



STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Board
FROM: Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing
SUBJECT: Learning Bridge Charter School – Charter Renewal Request
DATE: November 2, 2018

1. Background

Learning Bridge Charter School has submitted a request to renew its charter contract as the current charter contract for Learning Bridge Charter School expires on June 30, 2019. Learning Bridge Charter School is a single K-8 school and operates one campus in Ely; opening in 2013.

After a thorough review of the historical data and charter renewal application, staff strongly recommends that the Authority approve the charter renewal of Learning Bridge Charter School for a six-year term, beginning July 1, 2019, with conditions as outlined on page 4.

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 by the SPCSA of a renewal report to the charter school.¹ 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. This document 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

¹ Both charter school regulations and the Authority's Performance Framework provides 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 R089-16A(10)(2), and the Authority's Charter School Performance Framework, at page 7.

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 [R089-16A\(10\)\(1\).](#)

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 [R089-16A\(10\)\(1\).](#) 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\(3\).](#)

Decisions to renew a charter school contract or deny a renewal application are made and based upon the SPCSA's Charter School Performance Framework, and Nevada's charter school statutes and regulations related to charter school renewal. See [NRS 388A.285](#), and R089-16A. As stated in the [SPCSA's Charter School Performance Framework](#), "merit-based" charter renewal decisions will be made "in accordance with statute and regulation and based on longitudinal information over a school's charter term." See Charter School Performance Framework, at 7.

The SPCSA's Charter School Performance Framework makes clear that charter school renewal applications are based on the charter school's academic, financial and organizational performance, and the expectation is that charter schools seeking renewal will be rated under the NSPF as a three-star school or above. See Charter School Performance Framework, at page 7. 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 [R089-16A\(10\)\(10\).](#)

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 optional site visits, academic achievement of pupils, and any other information that is determined to be relevant to whether the charter contract should be renewed. See [R089-16A\(10\)\(6\).](#)

When determining whether to grant an application for renewal of a charter contract, the Authority Board considers the foregoing factors and 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 [R089-16A\(10\)\(9\).](#) Again, as stated above, no factor is to be given more weight than the academic performance of pupils at the charter school.² See [R089-16A\(10\)\(10\).](#)

At its sole discretion, the Authority Board may renew a charter contract for a term of 6 years, or, alternatively, deny the renewal application. See [R089-16A\(10\)\(11\)](#)³. If a charter contract is renewed, the

² See R089-16A(10)(10)b and c. 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.

³ Note that upon recommendation by SPCSA staff to deny a renewal application, or the Authority Board denying a renewal application, Nevada's charter school regulations provide for reconsideration and other mechanisms by which the charter school may provide additional information to the SPCSA. See R089-16A(14).

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....”

3. Analysis

Academics

Learning Bridge has exhibited adequate academic performance throughout its initial charter term. Most recently, the Nevada State Performance Framework (NSPF) rated the Elementary school 2 stars and the Middle school 3 stars.

Last month, the SPCSA Board issued a Notice of Concern to Learning Bridge given its 2-star status for the 2017-18 school year. Under the Charter School Performance Framework, a Notice of Concern represents Level 1 in the Authority’s Intervention Ladder. This is the school’s first and only Notice of Concern in the current charter term. In making a recommendation to renew a three-star school, staff would like to highlight the following characteristics related to Learning Bridge Charter School:

- School leadership has demonstrated a strong sense of urgency to act quickly in an effort to change its performance trajectory for both the elementary and middle schools. While the elementary school has dipped to a 2-star, the middle school has also fallen to a 3-star, and the school remains dissatisfied with their current rating. As such, SPCSA staff is optimistic that the school will be able to change its star rating for the positive with the next NSPF star rating release.
- Learning Bridge Charter School remains focused on maintaining quality seats, at-scale, in White Pine County. It is noteworthy that White Pine County currently has only three other schools in the county that are at or above the 3-star level. SPCSA staff believes that Learning Bridge offers some of the highest quality seats available to students and families in the area.
- It would be premature of the Authority to not renew the charter, thus bringing the school to a close, on the basis of a single year’s performance after historically acceptable academic performance.

