**STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY**

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## MEMORANDUM

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| **TO:** | SPCSA Board |
| **FROM:** | Rebecca Feiden, Executive Director |
| **SUBJECT:** | Initial Steps to Elevate our Focus on Equity |
| **DATE:** | February 26, 2021 |

**Background**

At the July 24, 2020 SPCSA Board Meeting, the Authority discussed actions that the SPCSA can take to support schools in their efforts to serve all students equitably and uphold the SPCSA's values of equity and diversity. Throughout the summer and fall, the Authority discussed this topic at each board meeting and SPCSA staff has continued to incorporate a focus on equity into our work. Below is a summary of the Initial Steps, including the status of the identified action items.

**Initial Steps to Elevate our Focus on Equity**

*Site Evaluations*

- To ensure a holistic view of the school, the SPCSA will work with the school to ensure that focus groups are representative of the student population and include a statement to this effect in the Site Evaluation Handbook.
- To enable candid conversations about equity, as part of the presentation portion of the site evaluation, schools will be asked to discuss efforts to embed culturally responsive practices into academic and organizational policy and procedure.

➢ The Site Evaluation Handbook was updated in August and in site evaluations this year, staff has worked with school to ensure representative focus groups and schools have included information in their presentations on culturally responsive practices.

*New School and Amendment Applications*

- The SPCSA will revise application templates to include questions that directly ask about efforts to close opportunity gaps and address disproportionate discipline practices, including the use of restorative justice practices. For applicants that already operate a school, the application will ask for academic and discipline data by subgroup. In addition, the application templates will continue to include questions on family and community engagement practices and SPCSA staff will convey the importance of this work in applicant trainings. Update the New School Application to contemplate a proposed Alternative School.

➢ For the winter 2021 new charter school application template, staff has updated the template to ask about efforts to close opportunity gaps and address disproportionate discipline practices. Staff has continued to emphasize the importance of family and community engagement within the application and during applicant trainings.

*Renewal Application*

- The SPCSA has revised the Renewal Application to include questions on restorative justice practices, plans to monitor for potential disproportionate discipline practices, and plans to address any opportunity gaps for specific student groups. The SPCSA will update the Renewal Application for the Fall of 2021 to include 1) explicit questions on how the school engages parents and families as well as what trainings the school provides regarding diversity and inclusion, and 2) questions asking the school to reflect on the diversity of their student body, specifically in comparison to local schools and the local school district, and describe their efforts to ensure that they are representative of their local community.

➢ The Renewal Application was updated in the summer of 2020 to include questions on restorative justice practices, plans to monitor for potential disproportionate discipline practices, and plans to address any opportunity gaps for specific student groups.

*Access to Equity Data (Updated in February 2021)*

- Presentations to the Authority on student academic performance will include a heightened focus on understanding performance by student group. In addition, the SPCSA will present data on discipline by student group.
- The SPCSA will identify opportunities to make Equity Data available and accessible to the public.
- The SPCSA will examine the demographics of educators and consider how they reflect the demographics of students served.

➢ In December, the Authority received presentations on student enrollment, graduation rate, and discipline data, all of which included data disaggregated by student group.
➢ The SPCSA will be working with the Nevada Department of Education to provide schools with access to training on how to examine their own discipline data.

➢ In February, SPCSA staff sent each school a report comparing the demographics of their school to local school district and the zoned, neighborhood school for the community in which the school is located for the 2020-21 school year. The memo accompanying these reports urged schools to review their data and identify ways to address discrepancies.

➢ SPCSA staff continues to work to make data and information accessible to parents and families on our website through the Annual Performance Reports and our Online Hub Initiative (H).

➢ SPCSA have reviewed and analyzed data regarding the demographics of licensed educators for the 2020-21 school year. (See Appendix A)

*Focus on Schools (Updated in February 2021)*

• This year's Focus on Schools series at board meetings will be dedicated to hearing from schools about how they are directly addressing issues of equity, including any specific efforts to combat systemic racism.

➢ So far, the Authority has heard from three schools about how they are directly addressing issues of equity, including any specific efforts to combat systemic racism. Today we will be hearing from representatives from Academica Nevada and schools that contract for services and support with Academica Nevada.

*Growth Management Plan Working Group (Updated in February 2021)*

• As the SPCSA reconvenes this working group, we will solicit input about how we can work with organizations across our state to elevate our focus on equity. In addition, the SPCSA will look into adding Equity Data into the Growth Management Plan.

