



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:** Equipo Academy - Charter Renewal Recommendation  
**DATE:** December 11, 2020

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**1. Background and Summary**

Equipo Academy has submitted an application to renew its charter contract as the current charter contract expires on June 30, 2021. Equipo is a brick-and-mortar public charter school that currently serves 797 students in 6<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades and operates out of one campus in Las Vegas.

After a thorough review of the historical data and charter renewal application, staff recommends that the Authority approve the charter renewal of Equipo 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 Equipo 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\(1\)](#). Equipo submitted its notice of Intent to Renew its charter contract on August 31, 2020 and Equipo'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\(3\)](#). On October 15, 2020 Equipo submitted its renewal application, which can be found included with the supporting documents.

Equipo's renewal application includes a summary of the key design elements including their continued focus on providing college preparatory middle school classes designed to prepare students for Pre-Advanced courses in ninth and tenth grade and for full Advanced Placement courses by their later high school years. The school also notes that a major focus during this first charter term was a transition to mastery-based grading over task-based grading. Per the application, Equipo prioritized formative assessment systems that led to increased mastery and opportunities for all students, and this work is believed to be some of the most critical in the school's ability to build a culture of achievement and closing academic opportunity gaps. Looking ahead, Equipo Academy plans to empower team members to enhance their understanding and respond to student mastery data, and the integration of Canvas LMS will help facilitate this important work.

The renewal application also reiterates the school's commitment to strong restorative justice practices, noting that through the hard work of school staff over the term, the school has not had any suspensions or expulsions in the present year. The application notes that these discipline practices will continue to be a core part of the curriculum in the new charter term.

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.

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*

Equipo is currently rated as a 5-star middle school program and a 4-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.

The Equipo middle school program earned a 2-star rating for the 2016 – 2017 rating, resulting in the issuance of a Notice of Concern by the Authority. The school has since improved to a 3-star rating for the 2017 – 2018 school year, and a 5-star rating for the 2018 – 19 school year, respectively. As noted in the NSPF guidance document, a 2-star school is categorized as a school that has partially met the state’s standard for performance. Students and subgroups often meet expectations for academic performance or growth but may have multiple areas that require improvement. Areas requiring significant improvement are uncommon. A 3-star school is identified 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. Additionally, a 5-star school is recognized as a superior school that exceeds expectations for all students and subgroups on every indicator category with little or no exception.

It is noteworthy that the high school has not earned less than a 4-star rating during the current charter term according to the NSPF. During this charter term, the graduation rate of the school has also increased, with a 94.7%% rate for the 2018 – 19 school year and a 96.3% rate for the 2019 – 20 school year.

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

School Year	NSPF Rating
2019 – 2020 <sup>2</sup>	Middle: 5 stars High: 4 stars
2018 – 2019	Middle: 5 stars High: 4 stars
2017 – 2018	Middle: 3 stars High: Not Rated
2016 – 2017	Middle: 2 stars High: N/A
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. Equipo 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. In the interim, SPCSA staff has continued to monitor a variety of indicators of financial health. Equipo has a history of clean audit findings, 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 <sup>3</sup>
2016	Good Standing
2015	Good Standing

<sup>2</sup> NSPF school ratings and accountability for the 2019 – 2020 school year have been carried over from the 2018 – 2019 reporting year.

<sup>3</sup> The renewal report that was issued to Equipo on June 25, 2020 noted that a Notice of Concern due to financial underperformance was issued to the school during the current charter term. This was an error, and the school was not issued a Notice for FY17. The findings listed on this page are correct.

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

Despite the issuance of a Notice of Concern due to academic underperformance at the middle school level for the 2016 – 17 school year, Equipo has demonstrated academic improvement since that time, earning at least a 3-star rating since the 2017 – 2018 school year according to the NSPF results. Moreover, the school earned a 5-star rating for the most recent year of ratings. Since being rated, the high school has not earned less than a 4-star rating according to the NSPF.

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.

The school also maintains a high graduation rate.

Additionally, no organizational or financial notices have been issued during the current charter term.

SPCSA staff is confident the school will maintain strong performance at both the middle and high school levels. Past performance supports staff’s recommendation that the Authority renew Equipo for a six-year term, beginning July 1, 2021. The new term would be subject to the enrollment caps outlined below<sup>4</sup>.

	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-2027
<b>Enrollment Cap</b>	750	750	750	750	750	750
<b>Grades Served</b>	6-12	6-12	6-12	6-12	6-12	6-12

**5. Proposed Motion**

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

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<sup>4</sup> The Equipo Academy renewal application contemplates an increase of enrollment beginning in the 2021-2022 school year. Increasing the enrollment cap requires the school to make a formal request through the SPCSA amendment process, and this has been communicated to Equipo Academy. SPCSA staff anticipates that the school will submit an amendment detailing this expansion at a later date, and looks forward to working with the school through this process.

*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	430	0.9%	1.6%	4.4%	91.9%	0.2%	0.5%	0.5%	7.7%	24.4%	78.8%
16-17	559	0.5%	2.0%	3.0%	93.6%	0.2%	0.4%	0.4%	5.0%	14.1%	65.8%
17-18	759	0.5%	2.0%	2.6%	93.9%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	6.3%	16.3%	100%
18-19	753	0.7%	1.1%	2.3%	95.6%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	5.0%	23.2%	100%
19-20	761	0.7%	1.4%	2.1%	95.4%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	6.6%	34.7%	100%
20-21	797	0.6%	1.6%	1.8%	95.4%	0%	0.2%	0.1%	5.5%	35.2%	95.0%

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

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