Vegas school. There are also capacity questions about effectively implementing the model, especially in the proposed community in which the school intends to locate.

### Areas of Strength

- The proposed school has strong mission and vision statements. Both in the application and during the capacity interview, the Committee to Form clearly articulates that it will be open to all students, and will not discriminate based on gender or gender identity.
- Within the application, the applicant provides research that supports a single-sex model approach to education. Additionally, the application outlines a number of key pieces within their instructional model to support students, including: exit tickets, academic assessments, team meetings and customized interventions.
- The Committee to Form clarified during the capacity interview that the GALS network has two different types of schools: service schools and model-inspired schools. The proposed school is a service school, one that will contract for services and implements components of the model. The CMO explained that historical data indicates that services schools outperform model-inspired schools, thus supporting the model as proposed.

### Areas of Concern

- The applicant spoke to the recent academic performance results in Denver, Colorado during the capacity interview. The school is currently rated as “Accredited on Watch” by Denver Public Schools which is defined as a “school that demonstrates results in some areas and/or has several areas in need of improvement.” While the answers were clear, they raised questions about the proposed school in Las Vegas because the proposed school seeks to serve an at-risk population. Specifically, the applicant stated that the GALS MS in Denver struggled in the various academic subgroup areas (ELL, SPED), and acknowledged that there is work to do in order to eliminate performance gaps and improve against authorizer standards. The School Performance Framework report published by Denver Public Schools rates the school as “Does Not Meet Expectations” in the area of “Academic Gaps.” The CMO representative spoke to ongoing changes in the model in the DPS context, but there was no concrete plan of action presented about how the network would work to improve the Denver schools’ performance.
- The CTF was unable to identify specific, detailed path forward here in Las Vegas that reflects the academic challenges in affiliate schools in Denver. The proposed Head of School stated that she would make curriculum available to all staff which is different from the other schools that she had seen, but little else was offered. This statement also

differed from what was described in the application.

- When asked about how the school would determine the academic performance goals for the school, the applicant stated that they would look at the experience of other schools in the network, particularly the school in Los Angeles. While this is valuable context, the applicant did not speak to performance goals against the SPCSA academic framework or of performance goals compared to traditional, neighborhood schools. The applicant did not provide clear and compelling evidence that it would set strong academic performance goals for its school that would translate to success under this framework.
- During the capacity interview, there was some confusion amongst the Committee to Form about how the GALS model at the proposed school would be altered to accommodate to students that are males, but identify as females. This concern is compounded when considering that there are some outstanding questions regarding the roles of the CMO and local board. It is not clear that the Committee to Form has a clear grasp of the proposed academic program.

## Operations Section

There were a few strengths identified within this component, namely the applicant's firm plan for a first-year facility along with a contingency and demonstration that the school has community support from prospective students and parents in the form of letters of support from the community as well as intent to enroll forms. Ultimately, however, there were a number of identified concerns that suggest a lack of preparedness to open. The staffing plan, including proposed salaries, raises concerns from both capacity and teacher quality perspectives. The review committee has serious questions about the plan to effectively provide instruction to at-risk students with limited full-time staff, contracted services and graduate level students. The Master-Service Agreement, as proposed, also leads to apprehension about accountability structures and the ultimate authority of the proposed governing body.

### Areas of Strength

- The Committee to Form clarified during the capacity interview that the proposed location for the school in year 1 would be a temporary location. The applicant team further clarified that they are in close communication with representatives from the Boys and Girls club, and are confident that this facility will come to fruition. This was clear evidence of a strong facility plan.
- When asked questions about student enrollment, the Committee to Form indicated that the school has obtained approximately 80 intent to enroll forms, showing significant support of the proposed model. The applicant further clarified that over half of these likely reside within the two-mile radius of the school during the capacity interview.
- The proposed Board is diverse, includes members that reside in the community and demonstrated an understanding of its role as a governing body that it is not charged with day-to-day management of the school.

### Areas of Concern

- The proposed teacher salaries are comparatively lower than that of CCSD. The applicant shared that they believe teacher applicants will be attracted to working at the proposed school due to the autonomy they will enjoy as professionals, and reiterated that it will be mission critical to hire for the right fit for the school. The review committee remains skeptical that without additional dollars, it will prove difficult to hire qualified, highly-experienced staff to instruct students. This concern is heightened when considering that the school proposes to serve a population that will likely have many at-risk students.
- The applicant's plan for providing SPED services is not fully developed as there are minimal staffing supports for underserved populations, particularly SPED and ELL students. The applicant stated during the capacity interview that the plan is to have a SPED teacher that was shared across all grades as well as use resources to contract for additional positions as may be necessary. In particular, the applicant mentioned establishing a relationship with UNLV to have students on contract for key student support roles. This raises a number of questions and concerns as working with at-risk student populations often requires significant training and experience.

