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ACTION MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Authority Board
FROM: Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing, SPCSA
Danny Peltier, Management Analyst III, SPCSA
SUBJECT: **Explore Academy – Charter Amendment Request to Reduce Enrollment Cap**
DATE: March 1, 2024

Summary of Request and Recommendation

Explore Academy Las Vegas (Explore) is requesting that the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) grant a Good Cause Exemption request and approve the school to reduce the enrollment cap for the 2023 – 24 school year and to reduce the enrollment cap for each year remaining on the charter term.

SPCSA staff has reviewed the application and recommends that the Authority grant the Good Cause Exemption and approve the amendment request. A proposed motion can be found on page of 3 this memo.

Background and Analysis

Explore is a charter middle and high school that is approved to serve grades 6-12 at full-scale. Explore moved into its permanent facility, located at 3551 N Ferrell Street, North Las Vegas, to start the 22-23 school year. Explore had 268 students enrolled as of the 2023 Validation day.

According to the amendment application, Explore is seeking an amendment in order to reduce its enrollment cap and revise the plan for enrollment. Projections have been adjusted in part due to the following factors which were primarily related to the facility. First, the Explore noted it had to decrease its enrollment goals in 2020-2021 in accordance with the challenges faced when opening a brand new school during a pandemic. Additionally, according to the application, the delay in securing and preparing the school’s permanent facility, also in large part due to the pandemic, impacted enrollment during 2021-2022 when the school was temporarily co-located

with another school at 4660 N Rancho Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89130. Explore originally proposed opening the permanent facility in January 2022, but ongoing pandemic-related issues with construction and supplies, delayed the relocation until immediately prior to the opening day of the 22-23 school year.

Explore continues to aggressively market the school and has seen increases in enrollment in each year of operation. According to the amendment application, The hiring of a new school leader has made a marked difference at the school, as observed by SPCSA staff during the site visit conducted on December 5, 2023. In addition to an improved learning environment and establishment of consistent systems, the principal, Ali Taylor, and school staff have prioritized contacting potential families on a regular basis and work diligently to promote the school in the local community. Also, the network hired a Director of Outreach and Marketing, Katia Pride, to assist with recruitment efforts. The school has been hosting meet and greet events, in-person at the school and virtually, if needed.

The school leader and support staff have been increasing their presence in the community by hosting community wide events and marketing in community centers, such as libraries. The school’s social media postings are also a focus by promoting what is happening within the school. The school is also ensuring a presence at community events such as holiday themed activities, school fairs, and other community sponsored events.

Explore continues to modify its budget to account for lower than expected enrollment. According to the application, the school’s budget relies almost exclusively on state funding with additional supplemental funding taken into account for Title programs and IDEA-B. No additional grants, donations, or fundraising revenues are included within the budget estimates. The budget considers the increase in per-pupil funding for the upcoming 2024-25 school year with no assumed increases thereafter.

If approved, the remaining approved enrollment cap for Explore’s charter term would be as follow:

School Year	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Grade Levels	6-12	6-12	6-12
Total Enrollment	284	450	525

Legal Authority and Requirements Related to Amendment Requests

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, SPCSA staff reviews the academic, financial and organizational performance of the applicant charter school. Explore’s middle school received a 1-star rating under the 2022-23 NSPF and scored 18.6 points on the SPCSA’s Academic Performance Framework. The middle school was issued a Notice of Concern at the December 8, 2023 SPCSA Board meeting. The Explore high school has yet to be rated on the NSPF or the SPCAS’s Academic Performance Framework.

Additionally, the school earned 93.70 points (out of 100) under the SPCSA Organizational Performance Framework for the 2021 – 22 school year as approved by the Authority on December 16, 2022, and appears on track to Meets Standard on the Authority’s 2022-23 Organizational Performance Framework as well. As such, SPCSA staff finds the school to be ‘Meeting Standards.’ Explore was issued a Notice of Concern on the 2022 SPCSA Financial and has yet to submit an independent audit for the 2023 SPCSA Financial Framework.

Overall, SPCSA staff will still continue to monitor Explore with regard to academic performance and financial performance, but SPCSA staff believes that ongoing monitoring should not affect this request to reduce the schools year enrollment cap. SPCSA staff does have concerns regarding Explore which have been noted in both the Notices of Concern in both Academic and Financial results. However, a charter school is required to be within 10% of the approved enrollment cap thus making this amendment approval necessary for contract compliance.

Proposed Motion:

Grant Explore Academy a Good Cause Exemption and approve the request of the school to reduce the enrollment cap for the 2023 – 24 school year and through the remainder of the charter term.

If approved, the enrollment cap for Explore Academy will be:

School Year	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Grade Levels	6-12	6-12	6-12
Total Enrollment	284	450	525

The currently approved enrollment cap for Explore Academy is:

School Year	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Grade Levels	6-12	6-12	6-12
Total Enrollment	450	545	570

Historical Performance and Demographic Information – Explore Academy

School Total Enrollment and Demographics since 2020

Year	Enrollment	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
20-21	136	2.2%	19.8%	50%	24.2%	0%	0.7%	2.9%	13.9%	*	41.1%
21-22	192	4.1%	19.2%	39%	29.6%	1%	6.7%	0%	14.5%	5.2%	46.3%
22-23	289	2.4%	23.15	26.6%	37.0%	0.3%	10.3%	0.0%	15.9%	<5%	54.6%
23-24	268	2.9%	19.0%	19.0%	46.6%	0.0%	10.4%	1.8%	12.6%	10.8%	100.0%

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

Explore Academy Charter School Financial Performance

Year	Rating
2021 – 2022	Notice on Concern
2020 – 2021	Meets the Standard

Explore Academy Charter School Organizational Performance

Year	Rating
2021 – 2022	Meets the Standard
2020 – 2021	Meets the Standard

Explore Academy Academic Performance

Year	Rating
2022 – 2023 Star Rating	Explore MS: 1-star Explore HS: Not Rated
2021 – 2022 Index Scores	Explore MS: 18.8 Explore HS: Not Rated

2020 – 2021 ¹	N/A
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Explore Academy 2022-23 SPCSA Academic Performance Framework Results³

Campus	2022-23 SPCSA Academic Framework Score	2022-23 SPCSA Academic Framework Rating
Explore Acad MS	18.6	BELOW STANDARD
Explore Acad HS	Not Rated	Not Rated

Explore Academy 2021-22 SPCSA Academic Performance Framework Results²

Campus	2021-22 SPCSA Academic Framework Score	2021-22 SPCSA Academic Framework Rating
Explore Acad MS	31.2	DOES NOT MEET STANDARD
Explore Acad HS	Not Rated	Not Rated

¹ Due to COVID-19, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) applied for and was granted a 2020 – 21 school year waiver from the US Department of Education for certain requirements established by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Nevada statewide assessments were administered in the 2020 – 21 school year, but the NDE did not calculate Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) school ratings for the 2020 – 21 school year.

² The Nevada Department of Education (NDE) calculated NSPF index scores for the 2021-22 school year but did not calculate corresponding star ratings (shown as N/A). 2021-22 NSPF details and rules can be found at: <http://nevadareportcard.nv.gov/DI/MoreDownload?filename=Nevada%20School%20Performance%20Framework%20Manual%202021-22%20School%20Year.pdf>