

To: Melissa Mackedon, State Public Charter School Authority Board Chair
Members of the SPCSA Board

CC: Rebecca Feiden, SPCSA Executive Director
Mark Modrcin, SPCSA Director of Authorizing

From: Alejandro Rodriguez, Proposed Board Chair, Sage Collegiate PCS
Proposed Board of Sage Collegiate PCS
Sandra Kinne, proposed Executive Director Sage Collegiate PCS

Date: Wednesday, December 11, 2019

RE: Application for authorization – Sage Collegiate Public Charter School

The proposed Board of Directors of Sage Collegiate Public Charter School and its proposed leader are grateful for a thorough charter review process and the opportunity to address any initial findings. We have worked diligently in response to the Authority's staff recommendation regarding our application for authorization submitted during the Summer 2019 cycle.

We respectfully outline our response here, which we submit in advance of the Dec. 17 meeting in order to provide a more concrete case than speaking time will permit within the meeting.

We do not believe that the review committee's report fully captures the strengths and adequacy of our proposal and the clear need for the proposed school, which we outline below. We also appreciate the primary concerns which the review committee noted. Prior to the recommendation, we began addressing two of those items – community outreach and facilities.

We are confident in the merits of our proposal and our ability to successfully deliver a quality school as part of the state's portfolio of schools. We respectfully ask the Board to consider authorizing Sage Collegiate Public Charter School so that students in the central part of our city have access to quality school options and real choice.

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration.

STRENGTHS

(1) Sage Collegiate Public Charter School's proposal meets the Geographic component of the Academic Needs within the SPCSA Academic and Geographic Needs Assessment, per AB 462.

We address the multiple needs defined in the Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment in detail in the "Meeting the Need" section of our charter application. Specifically, we speak to the needs of students in the 89107 and 89108 zip codes by indicating the more than a dozen 1- and 2-star schools located within a 5-mile radius of these communities. We identify the schools within these two zip codes by star rating, using data from the Nevada Report Card. We also address the needs of English Language Learners and Free/Reduced Lunch students throughout this section and in other areas of our application.

(2) The application is strong, legally sound, and designed from best practices from high-performing schools across the country.

We offer research-proven methods as well as a uniquely unavailable model to increase student achievement, including providing Latin instruction beginning in 3rd grade, community and civic engagement for our middle school students, and cognitively guided instruction in math across all grades. We consider the whole child and children's socio-emotional well-being by offering daily PE and Mindfulness instruction to help children cope with trauma and be physically healthy. We provide age-level appropriate Enrichment, including Art, coding, and Speech & Debate at various grade levels. We involve our families and community through multiple opportunities, including annual Home Visits with each newly enrolled family, annual Family Orientations for all families, monthly Cafecitos, and monthly events to showcase our students' achievement.

We detail and reference our findings from high performance schools across the country throughout our application, and specifically in the sections Meeting the Need; School Structure, Curriculum and Instructional Design; and Incubation Year Development and Attachment 10.

Additionally, Ms. Kinne was in the Fellowship with Justin Brecht, founder of Nevada Rise Academy, and David Blodgett, school leader of the 5-star school, Nevada Prep Academy. She has since spent time at both of their schools, as well as at Futuro Academy, founded by Ignacio Prado, another BES Fellow to better inform and observe the execution of best practices locally. Further, Ms. Kinne, in her role at the SPCSA visited and evaluated more than a dozen schools within the Authority's portfolio, including several that are 4- and 5-star schools. There are strong practices being implemented across Nevada that can be implemented in an area of high need and are akin to components of our application.

(3) The application outlines the strong partnerships needed to succeed in the short- and long-term, which we continue to leverage for the families and children of Las Vegas.

We are working closely with our established community partner Opportunity 180 and national partner BES (formerly Building Excellent Schools) and through them continue to receive ongoing support and training for both our management and governance teams, and both of which have partnered with a number of local successful and respected charter schools in high-need, under-served neighborhoods in our city, including Futuro Academy, Nevada Rise Academy, and Nevada Preparatory, whose middle school earned 5-stars in its first year. We have strong partnerships with additional well-established organizations that support our application and are committed to working with us to ensure a strong start and long-term success for our scholars.

(4) The application provides an academic plan that responds to the chronic academic crisis within our community, and its immediate need for a high-quality school.

In our targeted area of the zip codes 89107 and 89018, 72% of students attend 1- or 2- star schools and just .03% in 4- or 5-star schools. The single school with greater than 3-star status is a 5-star magnet school. The average reading and mathematics proficiency rates within the community are 36% in reading and 28% in math.