- The staffing plan relies on a very small amount of money (\$50,000) to provide additional supports to SPED, ELL students and/or other students that may have exceptional needs. While the applicant indicated that this is on-par with other schools within the GALS network, this amount may be understated and does not provide evidence of a high likelihood of success. Moreover, other GALS network schools have experienced academic performance gaps in the exact demographics for which these monies aim to support.
- The description of the proposed school/governing board's relationship with the CMO was unclear and lacked even further definition after the capacity interview. The CMO representative spoke almost exclusively when the committee was asked questions about the relationship between the two parties. Of particular concern was the CMO's discussion of the right to intervene/interject in the board's decision-making process. The CMO stated that this was a new provision in the contract because of some issues that they have had in the past due to other school leaders. The ability of the CMO to potentially override the governance of the actual charter holder raises substantial questions about the sustainability of the school should the relationship fracture.
- Several additional clauses within the proposed Master Service and Licensing Fee agreement may infringe on the autonomy of the local board. Specifically, the CMO will provide board succession planning and vetting of proposed Board members in addition to recruiting any additional founding board members. It is also difficult to distinguish between the role of collaborator and advisor within the agreement.
- The reporting structures and role of the Regional Board and GALS Leadership team remain unclear as it relates to the role of the GALS Las Vegas Board and the Las Vegas Executive Director. The proposed structure is convoluted, and concerns are enhanced by the proposed Master Service agreement.
- It does not appear that the proposed school leadership team has extensive experience in high poverty communities. This may pose challenges given that the school intends to serve a high percentage of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Price Lunch.

## Financial Section

Given the proposed student population and community the school aims to serve, questions arose regarding the amounts of money allocated to ensuring adequate supports for EL and SPED students. The school proposal mentions grant funding, but does not include financial commitments nor does it reference specific grants and amounts that are being pursued. While the applicant did reaffirm during the capacity interview that the proposed budget was conservative, and grant funding is not included in the budget, concerns remain about teacher compensation as well as needed resources that may be vital to effectively serving students.

### Areas of Strength

- During the capacity interview, the applicant indicated that they had budgeted conservatively, and that there was a likelihood that additional funds could be made available to the school in the coming months. During the capacity interview, the applicant named the Charter School Program (CSP) grant as well as possible funding from Opportunity 180 as additional funds, neither of which are included in the proposed budget. The applicant also demonstrated an understanding of the specific requirements of a CSP grant during the capacity interview.
- The applicant team was able to identify contingency plans during the capacity interview should the school face financial shortcomings or constraints. The Committee to Form cited the possibility of applying for a Revolving Loan, seeking additional grants, or pursuing Medicaid reimbursables to pay service providers to help cover additional costs not currently in the budget.

### Areas of Concern

- The applicant acknowledged that they have a lot of work to do in the area of budgeting during the interview after communicating that they took a conservative approach and are seeking additional grants to supplement their proposal. Some evidence of these grants is included in the application, but the applicant mentioned multiple grants during the capacity interview.
- The applicant pointed to a \$50,000 line item in the budget to fulfill future budgetary needs as they might arise, such as adequate staffing for ELL and SPED students. The applicant also acknowledged that this would be the set-aside for any students that are identified as severe/profound and require significant support. While it is encouraging that the applicant reaffirms that the proposed school will be open to all students, it is unlikely that this small amount of money could be effective in providing all of the necessary student support services that may be required.
- The applicant did not provide a thorough description of how it plans to support EL and SPED students with regarding to staffing and the budget. This is particularly problematic given the community and student population the school aims to serve. The applicant stated that the school assumes that they will have UNLV students supporting in special populations, and therefore, only budgets for \$50,000 in contract services. However, this is very likely underestimating the needs for the proposed student population. While this is a creative approach to address a staffing need, when it comes to serving students well, it is

not realistic to expect UNLV students to sufficiently meet the needs of the special populations students.

- The school believes that the salaries offered in the budget are reasonable, but expressed a desire to allocate more money should grants and additional resources come through. Additionally, the Committee to Form acknowledged that being able to offer higher salaries would it easier to attract talent.

## Capacity Interview Summary

Based on the independent and collective review of the application, the review committee conducted a 90-minute in-person interview of the applicant to elicit any necessary clarifications or additional information about the proposed charter school and determine the ability of the applicants to establish a high-quality charter school. The capacity interview for Girls Athletic Leadership School was conducted on Thursday October 31. All but one of the proposed members of the Committee to Form attended on behalf of the applicant. Additionally, the one representative the proposed CMO – Girls Athletic Leadership Schools, Inc. – attended the capacity interview. Questions during the capacity interview were developed by the team of reviewers to specifically address the details of the GALS application and focused primarily on four key areas:

- The ability of the applicant to meet one or more of the academic or demographic needs as outlined in the SPCSA Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment.
- The operations plan, including student recruitment, organizational chart, staff recruitment and proposed vendors.
- The academic plan, including curriculum, remediation, student support services and assessments.
- The financial plan, including the proposed budget, prospective facilities, staff recruitment, proposed vendors, and alignment to the proposed academic model.

Information gleaned from the capacity interview were coupled with the initial review of the application to determine final ratings on the rubric. Relevant information from the capacity interview is incorporated in the findings outlined above.

## District Input

Per Assembly Bill 462 (2019), the SPCSA solicited input from the Clark County School District regarding this application.<sup>1</sup> The timeline regarding this request for input is below and the response provided by the Clark County School district is attached.

- September 16, 2019 – Memo sent to CCSD soliciting input.
- November 6, 2019 – Presentation by CCSD staff to CCSD Board of Trustees regarding input.
- November 13, 2019 – Written input provided from CCSD to SPCSA.

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<sup>1</sup> Assembly Bill 462 (2019) section 6.3, subsection 1, paragraph (d): “The proposed sponsor of a charter school shall, in reviewing an application to form a charter school...If the proposed sponsor is not the board of trustees of a school district, solicit input from the board of trustees of the school district in which the proposed charter school will be located.”