

Charter School Application Report

Pinecrest Academy of Northern Nevada

Recommendation from the Summer 2019 Charter Application Cycle

General Information

Proposed Name	Pinecrest Academy of Northern Nevada
Proposed Mission	Pinecrest Academy of Northern Nevada unites the community to prepare students for college and career.
Proposed EMO	Academica Nevada
Proposed Grade Configuration	K-8 ¹
Proposed Opening	2020-21
Proposed Location	89431, 89433 and 89441

Process/Key Dates for Pinecrest Academy of Northern Nevada

- New Charter Application Training
- March 15, 2019 – Notice of Intent is received
- July 15, 2019 – Application is received
- August 15, 2019 – AB 462 Addendum is received
- October 30, 2019 - Capacity Interview is conducted
- December 17, 2019 – Recommendation is presented

¹ The applicant proposes to open with grades K-7 in the 2020-21 school year. The school would add an 8th grade the following year, reaching a K-8 grade configuration for the 2021-2022 school year.

Planned Enrollment Chart

	<u>2020-21</u>	<u>2021-22</u>	<u>2022-23</u>	<u>2023-24</u>	<u>2024-25</u>	<u>2025-26</u>
<u>K</u>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<u>1</u>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<u>2</u>	104	104	104	104	104	104
<u>3</u>	104	104	104	104	104	104
<u>4</u>	78	104	104	104	104	104
<u>5</u>	78	78	104	104	104	104
<u>6</u>	62	93	124	124	124	124
<u>7</u>	62	62	93	124	124	124
<u>8</u>	0	62	62	93	124	124
<u>9</u>						
<u>10</u>						
<u>11</u>						
<u>12</u>						
Total	688	807	895	957	988	988

Executive Summary and Recommendation

The review committee and SPCSA staff find that the Pinecrest Academy of Northern Nevada exhibits shortcomings within all four components of the submitted application. Regarding the proposed academic, organizational and financial plans, there are identified weaknesses that do not meet the standards as outlined in the charter application rubric. The applicant was unable to provide the review team with a clear understanding of how the Pinecrest model would be adapted to best serve the projected demographics of the school. More specifically, there was little evidence that the school has adequate supports for key demographics such as English learners. The academic plan would also benefit from additional detail regarding the social, emotional and behavioral supports available to students

Weaknesses within the organizational plan are accentuated by a staffing plan that does not adequately support EL students. The school is obligated to provide suitable services for this specific demographic. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity about the incubation year and roles and responsibilities of the identified principal, Academics and the Committee to Form. Both of these concerns tie directly to identified gaps within the proposed financial plan.

The principal deficiency is the application’s failure to meet one of the identified needs as defined by the SPCSA’s Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment. While the Committee to Form provided evidence of community engagement, and spoke to past and scheduled events to

promote the school, the applicant was unable to substantiate that it was providing access to a 3, 4 or 5-star school for students currently attending a 1 or 2-star school. The zip code where the school proposes to locate previously included only one 2-star school according to the 2018 Nevada School Performance Data (NSPF). According to 2019, this single school is now rated as a 4-star school, leaving no schools in the zip code rated below 3-stars. It is also noteworthy that the projected demographics for the school do not match those of Washoe County School District in key subgroups of EL and FRL students. Given the requirements of recent legislation, this represents a significant shortcoming.

For these major reasons, in addition to those outlined throughout this document, staff's recommendation is to deny the Pinecrest Academy of Northern Nevada charter school application

Proposed motion: Deny the Pinecrest Academy of Northern Nevada charter school application as submitted during the 2019 Summer Application Cycle based on a finding that the applicant has failed to satisfy the requirements contained in NRS 388A.249(3).

Summary of Application Section Ratings

The State Public Charter School Authority is required to assemble a team of reviewers and conduct a thorough evaluation of the application, which includes an in-person interview with the applicant designed to elicit any necessary clarification or additional information about the proposed charter school. The SPCSA is required to adhere to its policies and practices, namely the application guidance, training and rubric, regarding evaluating charter applications. Ultimately, the SPCSA must base its determination on the documented evidence collected through the application process.

