



STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** SPCSA Board  
**FROM:** Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing  
**SUBJECT:** Alpine Academy - Charter Renewal Recommendation  
**DATE:** December 11, 2020

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**1. Background and Summary**

Alpine Academy has submitted an application to renew its charter contract as the current charter contract expires on June 30, 2021. Alpine is a brick-and-mortar public charter school that currently serves 116 students in 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades and operates out of one campus in Sparks.

After a thorough review of the historical data and charter renewal application, staff recommends that the Authority approve the charter renewal of Alpine Academy for a six-year term, beginning July 1, 2021.

**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.<sup>1</sup> 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. The Alpine Academy renewal report was sent to the board chair on June 25, 2020 and can be found within the supporting documentation for the item.

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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\(2\)](#).

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\(1\)](#). Alpine Academy submitted its notice of Intent to Renew its charter contract on August 27, 2020 and Alpine Academy's notice of intent to renew can be found along with the supporting documents.

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\(3\)](#). SPCSA staff and the school mutually agreed to extend the renewal application submission deadline. On October 30, 2020 Alpine Academy submitted its renewal application, which can be found included with the supporting documents.

Alpine Academy's renewal application includes a summary of the key design components to be implemented in the upcoming term. Per the renewal application, these include:

- A continued emphasis on individualized academic support, whereby students will actively participate in personalized meetings to discuss goals and progress towards promotion and graduation, credit accrual, and parent contact toward academic goals.
- The implementation of student internship/job shadowing programs through partnerships with community agencies to provide these opportunities in fields of interest for students. Additionally, the school plans to re-institute job fairs and the Career Project which includes an extensive research project and interview day.
- An expansion of course and workshop offerings based on survey data/needs of students.

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, including financial and organizational performance. 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 [NRS 388A.285\(6\)](#) 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 and is now codified in [NRS 388A.285\(6\)](#).

The Authority Board may accept or reject, in whole or part, the recommendation of the Executive Director. See [NAC 388A.415\(10\)\(a\)](#). 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 restrictions which the State Public Charter School Authority determines are appropriate. See [NAC 388A.415\(11\)\(b\) and \(c\)](#).

Alternatively, the Authority Board may deny the renewal application for the purpose of reconstituting the governing body of the charter school pursuant to [NRS 388A.330](#) and assigning the charter contract to a charter management organization or a new governing body which may include, without limitation, the governing body of another charter school or a governing body assembled by the Executive Director; deny the renewal application for the purpose of restarting the charter school and issuing a new charter contract pursuant to [NRS 388A.300](#) to a charter management organization or a new governing body, including, without limitation, the governing body of another charter school, which will inherit any assets of the charter school which remain following dissolution; or deny the renewal of a charter contract for the purpose of closing the charter school. See [NAC 388A.415\(11\)\(d\),\(e\) and \(f\)](#).

### **3. Analysis**

#### *Academics*

Alpine Academy is currently rated as a 3-star high school program according to the 2018 – 19 NSPF ratings. As the Authority is aware, NSPF school ratings and accountability for the 2019 – 2020 school year have been carried over from the 2018 – 2019 reporting year. For the 2017 – 2018 school year, Alpine was rated as a 4-star school. It is noteworthy that the school has not earned less than a 3-star rating during the current charter term according to the NSPF.

As noted in the NSPF guidance document, a 3-star school is categorized as an adequate school that has met the state’s standard for performance. Additionally, a 3-star school has an all-students group that has met expectations for academic achievement or growth with little exception; however, no group is far below standard. A 4-star school 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. Further, the school graduation rate meets expectations and the school does not fail to meet expectations for any group on any indicator.

During this charter term, the graduation rate of the school has also increased. The validated four-year graduation rate for the 2015 – 16 school year was 85.2%, and this rate has increased to 100% for the 2019 – 20 school year.

It is also noteworthy that the school was awarded the Social Emotional Academic Development grant for the 2019 – 20 school year and professional development included units concerning restorative justice practices.

The NSPF results for this current charter term are summarized and provided in the table below:

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

| School Year              | NSPF Rating   |
|--------------------------|---|
| 2019 – 2020 <sup>3</sup> | 3 stars   |
| 2018 – 2019              | 3 stars   |
| 2017 – 2018              | 4 stars   |
| 2016 – 2017              | Not Rated by the Nevada Department of Education                 |
| 2015 – 2016              | No Star Ratings published by the Nevada Department of Education |

*Organizational*

Until the Authority approved a more robust organizational framework in the summer of 2019, 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. Alpine Academy has not received a Notice of Breach or Notice of Concern under this framework during the current charter term. The school earned 100 points under the 2020 Organizational Performance Framework as approved by the Authority on November 6, 2020.

