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ACTION MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Authority Board
FROM: Danny Peltier, Management Analyst III, SPCSA
SUBJECT: **Young Women’s Leadership Academy– Charter Amendment Request to:**
1. Expand enrollment into the 8th grade for the 2023-24 school year
2. Add Distance Education
DATE: June 23, 2023

Summary of Request and Recommendation

Young Women’s Leadership Academy (YWLA) has submitted an amendment application requesting that the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) grant a Good Cause Exemption and approve the request to expand enrollment into the 8th grade for the 2023-24 school year (one year earlier than previously authorized) and add distance education options. SPCSA staff also notes the addition of 8th grade beginning in 2023-24 will not affect YWLA’s approved enrollment cap.

SPCSA staff has reviewed the application and recommends that the Authority grant the Good Cause Exemption and approve the amendment request. A proposed motion along with conditions can be found on page 4 of this memo.

Background and Overview of the Amendment

YWLA is located at 3415 S. Mojave Rd. in Las Vegas, Nevada 89121 in Clark County. YWLA is affiliated with the Young Women Leadership Schools network of all-girls college prep schools all driven by the same mission and vision: to nurture the intellectual curiosity and creativity of young women. Young Women’s Leadership Schools accomplish this by supporting the “whole girl” and seek to maximize the academic achievement, social emotional well-being, and post-secondary success of each student. YWLA began operation in 2022 with Grades 6 and 9. As of the 2022 Validation Day, YWLA had 62 students enrolled.

According to the amendment application, YWLA is requesting the Authority approve two items. The first item is to add 8th grade beginning in the 2023-24 school year which is one year earlier than what

was approved as part of the original charter application. The second item YWLA is requesting approval for is the addition of distance education options for certain students attending YWLA.

Addition of 8th Grade

Regarding the addition of 8th grade beginning in the 2023-24 school year, YWLA noted in their application that the proposed changes would permit the school to continue focusing on the development of the students currently registered in grades 6-7 and 9-10 while permitting additional marketing efforts to promote YWLA’s unique educational program. The school first opened in August 2022 serving students in grades 6 and 9. Currently, YWLA is approved to serve students in grade 6-7 and 9-10 beginning in 2023-24, to serve students in grade 6-11 with the addition of grades 8 and 11 beginning in 2025-25. YWLA explained in their application that the recent closure of the Girls Empowerment Middle School (GEMS) charter school caused them to reassess their grade growth and add 8th grade earlier than anticipated in order to give 7th grade students leaving GEMS another option to choose from for the 2023-24 school year. Additionally, according to the amendment application, YWLA’s Principal Whitney McIntosh has already been working closely with the school leaders of GEMS, and both Principal Dr. Joyce Brooks and Vice Principal Mike Taack, to provide information and school tours of the YWLA campus to students and families of all current GEMS students to help support their transition should they be interested in continuing their education at YWLA.

YWLA serves underserved families and disadvantaged students residing on the east side of the Las Vegas Valley who are attending public middle and high schools in the following zip codes: 89101, 89104, 89119, 89121, 89142, and 89169. YWLA was approved to reduce its 2022-23 enrollment cap from 110 students to 58 students at the December 16, 2022 SPCSA board meeting due to lower than anticipated enrollment in its initial year of operation. This amendment request did not contemplate reducing the 2023-24 enrollment cap of 300 and YWLA believes that by adding 8th grade beginning next school year, the school will be able to market to additional students which will help close the gap in enrollment.

If approved, the enrollment cap for YWLA will remain at:

School Year	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Grade Levels	6-10	6-11	6-12	6-12	6-12
Enrollment Cap	300	450	540	570	600

Distance Education

The second request YWLA is seeking approval for is the addition of distance education options for certain students. According to the application, YWLA would like to create a new program of distance education to better serve each student’s unique educational needs by expanding the course offerings available at YWLA. YWLA noted that these additional, supplemental course offerings would be primarily for students who would like academic challenges such as honors ELA and Math courses, or students who wish to take an elective course that they may not otherwise have the opportunity to attend at YWLA’s physical campus. In addition to honors courses and electives, YWLA will also offer distance education options for students who are in need of credit retrieval, recovery, or remediation. The requested distance education program would not permit students to attend online courses full-time.

Additionally, according to the amendment application, YWLA students who elect to participate in distance education courses will receive instruction from their virtual teacher in addition to having access

to a digital learning lab or classroom with support from their face-to-face teacher. In this way, YWLA's students will engage in distance education coursework in a hybrid model where students have multiple pathways to success.