Rating options for each section are Meets the Standard; Approaches the Standard; Does not Meet the Standard. These are defined as follows:

- **Meets the Standard:** The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It addresses the topic with specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation; presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; and inspires confidence in the applicant's capacity to carry out the plan effectively in a way which will result in a 4- or 5-star school.
- **Approaches the Standard:** The response meets the criteria in many respects but lacks detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.
- **Does Not Meet the Standard:** The response is undeveloped or incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant's ability to carry it out.
- The rubric is broken into four major sections as outlined below and detailed descriptions of each rubric item can be found in the full rubric located on the SPCSA Application website: http://charterschools.nv.gov/OpenASchool/Application_Packet/

Meeting the Need: Does Not Meet the Standard

- o Targeted Plan
 - Does Not Meet the Standard
- o Parent and Community Involvement
 - Approaches the Standard

Academic Plan: Approaches the Standard

- o Mission and Vision
 - Approaches the Standard
- o Transformational Change

- **Meets the Standard**
- Curriculum & Instructional Design
 - **Approaches the Standard**
- Distance Education Requirements
 - **N/A**
- Pre-K Requirements
 - **N/A**
- High School Graduation Requirements
 - **N/A**
- Driving for Results
 - **Meets the Standard**
- At Risk Students and Special Populations
 - **Does Not Meet the Standard**
- School Structure (Culture)
 - **Approaches the Standard**
- School Structure (Student Discipline)
 - **Approaches the Standard**
- School Structure (Calendar and Schedule)
 - **Meets the Standard**
- A Day in the Life & Scenarios
 - **Approaches the Standard**

Operations Plan: Approaches the Standard

- Leadership Team
 - **Approaches the Standard**
- Leadership for Expansion (Experienced Operators Only)
 - **N/A**
- Staffing
 - **Does Not Meet the Standard**

- Human Resources
 - **Meets the Standard**
- Scale Strategy (Experienced Operators Only)
 - **N/A**
- Student Recruitment and Enrollment
 - **Approaches the Standard**
- Board Governance
 - **Approaches the Standard**
- Incubation Year Development
 - **Does Not Meet the Standard**
- EMO Relationships and School Management Contracts (If Applicable)
 - **Approaches the Standard**
- Services
 - **Approaches the Standard**
- Facilities
 - **Does Not Meet the Standard**

- Ongoing Operations
 - **Approaches the Standard**

Financial Plan: Approaches the Standard

Meeting the Need Section

While it is clear that the Committee to Form (CTF) has engaged with students and families from the greater Reno/Sparks area, the proposed school does not meet one of the academic or demographic needs as outlined in the SPCSA Needs Assessment. While the applicant has identified a location in a zip code that according to the 2017-18 Nevada Report Card had one 2-Star school (note that according to the 2018-19 Nevada Report Card no school in the identified zip code is rated as below 3-Stars), the CTF has not demonstrated a commitment to providing access to a high-performing school to students and families that currently attend 1 or 2-star schools. The written application projects serving a free and reduced lunch (FRL) population that is significantly lower than the average for Washoe County School District (WCSD) as well as currently operating Pinecrest schools in southern Nevada. By comparison, the written application projects serving approximately 14% of students who are English learners, on par with the statewide rate and 19% students with disabilities, above the statewide rate. While the Pinecrest model has shown substantial success in the Las Vegas area, the applicant provided little evidence that the model has been adapted to serve substantially more English Learners, FRL students, and students with disabilities than are currently served in the Las Vegas schools.

Areas of Strength

- The CTF shared its belief that because of the strong results in Southern Nevada, opening a school with the Pinecrest model in Northern Nevada should create a consistent, high-quality option in Northern Nevada.
- Four total meetings have been planned, with two additional that are scheduled. It was estimated by the CTF that there have been between 40-60 individuals at each of these meetings.
- The CTF reinforced that it plans to partner with the Boys and Girls Club, which is also a school lunch provider in Washoe County. WCSD is the only other entity (other than the Boys & Girls Club) that provides lunch services. It was also identified that the Boys and Girls Club can also provide assistance to families with after-school programming.
- The website and interest to enroll forms are available in multiple languages.

Areas of Concern

- The capacity interview indicated that the school still has work to do in terms of clearly defining the community it plans to serve and meeting one of the needs from the SPCSA Needs Assessment. Members of the CTF explained that initially they were intent to market their school in a close radius to the proposed location, but this radius has expanded due to increased interest throughout the greater Reno/Sparks area. This creates questions about the community the school wishes to serve, especially since the nearest school that is now rated less than 2-stars is more than five miles away according to the 2018-19 NSPF ratings.
- The projected FRL population at the school seems very low compared to the average for Washoe County School District. While the CTF indicated that this number will end up being much higher, it is not clear that the CTF has already made progress to engage and market

the school to populations that might benefit the most, such families residing on an Indian Reservation. This was reaffirmed later in the interview when members of the proposed Board agreed that there were opportunities to build a relationship with tribal members, but that communication had yet to be established with the tribe to promote PANN as an option.

