

Charter School Application Report

Sage Collegiate Public Charter School

Recommendation from the Summer 2019 Charter Application Cycle

General Information

Proposed Name	Sage Collegiate Public Charter School
Proposed Mission	With a commitment to excellence for all and a belief in the power of an education, Sage Collegiate Public Charter School educates K-8 students for academic achievement, college success, and a life of opportunity.
Proposed EMO	N/A
Proposed Grade Configuration	K-8 ¹
Proposed Opening	2020-21
Proposed Location	89107 and 89108

Process/Key Dates for Sage Collegiate Academy

- New Charter Application Training
- March 15, 2019 – Notice of Intent is received
- July 15, 2019 – Application is received
- August 11, 2019 – AB 462 Addendum is received
- October 28, 2019 - Capacity Interview is conducted
- December 17, 2019 – Recommendation is presented

¹ The applicant proposes to open with grades K-2 in the 2020-21 school year. The school would add one grade per year until reaching the full K-8 configuration. Note that during the initial charter term the school would only grow to reach grade 7.

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>	56	56	56	56	56	56
<u>1</u>	56	56	56	56	56	56
<u>2</u>	56	56	56	56	56	56
<u>3</u>	0	56	56	56	56	56
<u>4</u>	0	0	56	56	56	56
<u>5</u>	0	0	0	56	60	60
<u>6</u>	0	0	0	0	60	60
<u>7</u>	0	0	0	0	0	60
<u>8</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>9</u>						
<u>10</u>						
<u>11</u>						
<u>12</u>						
Total	168	224	280	336	400	460

Executive Summary and Recommendation

The review committee and SPCSA staff find that the Sage Collegiate Public Charter School application has shortcomings within all four components of the submitted application. The SPCSA staff find that the proposed academic, organizational and financial plans do not meet the standards as outlined in the charter application rubric. The Committee to Form, including the proposed school leader, have some experience working in the community where the school proposes to locate. However, the applicant has provided little evidence of engagement with or support from the proposed local community. In addition, while the applicant identifies a range of research-based instructional strategies and programs, the applicant has not yet decided on or committed to which will be implemented. Ultimately, the academic plan is not fully developed at this time and does not warrant a Meets Standard rating. The applicant has not provided convincing evidence that a facility that meets both the physical and budgetary requirements can be identified and prepared in time for a fall 2020 opening. In addition, the proposed budget raised several questions that were not thoroughly explained during the capacity interview. Rather the applicant referred to the budget at “very preliminary,” raising questions as to whether the school, as presented, is ultimately viable.

The review committee and SPCSA staff find that the Sage Collegiate Public Charter School application meets the Geographic component of the Academic Needs within the SPCSA Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment. The applicant articulates a commitment to create a 4 or 5-star school in a community that has multiple 1 and 2-star schools and to provide access to students currently enrolled in those 1 and 2-star schools.

For these major reasons, in addition to those outlined throughout this document, staff’s

recommendation is to deny the Sage Collegiate Public Charter School application.

Proposed motion: Deny the Sage Collegiate Public 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: Approaches the Standard

- Targeted Plan
 - Meets the Standard
- Parent and Community Involvement
 - Approaches the Standard

Academic Plan: Approaches the Standard

- Mission and Vision
 - Meets the Standard
- Transformational Change

- **Approaches the Standard**
- Curriculum & Instructional Design
 - **Does Not Meet 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
 - **Approaches 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
 - **Meets the Standard**

Operations Plan: Approaches the Standard

- Leadership Team
 - **Approaches the Standard**
- Leadership for Expansion (Experienced Operators Only)
 - **N/A**
- Staffing
 - **Approaches the Standard**

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

Financial Plan: Does Not Meet Standard

Meeting the Need Section

The applicant has clearly identified a target community that closely aligns to the Academic and Geographic Needs Assessment. Specifically, the applicant aims to serve a community with a high percentage of students in poverty and where there are a significant number of existing 1- and 2-star schools. However, there is little to no evidence of engagement with the local community. Letters of support provided are not from community stakeholders or organizations within the local community where the school proposes to locate. There was no evidence of how the local community had contributed in the development of the proposal.