Because of the current realities for families and students in Las Vegas, we recognize the importance of providing students with a high-quality education that leads to academic achievement and a life of opportunity. Less than a quarter, 23%, of Las Vegas residents have a bachelor's degree,¹ compared to 33% nationwide.² The median income is \$53,000, which is lower than the national average of \$61,000,³ while 16 percent of residents live in poverty.⁴ We have a responsibility to provide options for families so their students have opportunities to change their academic and life trajectory.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - RESPONSE

We recognize the limited direct involvement of the target population involved in the plan. The founding team brings natural connection to the community, and our intention was to leverage these pre-existing relationships within a more robust community engagement plan intentionally designed to be conducted post-authorization. We have remained sensitive to not wanting to give false hope to families who already do not have access to public charter schools and for whom the process for authorization is unfamiliar. We have not wanted our families to put their hopes and dreams on a school that does not yet exist; instead, we want them to be able to commit to an authorized school that is able to enroll their child – not keep them

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/lasvegascitynevada>.

² <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2017/cb17-51.html>.

³ <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/income-poverty.html>.

⁴ Ibid.

in limbo through a process that has already gone on longer than the expected 60-day process.⁵ Further, we present a detailed plan of action for community outreach in our application (pp. 9-11; pp. 62-64) and in Appendix 3.

(1) The application demonstrates that two members of the Committee to Form work in the target community and thus engage daily in an authentic manner with the families we seek to serve.

The petition outlines our authentic relationships with hundreds of local families, and through our daily work with them, we hear their hopes and dreams for students; and so are intimately aware of the needs of the community. *Because of our work in the community*, it seems misleading and inaccurate to claim the application does not meet the standard. The application as a whole, the intent to locate within the zip codes of 89107 or 89018 of which members of the team have been actively working for seven years, and the recognition of the needs of the community informed through such relationship, are wholly informed *by the community through authentic, daily, first-hand engagement by Committee to Form members within the community since 2012.*

(2) Our petition provides multiple letters of support from community stakeholders and we have a clear action plan which we are poised to implement beginning in January 2020.

Based on conversations with families in our community and a recent community survey, families recognize the lack of options and are eager for a school in their immediate community. Said one parent in a community survey, *“It would be nice to have a school like Doral but for kids in low income communities. ...Kids deserve experiences like Doral, but those kinds of schools are not in places accessible to low income kids.”* We have planned engagement activities in January, and we are awaiting authorization to be able to start the enrollment process. We have letters of support from people throughout the region that know and have worked in the targeted community, including Adam Johnson, a former SPCSA Board Chair; TyAnthony Davis, a former CCSD teacher and now a school leader in Los Angeles; and Erica Mosca, community leader and founder of Leaders in Training. Further, given feedback from the SPCSA staff, we have more formally surveyed community members and families to better capture their input and feedback about a proposed school.

(3) The application demonstrates our professional good faith regarding Ms. Kinne’s role as a former state employee at the Authority and full adherence to SPCSA’s explicit request.

As former SPCSA staff member, Ms. Kinne was asked by SPCSA leadership *to refrain from actively working on or being public* about her planned role as an anticipated Committee to Form member and Proposed Executive Director of a charter school that would come before the Authority’s board to prevent any conflict of interest, real or perceived, within the process. The State Ethics Commission agreed, and Ms. Kinne respectfully adhered fully to its findings, that as an SPCSA employee, she: (a) not publicly present herself with the efforts while on staff of the SPCSA, which explicitly included board recruitment for Sage Collegiate, and which would naturally and logically include public conversations and specifically community engagement (*which she respectfully did not*); and (b) resign from the Authority by the time the Summer Cycle 2019 application window opened on July 1, 2019 in order to pursue the application process (*which she immediately did*).

⁵ On July 31, the SPCSA asked all applicants for an extension. They stated in email⁵ that they intended to have the new applications heard at the Nov. 1 or Dec 6 board meeting. *“Lastly, and as you may be aware, NRS 388A.252 requires that the SPCSA consider applications at a meeting that is held not later than 60 days after the receipt of the application, or a later period mutually agreed upon by the committee to form the charter school and the institution [SPCSA]. Given that SPCSA staff is requesting additional clarification from applicants as it relates to AB 462 over the next two weeks, SPCSA staff is proposing that recommendations for all new applicants be heard at either the November 1 or December 6, 2019 Authority board meetings. SPCSA staff will keep individual committees to form apprised regarding their application as it moves through the process.”*

Upon completing her work at SPCSA, and because of the opportunity to return to the community in which she had served as an educator in prior years to ensure that she could build current authentic relationships within the community throughout 2019-2020, Ms. Kinne took a role in the zip code of Sage Collegiate's proposed location. She knew the need in the community and had previously worked as an instructional coach with Teach For America at multiple schools within the proposed location.

Therefore, it seems unmerited to (a) fault the application of Sage Collegiate for our compliance with Authority senior leadership members' requests and (b) not recognize the team's authentic work within and genuine relationship with the community, past and present.