- When asked how they would reach families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the CTF mentioned before and after school care through the Boys and Girls Club as a draw without providing specific, clear strategies for proactive engagement and recruitment.
- The CTF indicated that they will not be offering transportation initially, but would be open to discussing this at a later date and or partnering with the Boys & Girls Club. This compounds the concern that the intended community of the school appears to be undefined. If the targeted area is large, but there is no transportation provided, it likely will present a hurdle for students that would qualify for additional supports or free and reduced lunch from attending.
- The CTF noted that before and after care can be provided on-site at a reduced cost through a partnership with the Boys & Girls Club, which should help attract students and families that need additional supports outside of the traditional school day. The fact remains, however, that students will still have to physically get to the campus and it is not clear if aftercare will be free to all students.

Academic Section

Despite proposing a school model with demonstrated success in southern Nevada, the applicant fails to meet the standards within this section for a few reasons. The CTF failed to articulate how the proposed academic model has been adapted for the proposed community in the Reno/Sparks, specifically a higher English Learner (EL) population. The proposed staffing plan under this academic program raises questions about effectively supporting a high EL population. It was also unclear how the proposed principal would be adequately supported during the incubation year and how their job may need to be tailored to the specific community and model in northern Nevada.

Areas of Strength

- The school has an identified principal that is familiar with what a successful version of the Pinecrest model looks like. This helps ensure appropriate execution and fidelity.
- When asked how the CTF will know if the school model is effective with the student population, responses included iReady data, classroom observation data both through the principal and instructional coaches, and coordination with the Pinecrest teams throughout the country to ensure there is sound execution. This response reinforced various elements of the application.

Areas of Concern

- The CTF's responses further affirmed concerns related to supporting English learners when the school is projected to serve roughly 138 English learners at scale. The CTF acknowledged that no ESL teachers were included in the budget and claimed this was an oversight. Furthermore, when asked about support for English learners, the Power Hour program was reiterated. While Power Hour can provide a venue for supporting English learners, it does not speak to the staffing and programmatic approach. This was a missed opportunity for the applicant to detail and provide examples about how the specific model is best tailored to fit the needs of the community.
- When describing the Principal's role in managing Academica, the proposed Education Management Organization (EMO), and the Pinecrest Foundation, it was clarified that Academica provides support (back office, payroll, etc.) and principals provide feedback on these services while reporting on academics, parent involvement, etc. to the Board. The support from Academica is mainly tailored to helping the Principal, but the CTF stated that the Board is ultimately responsible for holding the Principal and Academica accountable. None of this information was included in the Principal job description, and likely requires significant time and capacity to execute adequately.
- During the capacity interview, it was repeatedly stated by the applicant team that they were attracted to the Pinecrest model due to the achievement results in Southern Nevada.

However, it was not clear how the local community was active in crafting this application to best fit their needs.

- Outside of providing the example of Leader In Me as an addition to the Pinecrest model, it was not clear that the Committee to Form had thought intentionally about what changes may need to occur to ensure success in the Spanish Springs area. This is especially true for special populations such as SPED and EL students as the southern Nevada schools that are proposed to be replicated currently serve significantly smaller populations of these subgroups than is anticipated by the CTF in the application.
- Insufficient information is included in the application related to supporting the behavioral, social, and emotional needs of students. The application only describes a mentor program that is not meant for students requiring more intensive, individualized services. Furthermore, no counselor is included in the year one budget and the described Response to Intervention framework does not include information related to behavioral interventions and only states that behavioral plans would be created as needed.

Operations Section

Similar to the concerns highlighted within previous sections, the proposed staffing plan has not been appropriately tailored to reflect a commitment to serving a high-need community. The applicant did not demonstrate that it has effectively planned for all jobs and key personnel areas so as to incorporate the community as a part of this proposal. It is not clear that there is an established, delineated plan for the proposed CTF, Principal and Academics during the incubation year that includes a written agreement. While there is a strong, proposed Board identified, there are a number of indirect ties to Academics that raise concerns about their ability to operate independently.

Areas of Strength

- When asked about the responsibilities of the Board as it relates to the model, the Board responded that their job is to adopt the model, turn the screw, and make sure it operates successfully. The Board understands their role is governance, not day-to-day management of the school.
- The CTF was able to stress the importance of independence and being public stewards of taxpayers' money.
- The CTF clarified that the 1% affiliation fee goes to Pinecrest Academy Inc., not Pinecrest Academy of Nevada, for use of the name and certain support services (on site principal training and PD; on site teacher training and PD; classroom critique and assessment; technology training; help with attaining accreditation). This confirms that the fee is not costly and also is reinvested into the proposed school.