**SPCSA Organizational Framework Findings**

|      |                                     |
|------|-------------------------------------|
| 2020 | Meets the Standard (100/100 points) |
| 2019 | Good Standing                       |
| 2018 | Good Standing                       |
| 2017 | Good Standing                       |
| 2016 | Good Standing                       |

*Financial*

In 2018, the Authority requested that the SPCSA Financial Framework be modified so as to be better assess the financial health of sponsored schools. The revised SPCSA Financial Framework was approved on January 18, 2019 and results for FY20 will be presented in January 2021. Alpine Academy was issued a Notice of Concern due to financial underperformance during the 2016 fiscal year. Since that time, SPCSA staff has continued to monitor a variety of indicators of financial health, and staff finds the school to be in good standing against performance standards within the financial framework at this time.

**SPCSA Financial Framework Findings**

|      |  |
|------|--|
| 2020 | <i>Will be reported in January of 2021</i> |
| 2019 | Good Standing                              |
| 2018 | Good Standing                              |
| 2017 | Good Standing                              |
| 2016 | Notice of Concern                          |
| 2015 | Good Standing                              |

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<sup>3</sup> NSPF school ratings and accountability for the 2019 – 2020 school year have been carried over from the 2018 – 2019 reporting year.

**4. Recommendation: Renew Alpine Academy for a 6-year term**

Despite the issuance of a Notice of Concern due to financial underperformance in the 2015 – 16 school year, Alpine Academy has improved their financial performance over the remainder of the charter term. Additionally, available data demonstrates that the school maintains sound academic performance. The school has not earned NSPF ratings lower than 3 stars during the current charter term.

As previously stated, NSPF school ratings and accountability indicators have been carried over from the 2018 – 2019 reporting year for the 2019 – 2020 school year.

It is also noteworthy that the school has not been issued any organizational notices.

SPCSA staff is confident the school will maintain strong performance under all three frameworks. Solid and largely consistent past performance supports staff’s recommendation that the Authority renew Alpine Academy for a six-year term, beginning July 1, 2021. The new term would be subject to the enrollment caps outlined below.

|                       | 2021-2022 | 2022-2023         | 2023-24 | 2024-25 | 2025-26 | 2026-2027 |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|
| <b>Enrollment Cap</b> | 140       | 140               | 140     | 140     | 140     | 140       |
| <b>Grades Served</b>  | 9-12      | 8-12 <sup>4</sup> | 7-12    | 6-12    | 6-12    | 6-12      |

**5. Proposed Motion**

*Approve the Alpine Academy Renewal Application for renewal with a six-year term beginning July 1, 2021 and the enrollment caps as outlined above in the recommendation memo.*

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<sup>4</sup> The Alpine Academy renewal application contemplates grade level expansion during the proposed term. While this proposed grade level expansion is reflected above, it does require separate, formal approval by the Authority through the SPCSA amendment process. SPCSA staff anticipates receiving an amendment from the school in 2021.

*Appendix: School Demographics since 2015*

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Total Enrollment<sup>5</sup></b> | <b>A</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>C</b> | <b>H</b> | <b>I</b> | <b>M</b> | <b>P</b> | <b>IEP</b> | <b>ELL</b>        | <b>FRL</b> |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| 15-16       | 120                                 | 0.8%     | 3.3%     | 71.7%    | 13.3%    | 3.3%     | 7.5%     | 0.0%     | 22.5%      | 0.0%              | 25.0%      |
| 16-17       | 111                                 | 2.7%     | 12.9%    | 43.4%    | 18.5%    | 0.9%     | 7.2%     | 0.0%     | 5.4%       | 3.1%              | 33.3%      |
| 17-18       | 133                                 | 4.5%     | 1.5%     | 64.7%    | 22.6%    | 1.5%     | 4.5%     | 0.8%     | 24.8%      | 3.0%              | 23.3%      |
| 18-19       | 113                                 | 4.4%     | 0.9%     | 59.3%    | 29.2%    | 1.8%     | 3.5%     | 0.9%     | 31.0%      | 0.9%              | 27.4%      |
| 19-20       | 103                                 | 2.9%     | 1.0%     | 63.1%    | 27.2%    | 1.9%     | 2.9%     | 1.0%     | 23.3%      | 1.0%              | 8.7%       |
| 20-21       | 116                                 | 0%       | 1.7%     | 66.3%    | 28.4%    | 0.8%     | 1.7%     | 0.8%     | 16.3%      | n<10 <sup>6</sup> | 13.7%      |

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

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<sup>5</sup> Enrollment as of Validation Day each year (October 1).

<sup>6</sup> To protect student privacy, n-counts less than 10 and their corresponding rates are displayed as n<10.