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**ACTION MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SPCSA Board  
**FROM:** Mike Dang, Manager of Organizational and Financial Performance  
Jennifer Bauer, Interim Executive Director  
**SUBJECT:** Transportation Plan: Explore Academy Las Vegas  
**DATE:** October 13, 2023

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**Background**

[Assembly Bill 400 \(2023 Session of the Nevada Legislature\)](#) appropriated \$7 million to the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) for each year of the upcoming biennium (the 2023-24 fiscal year and the 2024-25 fiscal year) to award to charter schools, including SPCSA-sponsored and district-sponsored charter schools, to fund student transportation. To receive funding, a charter school must submit a Transportation Plan to the SPCSA and the SPCSA may approve the Transportation Plan and award funding to the charter school if the plan meets the following criteria:

1. “The transportation plan is comprehensive and likely to be successfully implemented;
2. The transportation plan will materially improve access to education in the region served by the transportation plan;
3. The transportation plan demonstrates that the charter school will be able to comply with statutory and regulatory transportation requirements, including, without limitation, the certification of bus drivers and vehicle safety;
4. The transportation plan is financially viable;
5. The transportation plan would not cost more, on a per pupil basis, than the average cost for transportation for other public schools operating in the school district in which the charter school is located; and

6. The academic, financial and organizational performance of the charter school indicate that the transportation plan is in the interest of pupils who will be served by the transportation plan.”<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that pursuant to NAC 388A.330(4), a charter school is only permitted to provide transportation to pupils if the school has approval to do so from its sponsor. Therefore, charter schools that are not already approved to provide student transportation will be required to submit to their sponsor a contract amendment request in order to implement the Transportation Plan. For those schools sponsored by the SPCSA, the amendment request to provide student transportation was incorporated into the application process, and the SPCSA Board will consider approval of the amendment request in conjunction with the Transportation Plan.

Applications for the 2023-24 school year will be accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis from July 7, 2023 and through September 30, 2023<sup>2</sup>. While the SPCSA hopes to fund all applicants that submit a compliant transportation plan, because there is only \$7 million available in each school year, the SPCSA may prioritize funding Title I charter schools.

Additional details and form associated with the Transportation Plan and Funding Application can be found on the [SPCSA's website](#).

### **Transportation Plan Overview**

Explore Academy Las Vegas (Explore) is requesting a total of \$109,660 to implement the school's Transportation Plan. Below is an overview of the proposed Transportation Plan for the school, as provided in the application.

“Explore Academy's transportation plan aims to bolster academic inclusivity at our school. By providing consistent and reliable transportation, the school seeks to eliminate barriers to educational opportunity, allowing students from all socio-economic backgrounds to equally benefit from its unique offerings.

Moreover, the initiative is anticipated to positively influence school enrollment, attendance, and consequently, academic outcomes - especially for disadvantaged students. Financially, the enhanced enrollment through this plan is projected to augment the school's per-pupil funding, helping to solidify the school's economic base.”

### **Analysis and Recommendation**

Explore is a Title I School and is requesting approval of its Transportation Plan and funding to implement the Transportation Plan. In addition, because the school is not currently approved to provide transportation, the school is also requesting to amend its charter contract to provide

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<sup>1</sup> Section 28.5 of Assembly Bill 400 (2023 Session of the Nevada Legislature)

<sup>2</sup> After September 30, 2023, the SPCSA will determine if there are remaining funds that have not yet been awarded. If funds remain, the SPCSA will re-open the transportation application.

transportation, and has submitted a good cause exemption request to have this amendment considered outside of the established amendment windows.

SPCSA staff has reviewed the Transportation Plan and find that the Plan meets the requirements set forth in Assembly Bill 400.

1. The Transportation Plan is comprehensive and likely to be successfully implemented.
2. The narrative provided by the school explains that “Our proposed transportation plan aims to:
  - a. Enable students who currently can't attend due to transportation challenges to enroll and benefit from our educational model.
  - b. Ease the logistical and financial burdens on families, ensuring that all students, regardless of socio-economic background, have equal access to quality education.
  - c. Extend the duration for which students are under the school's care, with bus riding time ensuring safety and supervision.

Explore Academy's ability to offer two bus routes daily in a sustainable manner for 120 students - and to hopefully expand the mobility supports for more families in the future - will demonstrably improve access for our families with the highest economic need whose attendance and therefore academic performance can be the most at risk without reliable transportation.” This demonstrates that the Transportation Plan will materially improve access to education in the region.

3. The Transportation Plan includes details regarding how the charter school will ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory transportation requirements.
4. The budget provided within the Transportation Plan demonstrates that the Transportation Plan is financially viable.
5. The average daily enrollment for the school during the fourth quarter of the 2022-23 school year was 260. The school’s request is based on projected quarter 1 enrollment of 280 students, assuming verification prior to funding. Explore is located in Clark County where the four-year average (per pupil) in transportation funding for the 2023-24 school year is \$481 per pupil. The total funding request for the school was \$109,660, which is less than or equal to the average cost, per pupil, for transportation within the Clark County School District.
6. The academic, financial and organizational performance of the charter school indicate that the transportation plan is in the interest of pupils who will be served by the transportation plan. Specifically, the Transportation Plan indicates that transportation will or has accomplished or indicated the following performance so far:
  - a. Explore Academy demonstrates a strong commitment to providing high-quality education, ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities for all students, regardless of socio-economic backgrounds.
  - b. Academically, the proposed transportation plan “resonates with our mission of inclusivity and access. Facilitating seamless transportation aligns with our organizational objective of eliminating barriers to education, ensuring that our students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, can partake in the unique educational experience that Explore Academy offers. The data collected from the

transportation survey conducted by Explore staff shows that middle school students make up slightly more than half of the population of families who indicate a need for school transportation to and from school. Providing transportation to families will help ensure that students have equitable and consistent access to their education, as well as tiered, research-based supports and tutoring while at school.”

- c. Financially, not only will transportation “help to recruit new families to the model, it will also work as an incentive to continue with the model by removing transportation related burdens/hardships indicated by families in the parent survey.”
- d. Organizationally, the school points out that it has implemented other material terms of the education program it agreed to, suggesting that they would successfully implement this program. The school's proposal to provide transportation services aligns with their mission of inclusivity, aiming to remove barriers to education and create consistent access for all students.

Therefore, SPCSA staff recommend approval of the Explore Transportation Plan, along with funding to implement the plan. Furthermore, SPCSA staff recommend approval of the good cause exemption and amendment request to enable the school to provide transportation to students.

**Proposed Motion:**

- 1. Approve the Explore Academy Las Vegas Transportation Plan, along with funding to implement the Plan and allow SPCSA staff to work with the school to make budget revisions as long as the total funding does not exceed the average per pupil cost in the local school district.
- 2. Approve the charter contract amendment request for Explore Academy Las Vegas to allow the school to provide student transportation.
- 3. Require the school to provide SPCSA staff with documentation to demonstrate that the school is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations prior to beginning to transport students.

*If approved, the enrollment for the remainder of the contract term will remain unchanged:*

School Year	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Grade Levels	6-12	6-12	6-12	Contract renewal required		
Total Enrollment	530	550	570			