Areas of Concern

- While the CTF indicated that it was too early to enter into a contract with Pinecrest Inc., more specific information in another format could have been provided about the services and arrangements between the proposed school and Pinecrest Academy Inc. to outline accountability structures, commitments and the ultimate destination for the other 0.5% of the affiliation fee. It would be appropriate to have a copy of such agreement, at least in draft form, in the charter application.
- In response to questions about why there was material from an unrelated application in this proposal, a Board member stated there were some “type-o’s”. The Board member went on to state that English learner staff had been left out of the budget. Furthermore, the job descriptions, as proposed, do not align to the school model. This raises concerns about the preparedness of this applicant as it is critical that the information included within the application is both aligned to the school model and accurate.
- Representatives from Academica reiterated that part of their role during the incubation year is to handle services (recruitment, facility, etc.). This raises concerns, however, without a formal MOU or some clear understanding between the parties as well as questions about incurred costs. It also raises concerns about the Board’s ability to hold Academica accountable given that the school’s Board is allowing a vendor to execute critical incubation year functions without any written scope of services.
- The proposed staffing model does not adequately support the needs of EL students. While the applicant notes that it anticipates serving a high number of EL students, the staffing plan relies on a TESOL endorsed classroom teachers to provide all services. A homeroom teacher coordinating these services is insufficient given the number of EL students the school projects to serve. These concerns are enhanced by the applicant’s response to the Day in The Life Scenario, which signals the CTF may not fully understand that EL services are required, not optional.
- While several members of the Board directly addressed the question of prior relationships with Academica in the capacity interview, concerns still exist related to a majority of prospective Board members having an indirect tie to Academica, including two proposed members that are to be appointed by the Board of Pinecrest Academy of Nevada. While this may promote fidelity to the model, direct appointment of members leads to questions about how these members are vetted and which body actually governs the proposed school.

Financial Section

The proposed Board brings a wealth of experience in managing large budgets, and the proposed budget for the school is reasonable. However, the financial plan has not been altered to include a number of key components within the proposal, including: EL and SPED staffing, teacher salaries and the National School Lunch Program. The budget also reflects no expenditures for the incubation year, which is concerning given that a proposed Principal is already identified and the proposed Board and EMO have significant responsibilities prior to opening.

Areas of Strength

- The Board includes individuals that bring experience in managing large budgets and financial statements. Members of the proposed Board also reiterated during the capacity interview that they have asked critical questions of Academics as it relates to the budget in their work for other schools. This confirms that the Board recognizes its governance obligations.
- The budget that is presented is relatively conservative and realistic.

Areas of Concern

- No compelling additional information related to the Financial Plan criteria were provided. Concerns still exist related to lack of EL teachers and insufficient special education teachers in the budget, no information on health services until year three, teacher salary, the National School Lunch Program and transportation, the significant fund balance, and no audited financials for the proposed EMO.
- Additional concerns were raised during the capacity interview related to incubation year development. It is not clear how that time will be funded and if there are other parties involved—such as the Pinecrest Foundation or other Pinecrest schools—that will support this effort. There is no mention of a Pinecrest Foundation in the submitted application. Further, there is nothing in the budget to reflect this type of grant or any foundation grant.

Capacity Interview Summary

Based on the independent and collective review of the application, the review committee conducted a 90-minute in-person interview of the applicant to elicit any necessary clarifications or additional information about the proposed charter school and determine the ability of the applicants to establish a high-quality charter school. The capacity interview for Pinecrest Academy of Northern Nevada was conducted on Wednesday October 30. All but one of the proposed members of the Committee to Form attended on behalf of the applicant. Additionally, two representatives of the proposed EMO – Academica Nevada – attended the capacity interview. Questions during the capacity interview were developed by the team of reviewers to specifically address the details of the Pinecrest Academy of Northern Nevada application and focused primarily on four key areas:

- The ability of the applicant to meet one or more of the academic or demographic needs as outlined in the SPCSA Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment.
- The academic plan, including student supports for key student subgroups, instructional model and curriculum, remediation and how the proposed programming aligned with both the presented budget and staffing plan.
- The financial plan, including the proposed budget, incubation year funding, staffing plan, costs associated with replication, proposed vendors, and alignment to the proposed academic model.
- The operations plan, including the proposed Board, EMO selection and accountability structures, affiliation fees and staff recruitment.

Information gleaned from the capacity interview were coupled with the initial review of the application to determine final ratings on the rubric. Relevant information from the capacity interview is incorporated in the findings outlined above.

District Input

Per Assembly Bill 462 (2019), the SPCSA solicited input from the Washoe County School District regarding this application.² The timeline regarding this request for input is below and the response provided by the Washoe County School District is attached.

- September 16, 2019 – Memo sent to WCSD soliciting input
- October 15, 2019 – Written input provided from WCSD to SPCSA

² Assembly Bill 462 (2019) section 6.3, subsection 1, paragraph (d): “The proposed sponsor of a charter school shall, in reviewing an application to form a charter school...If the proposed sponsor is not the board of trustees of a school district, solicit input from the board of trustees of the school district in which the proposed charter school will be located.”