➢ The Community Working Group had its first meeting of the 2020-21 school year in October of 2020. In a subsequent subcommittee meeting, as well as during a full Community Working Group meeting in January, we discussed the SPCSA's Equity Initiatives. Comments focused on 1) efforts to increase access to quality professional development on restorative justice, culturally responsive practices, and diversity, equity and inclusion; 2) opportunities to reduce information and access barriers for historically underserved student groups; and 3) data regarding the demographics of staff in comparison to demographics of the student body. Additionally, Community Working Group participants have been proactive in including SPCSA representatives in meetings and events that relate to education and equity. This has increased our awareness and engagement with community partners.

*SPCSA-wide Training (Updated in February 2021)*

• The SPCSA will survey school leaders to determine what training they currently participate in on diversity and inclusion, and what training they would like to receive through the SPCSA.

➢ SPCSA staff conducted a survey of school leaders regarding existing training and the need for training on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. This data shows that of those that

responded, 60% have provided training on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the last year and 90% would be interested in facilitated by the SPCSA. *Note that any training would be conducted by a third party with expertise in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training.*

➢ The SPCSA will be participating in the Project Aware Grant. Through this grant, the SPCSA will be able to provide schools with access to training on related topics, including culturally responsive practices and restorative justice.
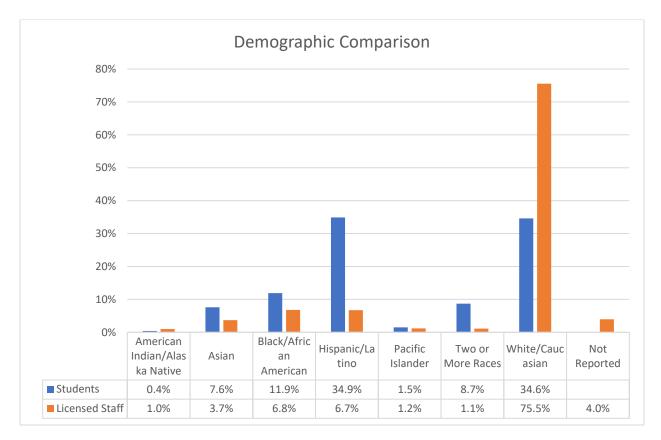
*Equitable Access*

- The SPCSA will work to establish lines of communication that would enable more access for those students that are homeless, in foster care or in the juvenile justice system.
- The SPCSA will make updates to our website to make it a centralized source for information that would be helpful for parents and families looking to identify a school for their child and enroll in a school.

➢ Through our Online Hub Initiative (H), SPCSA staff are working on initial updates to the SPCSA website to centralize data for parents and families seeking to find a school for their child. This is expected to be an ongoing and multi-step effort.

➢ The SPCSA has been in touch with the child welfare agencies responsible for foster care services in each county in which the SPCSA has sponsored schools. We are developing Memoranda of Understanding with each to ensure that the needs of students are met. In addition, staff from child welfare agencies and the juvenile justice system have been invited to participate in the Community Working Group.

**Appendix A**

The data below show a comparison between the demographics of students enrolled in SPCSA-sponsored schools and licensed teachers employed by SPCSA-sponsored schools. Data for this comparison include:

- Enrollment at SPCSA-sponsored schools as of the October 1, 2020 student count.
- Licensed employees of sponsored schools reported as of October 1, 2020 who were also attributed to that school in Nevada's Online Portal for Applications and Licensure (OPAL).

## Demographic Comparison

|  | American Indian/Alaska Native | Asian | Black/African American | Hispanic/Latino | Pacific Islander | Two or More Races | White/Caucasian | Not Reported |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students | 0.4% | 7.6% | 11.9% | 34.9% | 1.5% | 8.7% | 34.6% | |
| Licensed Staff | 1.0% | 3.7% | 6.8% | 6.7% | 1.2% | 1.1% | 75.5% | 4.0% |

The graph indicates that there is a noticeable discrepancy between the demographics of licensed school employees and students. Namely, the vast majority, approximately 76% of teachers are white, while white students only make up approximately 35% of the student enrollment. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate this trend within the SPCSA mirrors national trends. Specifically, in the 2017-18 school year, about 79% of public school teachers nationwide were white.[1] Examining this data is an important first step in working toward ensuring that educators are representative of the students they serve.

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[1] https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_clr.asp#:~:text=In%202017%E2%80%9318%2C%20about%2079,1%20percent%20of%20public%20school