As we have been surveying the community now more formally in response to the review process, that survey evidences what we know authentically to be true: what families need most are options in their community. The voice of one local surveyed parent captures that sentiment: *"Families have to have choice for their children. If they aren't fortunate enough to live near a five-star school, then another public option should be available."*

ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING - RESPONSE

The staff's report on our application focuses mostly on curriculum choices. The staff report notes we have listed 10 potential programs. As programs and curricula are not synonymous, and as our educational model is not contingent on one specific curriculum, our comprehensive curriculum choices are informed by our educational model.

(1) As a slow-growth, K-8 school eventually serving 9 grades by 2025-26, we have identified possible curricular options within each content area and/or across grade levels

In our Capacity Interview, we explicitly named funding as a factor in the final decision-making process. As we expressed, while we would like to be able to purchase a program like "Bridges in Mathematics," the constraints of public funding may require we use a free, open resource such as "Engage NY." This does not demonstrate ambiguity, but rather full understanding of our financial obligations to ensure conservancy while meeting the needs of our academic program over time.

We have provided clarification for the Board – and the staff – below, by identifying the specific grade levels for which each curriculum is aligned or intended for use at Sage Collegiate.

(2) All curricular options are compatible and non-duplicative, and all curricula support one another by targeting specific skills and areas of instruction within each grade level.

We provide the most curricular details for literacy and math, as both must address multiple student needs within the content area. As example, Reading Mastery, supports students' decoding and comprehension skills while Words Their Way supports phonics and vocabulary development. Fountas and Pinnell focuses on small-group instruction to support below-grade level readers. Identified curricula is meant to complement and work unison with one another.

The 10 curricula listed are informed by the curriculum used at the most successful public charter schools in high-need communities across the country, as a well as an understanding of the multiple modalities that literacy instruction must address. Our expanded program of 200 daily minutes of literacy instruction and 100 daily minutes of math instruction further support such choices.

- **English Language Arts:** Reading Mastery (K-2); Words Their Way Fountas and Pinnell (K-5); Latin: Classical Academic Press (3-8); Zaner Bloser (handwriting) (K-2); Writing Without Tears (handwriting) (3-5); Engage NY: ELA (3-8); IXL Blended Learning curriculum (K-8)
- **Mathematics:** Engage NY (K-8); Bridges for Math (K-5); CGI (K-5); Everyday Counts Calendar Math (K-2); IXL Blended Learning curriculum (K-8)

- **Science:** FOSS (Full Options Science System) HMH Science Dimensions
- **Social Studies:** Scott Foresman Social Studies

As expressed in our application and the Capacity Interview, all proposed curricula are researched-based and aligned to state standards.

BOARD MEMBERSHIP - RESPONSE

As noted in both the application (p. 88) and above, Ms. Kinne was asked by senior leadership at the Authority to refrain from recruiting board members while still on staff of the SPCSA. That the Authority cites the lack of a fully formed team prior to submission of the application seems operate outside the confines of good faith.

Meeting all requirements of [NRS 388A.240](#), a full Committee to Form was in place by mid-October, in advance of and participating within the Capacity Interview. Training and development of the proposed Board began in late summer, with proposed Board Members having regular touchpoints, training on their governance role through detailed study of *Charter School Board University*, and having a team retreat in preparation of both the Capacity Interview and their roles as governing board members. All Board members are aligned to our mission, dedicated to our community, and bring the requisite skills to conduct effective fiscal and academic oversight of the school and successfully implement all details of its academic program. Additionally, we have outlined a robust and detailed training and development process for the governing board in our application (pp.90-91) and have secured Follow on Support with BES for the first two years of operation, which includes direct board training and development.

FACILITY & FINANCE – RESPONSE

Our proposed initial budget is preliminary because of missing anticipated revenues including federal Title funding. We plan to serve a significant number of students who qualify for free/reduced lunch, English Language Learners, and a population of students in Special Education that is comparable to the district's Special Education population. As such, we will receive federal funding in support of our enrolled student population. However, we were unable to include the anticipated revenue related to Title I and Title III funding as the SPCSA budget template does not allow applicants to include this funding in our projections. As such, this creates an incomplete and imperfect preliminary budget. The budget process by the Board for Year 1 would run parallel to the enrollment process, and the Board, and its anticipated back office support firm, would have a more complete and accurate picture for planning the Year 1 budget.

Additionally, as we unable to secure a facility until we are authorized, we are unable to provide a more accurate assumption related to the budget, including any costs associated with ensuring the facility meets federal and state codes and requirements or retrofitting costs. Further, our facilities external partner, Building Hope, has a history of supporting independent, start-up schools through a fair, feasible, and practical payment structure to best support the start-up facilities costs. Whether Building Hope purchases a building and leases to Sage Collegiate or supports the direct leasing process by our school has been discussed but cannot be determined until we are authorized and are able to move forward on facility decisions.