



STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

1749 North Stewart Street Suite 40
Carson City, Nevada 89706-2543
(775) 687 - 9174 · Fax: (775) 687 – 9113

BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Board
FROM: Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing
SUBJECT: American Preparatory Academy - Charter Renewal Recommendation
DATE: January 31, 2020

1. Background and Summary

American Preparatory Academy has submitted an application to renew its charter contract as the current charter contract expires on June 30, 2020. The charter school serves a total of 1637 students in grades K-12. The school currently operates one campus in Las Vegas, but is approved to open a second campus beginning in the 2020 – 2021 school year. Details of both campuses can be found below:

- Patrick Campus, serving grades Kindergarten through 12th grade (*in operation*)
- Campus #2, approved to serve grades Kindergarten through 6th grade (*to open in 2020 – 2021*)

After a thorough review of the historical data and charter renewal application, staff recommends that the Authority approve the charter renewal of American Preparatory Academy for a five-year term, beginning July 1, 2020.

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 of a renewal report by SPCSA staff 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.

¹ Charter school regulations provide 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 [NAC 388A.415\(2\)](#).

The American Preparatory Academy renewal report was sent to the board chair on June 28, 2019 and 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 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 [NAC 388A.415\(1\)](#). American Preparatory Academy submitted its notice of Intent to Renew its charter contract on August 13, 2019 and American Preparatory Academy's notice of intent to renew can be found along with the supporting documents.

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 [NAC 388A.415\(1\)](#). 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\(3\)](#). On October 10, 2019 American Preparatory Academy submitted its renewal application, which can be found included with the supporting documents.

American Preparatory Academy's renewal application includes a summary of the school model including their focus on a classical, liberal arts education. The application states that the school will continue to implement existing key design elements such as precision training methods, use of the core knowledge sequence for grades K-8, classical education with required Latin and Logic classes, small learning groups, daily and weekly assessments, among others. In addition, American Preparatory Academy will focus on increasing training for teachers in higher-level questioning, posting actionable objectives, including student growth scores on the SBAC, continuing to focus on SBA proficiency, ensuring all students who may need an IEP are properly identified and reaching out to the community in an effort to attract more English learners and students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Decisions to renew a charter school contract or deny a renewal application are made and based upon the Nevada's charter school statutes and regulations related to charter school renewal (see [NRS 388A.285](#)) and the collective record of a school's academic, financial, organizational, findings from the site evaluation process, and all data and information provided by the Department of Education.

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 [NAC 388A.415\(10\)\(b\)](#).

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 site evaluations, academic achievement of pupils, and any other information that is determined to be relevant to whether the charter contract should be renewed. See [NAC 388A.415\(9\)](#).

When determining whether to grant an application for renewal of a charter contract, the Authority Board considers the foregoing factors, 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 [NAC 388A.415\(9\)](#). Again, as stated above, no factor is to be given more weight than the academic performance of pupils at the charter school.² See [NAC 388A.415\(10\)\(b\)](#).

At its sole discretion, the Authority Board may renew a charter contract for a term of three (3) to ten (10) years, or, alternatively, deny the renewal application. See Senate Bill 451 (2019) and [NAC 388A.415\(11\)](#). Note that a variable term length upon renewal was discretion afforded to the Authority under Senate Bill 451 during the 2019 Legislative Session.

The Authority Board may accept or reject, in whole or part, the recommendation of the Executive Director. See [NAC 388A.415\(10\)\(a\)](#). If a charter contract is renewed, that 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. See [NAC 388A.415\(b\) and \(c\)](#).

Alternatively, the Authority Board may deny the renewal application for the purpose of reconstituting the governing body of the charter school pursuant to [NRS 388A.330](#) and assigning the charter contract to a charter management organization or a new governing body which may include, without limitation, the governing body of another charter school or a governing body assembled by the Executive Director; deny the renewal application for the purpose of restarting the charter school and issuing a new charter contract pursuant to [NRS 388A.300](#) to a charter management organization or a new governing body, including, without limitation, the governing body of another charter school, which will inherit any assets of the charter school which remain following dissolution; or deny the renewal of a charter contract for the purpose of closing the charter school. See [NAC 388A.415\(11\)\(d\),\(e\) and \(f\)](#).

3. Analysis

Academics

American Preparatory Academy currently offers instruction at the elementary, middle and high school levels at one campus. NSPF results for the 2018 – 19 school year were released in mid-September of 2019. The elementary and high school programs earned 2-star ratings while the middle school program earned a 5-star rating. The elementary program was issued a Notice of Concern by the Authority on October 4, 2019. The high school was not issued a notice due to some purported issues related to the graduation rate.

While the academic performance in the most recent year raises some concerns, the school has been performing at a high-level since NSPF ratings were reestablished after the 2016 – 17 school year. It is noteworthy that the school has not earned less than a 4-star rating for the middle school during the current charter term according to the NSPF.