YWLA Board will work with its EMO, Academica, and their virtual education office for the planning and establishment of YWLA's distance education program. Academica has implemented similar programs at other schools in Nevada such as Mater Academy of Northern Nevada. According to the amendment application, YWLA will offer distance learning courses using NDE-approved distance learning providers such as Accelerate Education, eDynamic, and Flex Point Education Cloud. YWLA will not be developing any of its own courses. Any new courses to be offered by YWLA will be submitted by Accelerate Education, eDynamic, and Flex Point Education Cloud and will only be used if they are approved by the NDE. All courses to be used are currently included on the list of approved distance education courses prepared by the NDE.

Legal Authority

Existing charter schools that are sponsored by the SPCSA may submit a charter school contract amendment application to the SPCSA – which is reviewed by SPCSA staff and presented for SPCSA Board action – in order to, among other things, increase enrollment, add grade levels above and beyond what the charter school is approved to serve, or add a new campus. When determining whether to approve an amendment request, the sponsor considers the charter school's compliance with applicable local, state and federal laws and regulations and evidence relating to the academics, finance and organization of the charter school. (See NAC 388A.400(8) and NRS 388A.276).

Analysis and Staff Recommendation

When reviewing an amendment application for RFA eligibility, SPCSA staff reviews the academic, financial and organizational performance of the applicant charter school. YWLA is in its first year of operation and has not been rated academically, financially, or organizationally, however, staff finds no current issues grounded in past performance that raise concerns regarding this amendment.

SPCSA staff is supportive of YWLA's request to offer grades 6 – 10 beginning in 2023-24. As previously mentioned before in this memo, YWLA was approved to operate as a 6 – 12 school at full-scale. The proposed changes contemplated in the submitted amendment simply seek to offer 8th grade earlier than originally anticipated, and do not fundamentally change the overall mission of the charter school. This proposal intends to reduce barriers to enrollment and will hopefully allow for greater long-term stability for the school. SPCSA staff also reviewed YWLA's plans to recruit and enroll students and found them to be reasonable and adequate. Additionally, with the closure of GEMS, this change will allow for an additional option for students who found this particular model to be appealing for their children. GEMS was located about 2.5 miles from the current YWLA site and providing 7th graders with the option to continue in a setting similar to that of GEMS makes sense for students and families.

With regard to the implementation of distance education options for students attending YWLA, SPCSA staff is also supportive. As stated above, YWLA is requesting to add Distance Education options for students enrolled at the school. YWLA's population is children who are already enrolled in grades 6th and 9th, (and eventually 8th and 10th grades) who are in need of credit recovery or remediation, academic challenge such as Advanced Placement, or wish to take an elective course that they may not otherwise have the opportunity to attend without the proposed new distance education program. Stated another way, the proposed addition of distance education courses will not replace the current delivery of instruction in a brick-and-mortar atmosphere; YWLA will offer distance education as a supplement for students with specific needs. Academica NV has experience in assisting schools with this sort of supplemental distance education and

SPCSA staff sees this addition to be beneficial for students attending YWLA.

SPCSA staff is supportive of YWLA’s request to add 8th grade beginning in 2023-24 and to add distance education options for students. SPCSA staff recommends approval with conditions.

Proposed Motion: Grant YWLA’s Good Cause Exemption request and:

1. **Approve the addition of 8th grade beginning in the 2023-24 school year**
2. **Approve the implementation of distance education with the following conditions**
 - a. **Evidence of approval of YWLA’s distance education application from the Nevada Department of Education prior to the start of the 2023-24 school year;**
 - b. **A year-end report of the student performance against the performance expectation outlined in the amendment application, or that 90% of students enrolled in blended distance education classes will successfully pass their courses;**
 - c. **A student enrollment summary or course log that notes the number of students enrolling in supplemental distance education courses during the 2023-2024 school year**

If approved, the enrollment cap for YWLA will remain with the addition of 8th grade:

School Year	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Grade Levels	6-10	6-11	6-12	6-12	6-12
Enrollment Cap	300	450	540	570	600

Historical Performance and Demographic Information – YWLA

School Total Enrollment and Demographics since 2017

Year	Enrollment	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
22-23	62	1.6%	40.3%	8.0%	45.1%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0	*	*	70.9%

- A – Asian
- B – Black
- C – Caucasian
- H – Hispanic
- I – American Indian/Alaskan Native
- M – 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
- * - Suppressed data due to n-count

YWLA School Financial Performance – Not Rated

YWLA Organizational Performance – Not Rated

YWLA Academic Performance – Not Rated