Areas of Strength

- The target community has been identified as zip codes 89107 and 89108. These zip codes have significant numbers of 1- and 2-star schools. In addition, the schools in the community are largely student populations that are 100% FRL. The capacity interview reinforced the committee to form's commitment to the target zip codes and serving a high-need/at-risk student population.
- A detailed explanation of the target community is presented, and the proposed ED has firsthand experience and knowledge of the identified community. In addition, the proposed ED has previously supported teachers working in schools in the target community. The proposed ED is currently working as a teacher in a school within one of the identified zip codes of the application. Multiple board members also have connections within the identified zip codes.
- The application is very explicit that there will be no mandatory volunteering, donations, or fees as conditions of enrollment in the school.

Areas of Concern

- At the time of submission, the committee to form did not provide evidence of engagement with the local community in the development of the proposal. This was confirmed during the capacity interview, but the CTF was able to present intentional strategies for doing so. The proposed school leader shared anecdotal examples of community engagement but no data or evidence was provided to substantiate that parents, neighborhood, and/or community members representatives of the target population were involved in the development of the plan.
- While there are several letters of support from the charter school community in Las Vegas and in California, none of the letters of support are from community members or organizations that are located in the target community.

Academic Section

While the application identifies a range of research-based instructional strategies and programs, the applicant has not yet decided on or committed to which will be implemented. This is both stated in the written application and was affirmed during a lengthy discussion during the capacity interview. This raises questions about the investment and research conducted to date, but also made it difficult to fully evaluate the proposed academic program. In addition, it was not clear how the multitude of programs and strategies would be implemented in a coherent manner. When taken together, these are indicators that the school is not ready to open.

Areas of Strength

- Guiding purposes and priorities for the proposed school are very explicit, align with the committee to form's philosophy and mission, and the strategy for measurement is also identified.
- The applicant identifies a range of research-based instructional strategies and programs.
- Academic goals and measures are clear, measurable, realistic and ambitious. The applicant states students will have their own data binder to allow for students and families to track their progress. In addition, the applicant uses known reliable (valid) internal assessments STEP and NWEA.
- The applicant has provided a clear and appropriate delineation within the state-mandated Response to Intervention model. The applicant has ensured that the rights of students with disabilities have been considered and appear to be protected regarding discipline within the application.
- The narrative clearly explains how the proposed school will exceed the average number of calendar days in year 1 and assures the calendar will always have 180 days as required. The number of instructional minutes required is met and exceeded at each grade level and the calendar and schedule seem reasonable to support the delivery of the program.

Areas of Concern

- Several parts of the academic program were intentionally left undefined, in particular the curriculum. The proposal is a compilation of the programs and strategies the proposed ED has researched and likes, but is unwilling to commit to which ones will be implemented. This was probed and crystalized during the interview (and is explicitly stated in the written application regarding curriculum). Specifically, during the capacity interview, the review committee listed out ten programs directly from the application and asked "are there any that you do plan to implement, for sure, that you've listed in your application. Or are they just kind of ideas that you've researched?" The proposed school leader stated "At this stage, they're ideas we're weighing and considering. Upon authorization and upon the receipt of a grant we will make those decisions." Not only does this raise questions about the level of investment to date from the committee to form in researching and identifying programs that will best suit the target community, but it also leaves the application with significant holes that make it hard to fully evaluate

- the quality of the academic plan, a fundamental element of the charter proposal.
- While key components of the model are identified and research-based, the application is lacking in detail regarding how these components would be implemented in a coherent manner. Responsible parties, target population, actions, timelines, context, delivery methods, and rationale are not provided for many of the identified components.
- The application does not speak to plans for exiting students from special services.
- The application does not provide a strong sense of the culture, other than being structured with routines and a thoughtful/rigorous approach to discipline. The description of the culture of the school contains a list of resources from well-respected authors. However, it is not clear how this knowledge will be transferred to staff members. This is compounded by a lack of clarity on the overall academic model.
- A “core value tracker” is mentioned but not explained. It is not clear how this tracker will relate to the clip change chart and merit/de-merit systems. A few different systems are mentioned without full clarity on each and how they create a cohesive system.
- Restorative Justice is briefly mentioned a few times but this approach is not developed throughout the culture or discipline sections.

Operations Section

The organizational section includes clear information about the staffing model, ongoing support for the school leader and a thoughtful approach to hiring and evaluating teachers. However, at the time of submission, only two proposed board members had been identified. While the applicant has made noticeable progress in identifying three additional, qualified board members, it is not clear that the proposed board is fully prepared to launch the school and hold the proposed school leader accountable. In addition, the applicant has not provided convincing evidence that a facility that meets both the physical and budgetary requirements can be identified and prepared in time for a fall 2020 opening.

Areas of Strength

- The organizational charts presented for year 1 and at scale are clear and reasonable. Each position is included in the draft proposed budget. Positions are clear and leadership responsibilities seem to be reasonably spread across the team. In addition, the year 7 chart includes a HS outreach position and a director of development, as well as enrichment teachers.
- Coaching and PD will be provided to the proposed school leader and proposed board through Building Excellent Schools. The qualification and competencies of the proposed leader are very well described and paint a clear picture of a capable professional with relevant experience and skills.
- The narrative articulates a clear process for hiring in alignment with the school’s core values and academic program. The school plans to offer slightly higher salaries than other local schools as an incentive to recruit talent and has a benefits package. The rationales are explained in the budget narrative.
- A thoughtful approach to teacher observations and evaluations is presented, along with an identified exemplar rubric. The evaluation system includes measures of student

growth and achievement, which strongly aligns with the proposed school's identified goals and the standards established by the charter authority.

- In order to maximize enrollment for students with special needs or those considered at-risk, the narrative identifies a number of detailed and targeted enrollment preferences to be exercised during the lottery and acknowledges being a Charter School Program grant recipient might hinder the use of the preferences, should grant funds be awarded. This demonstrates a very thoughtful and knowledgeable approach to policies related to student admissions.
- The rationale behind the slow growth model is explained and research is cited to support the approach.
- The application makes it clear the proposed school leader has a grasp of the operational tasks necessary to prepare for opening. There is a timeline with key tasks/milestones outlined and a plan for bringing on key staff.

Areas of Concern

- The written application identified only two proposed board members. In advance of the capacity interview, three additional board members were identified, all of whom were in attendance for the capacity interview. The board does now meet the legal requirements for membership and proposed members bring a range of skills and experiences. Yet serious questions remained after the interview regarding whether the proposed board would be prepared to hold the proposed school leader accountable, and whether there has been meaningful preparation work (such as community engagement) undertaken by the collective team – this interview was dominated by one strong personality (proposed school leader). It didn't balance well between leadership and governance and therefore the reviewers did not feel confident that this was a strong proposed board that understands the proposal and is ready to govern.
- The proposed school leader has a strong personality, experience, and is knowledgeable. However, during the capacity interview, she demonstrated a marked reluctance to having the board involved in anything she considered the purview of "management." Her definitions of where the lines are between management and governance seem to be skewed on the side of letting the school leader make all decisions and run the school without much oversight and input from the board. She also acknowledged that she led the application writing process (and the proposed board confirmed this as well) and therefore owns all the mistakes and problems found throughout the proposal, of which there are many. The application itself becomes a foundational charter document and therefore should be constructed with a high level of rigor and intentionality.
- At the time of submission of the application, a facility had not been identified. A basic timeframe was provided for acquisition but lacks discussion of other key dates and steps to be followed. The budget assumptions related to leasing and tenant improvement costs raise significant questions as to whether a viable facility exists within the budgeted amount. In addition, the applicant raises the possibility of retrofitting a former retail space which would require extensive renovations to be made suitable for use as a school. During

the capacity interview, the applicant was vague about whether any options had been identified within the projected cost assumptions. The proposed school leader reaffirmed with confidence the team's commitment to finding a suitable building for the school but failed to instill this same confidence in the review committee given the lack of detail provided.

- Professional development requirements to keep up with multiple methods of instruction will require large workload for teachers and may lead to burnout.
- The plan for safety and security is not fully developed. It does indicate that the applicant is familiar with mandates, however, doesn't offer a robust discussion of how the facility will be kept safe, other than administering visitor badges. This is important to address since there will not be any additional security contracted. When asked about this during the capacity interview, the applicant acknowledged the importance of this work, but did not provide many additional specifics, pointing to working with law enforcement and learning from other charter schools.

Financial Section

While the applicant has identified a reputable back office support firm and used conservative estimate regarding revenue, the budget raises many questions and was acknowledged by the committee to form as “very preliminary.” It is understandable that a proposed school budget would evolve during the incubation year. However, the highly preliminary nature of this budget makes it hard to fully evaluate whether it is balanced, realistic, evidence-based and viable.

Areas of Strength

- The proposed school would contract with a reputable back office support firm with charter school experience. The narrative demonstrates a thoughtful approach to acquiring this firm and clear expectations for what the process will entail (competitive bids, competitive pricing, mission alignment).
- The applicant used conservative estimates for ongoing school funding.

Areas of Concern

- During the interview it became clear that the construction of the budget is not thorough. Throughout this portion of the interview it was repeatedly stressed that the figures and assumptions were “preliminary” (the phrase “very preliminary” was also used). The totality of the conversation left the impression that the assumptions and draft budget are very unreliable and may not come close to matching the reality the school may face. While reviewers know budgets can and do change after approval, the responses here indicated a rushed or incomplete budgetary planning process. Overall the budget seems to be like the academic program – something was put on paper but it does not yet reflect a realistic plan. Assumptions should be logical, defensible, and supported by evidence – not explained away as being “preliminary” or “very preliminary.” Ensuring this is true for all major budget categories will yield a proposal that is much more likely to be aligned with the proposed school’s eventual reality. Moreover, it can be evaluated for viability.
- At the time of submission of the application, a facility had not been identified. A basic timeframe was provided for acquisition but lacks discussion of other key dates and steps to be followed. The budget assumptions related to leasing and tenant improvement costs raise significant questions as to whether a viable facility exists within the budgeted amount. In addition, the applicant raises the possibility of retrofitting a former retail space which would require extensive renovations to be made suitable for use as a school. During the capacity interview, the applicant was vague about whether any options had been identified within the projected cost assumptions. The proposed school leader reaffirmed with confidence the team’s commitment to finding a suitable building for the school but failed to instill this same confidence in the review committee given the lack of detail provided.
- There are several assumptions in the budget that were not substantiated, such as the assumption that just because vendors have a history of building payment plans around DSA payment timing with other schools will mean they will make the same arrangements

with this school and the assumption that the unidentified landlord will be willing to make a large portion of the tenant improvements.

- Several components of the budget do not line up with the application narrative:
 - The application indicates that teachers will receive bonuses based on longevity and student performance. No bonuses are included in the budget.
 - The application indicates that PE will be taught at the school, but there is no budget for athletic expenditures.
 - The application puts a heavy emphasis on the importance of parent and staff meetings, but there is no budget for this.

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 Sage Collegiate Public Charter School was conducted on Monday, October 28. All but one of the proposed members of the Committee to Form attended on behalf of the applicant. Additionally, one representative from EdTech, a potential vendor to provide back office services, who assisted with the development of the budget attended the capacity interview. Questions during the capacity interview were developed by the team of reviewers to specifically address the details of the Sage Collegiate application and focused primarily on five 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.
- School Leadership and Governance, including the experience, skills, and qualifications of members of the founding team and the proposed board's approach to governance and accountability
- The academic plan, including curriculum, instructional strategies, programs, professional development, and student supports.
- The operations plan including vendors, services, insurance, and school safety.
- The financial plan, including the proposed budget, prospective facilities, cash flow, and alignment to the proposed academic model

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 Clark County School District regarding this application.² The timeline regarding this request for input is below and the response provided by the Clark County School district is attached.

- September 16, 2019 – Memo sent to CCSD soliciting input.
- November 6, 2019 – Presentation by CCSD staff to CCSD Board of Trustees regarding input.
- November 13, 2019 – Written input provided from CCSD 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."