The APA elementary school program was rated as a 4- and 5-star school for the 2017 – 18 and 2018 – 19, respectively. As noted in the NSPF guidance document, a 4-star school is categorized as a commendable school that has performed well for all students and subgroups. A 4-star school demonstrates satisfactory to strong academic performance for all students. A 5-star school is described as superior, exceeding expectations for all students and subgroups on every indicator category with little or no exception and does not fail to meet expectations for any group on any indicator.

The middle school program, by virtue of its 5-star rating the last three years, also fares very well compared to performance expectations and standards. The school has achievement and growth scores that are almost

² See [NAC 388A.415\(10\)](#). 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.

always above state performance expectations, and this level of performance is almost always above the SPCSA average proficiency rate within the portfolio in both math and ELA.

The first high school rating for APA occurred this past fall for the 2018 – 19 school year. Along with other factors, due to the published graduation rate of 64.29%, the school earned a total index score of 45 points out of 100. While that number is concerning in isolation, it is important to note that the 2019 graduation rate for APA is 95.92%, which will be included in the 2020 NSPF ratings.

With regards to the financial performance and viability of the school, SPCSA staff has no concerns about the overall health and viability of the school. The organizational health and performance of the school has been strong over the current charter term. The school has not received any notices regarding organizational performance.

The NSPF results for this current charter term are summarized and provided in the table below:

School Year	NSPF Rating
2018 – 19	Elementary: 2 stars Middle: 5 stars High: 2 stars
2017 – 18	Elementary: 4 stars Middle: 5 stars High: N/A ³
2016 – 17	Elementary: 4 stars Middle: 5 stars High: Not Rated
2015 – 16	No Star Ratings published by the Nevada Department of Education
2014 – 15	Elementary: Not Rated (new school) Middle: Not Rated (new school)

Organizational

Until the Authority approved a more robust organizational framework this past summer, the previous version of the SPCSA Organizational Framework was 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. American Preparatory Academy has not received a Notice of Breach or Notice of Concern under this framework during the current charter term.

SPCSA Organizational Programmatic Audit Findings

2018	Good Standing
2017	Good Standing
2016	Good Standing
2015	Good Standing

Financial

The SPCSA Financial Framework monitors a variety of indicators of financial health. American Preparatory Academy has a history of clean audit findings, and staff finds the school to be in good standing against performance standards within the financial framework.

³ In order for a high school to be rated under the NSPF, it must meet the minimum n-size requirements and earn points in all of the following indicators and/or measures: Academic Achievement and Graduation (4-year ACGR). A school that does not meet the minimum n-size requirements will receive a “Not Rated” classification.

SPCSA Financial Programmatic Audit Findings

2018	Good Standing
2017	Good Standing
2016	Good Standing
2015	Good Standing

4. Recommendation: Renew American Preparatory Academy for 5-year term

Despite the issuance of a Notice of Concern due to academic underperformance at the elementary school in the 2018 – 2019 school year, American Preparatory Academy has shown generally strong academic performance throughout its initial charter term in the eyes of staff. This is best exemplified by consistent 4- and 5- star ratings under the NSPF throughout the charter term at the middle school. Additionally, the reported graduation rate for 2019 shows significant improvement when compared to the prior year. It is also noteworthy that the school has not exhibited any financial or organizational concerns. SPCSA staff is confident the school will improve upon its most recent rating for the elementary school while maintaining strong performance at the middle and high school levels. The school currently has strong enrollment and financial performance indicators show that the school is financially viable.

Despite a dip in performance in the most recent year, strong past performance supports staff’s recommendation that the Authority renew American Preparatory Academy for a five-year term, beginning July 1, 2020.

School Demographic since 2015

Year	Total Enrollment⁴	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
15-16	1424	14.4%	12.6%	42.7%	19.5%	0.4%	8.6%	1.9%	4.3%	6.7%	9.3%
16-17	1434	16.2%	12.9%	43.4%	18.5%	0.4%	6.6%	1.9%	5.4%	3.1%	2.7%
17-18	1554	17.0%	14.6%	41.4%	18.3%	0.3%	5.8%	2.6%	5.2%	3.2%	0.0%
18-19	1657	16.4%	16.1%	39.9%	18.5%	0.2%	6.2%	2.7%	5.1%	1.8%	14.4%
19-20	1637	17.3%	14.6%	39.8%	19.4%	0.1%	6.1%	2.6%	4.8%	1.5%	19.3%

A – Asian

B – Black

C – Caucasian

H – Hispanic

I – American Indian/Alaskan Native

M – Mixed/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

Additionally, American Preparatory Academy projects strong continued enrollment through a renewed charter term.

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-2026
Planned Total Enrollment	2236 ⁵	2256	2296	2296	2296	2296
Grades Served	K – 12	K – 12	K – 12	K – 12	K – 12	K – 12

⁴ Enrollment as of Validation Day each year (October 1).

⁵ On June 28, 2018, the Authority approved APA to open a second campus serving grades Kindergarten – 6th grade. This campus is on schedule to open beginning in the 2020 – 2021 school year.