| Year | NSPF Rating |
|------|--|
| 2018 | Elementary school: 2 stars (Operating under a Notice of Concern) Middle school: 3 stars |
| 2017 | Elementary school: 3 stars Middle school: 5 stars |
| 2016 | Elementary school: 3 stars Middle school: not ranked |
| 2015 | Elementary school: 3 stars Middle school: not ranked |
| 2014 | Elementary school: 3 stars Middle school: not ranked |

| Year | SPCSA Academic Programmatic Audit Findings | SPCSA Academic Intervention Ladder Status |
|------|--|---|
| 2014 | Adequate | Good Standing |
| 2013 | Adequate | Good Standing |

Organizational

In its current iteration, the SPCSA Organizational Framework is 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. Last month, the Authority issued a Notice of Concern to the school for its 2-star rating under the Nevada Department of Education’s Nevada

School Performance Framework for the 2017-18 school year. Under the Charter School Performance Framework, a Notice of Concern represents Level 1 in the Authority’s Intervention Ladder.

SPCSA Organizational Programmatic Audit Findings

| | |
|------|---------------|
| 2017 | Good Standing |
| 2016 | Good Standing |
| 2015 | Good Standing |
| 2014 | Good Standing |

The total number of staff is 18, with 11 of those – 61% being instructional staff members.

In addition to enrollment of 188 students, Learning Bridge has 2 siblings currently on its waitlist.

Financial

Learning Bridge has a history of clean audit findings. The SPCSA Financial Framework monitors a variety of indicators of financial health. This is supported by the school being classified within the financial rating system as in Good Standing each year since 2014.

SPCSA Financial Programmatic Audit Findings

| | |
|------|---------------|
| 2017 | Good Standing |
| 2016 | Good Standing |
| 2015 | Good Standing |
| 2014 | Good Standing |

4. Recommendation: Approve Renewal, with Conditions

Learning Bridge has shown consistent academic and organizational performance in its initial charter term. They are financially viable, and SPCSA staff is confident the school will be able to change its current trajectory and return to good standing. They currently have consistent and steady enrollment, and they are financial viable.

The Authority is encouraged to renew Learning Bridge for a six-year term, beginning July 1, 2019. Furthermore, SPCSA staff recommends that the elementary school submit to SPCSA staff an academic improvement plan should the school fail to improve to a three-star rating, or earn at least 50 adjusted index score points, according to the 2019 NSPF results in the first year of the renewal term.

School Demographics, since 2015

| Campus Name | Total Enrollment | AI/AN | Asian | Black | Caucasian | Hispanic | Mixed Races/ Two or more races | Pacific Islander | IEP | ELL | FRL |
|-------------|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|----------|--------------------------------|------------------|-------|------|-------|
| 2017-18 | 179 | 3.4% | 0.6% | - | 72.1% | 20.1% | 2.8% | 1.1% | 13.4% | 3.9% | 14% |
| 2016-17 | 181 | 3.9% | - | - | 74.0% | 18.2% | 2.8% | 1.1% | 13.2% | 4.0% | 24.8% |
| 2015-16 | 174 | 4.6% | - | - | 67.2% | 24.7% | 2.8% | 1.1% | 8.6% | 4.0% | 25.8% |

Additionally, Learning Bridge Charter School projects continued consistent enrollment through a renewed charter term.

| | 2019-2020 | 2020-2021 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 | 2024-2025 |
|---------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Planned Total Enrollment | 183 | 183 | 183 | 183 | 183 | 183 |
| PreK | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Kindergarten | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| 1st grade | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| 2nd grade | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| 3rd grade | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| 4th grade | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| 5th grade | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| 6th grade | 21 | 21 | 21 | 21 | 21 | 21 |
| 7th grade | 21 | 21 | 21 | 21 | 21 | 21 |
| 8th grade | 21 | 21 | 21 | 21 | 21 | 21 |
| 9th grade | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| 10th grade | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| 11th grade | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| 12th grade | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |