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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

TO: State Public Charter School Authority Board
FROM: Rebecca Feiden, Executive Director
SUBJECT: Initial Steps to Elevate our Focus on Equity
DATE: July 30, 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 2020-21 school year, 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 taken during the 2020-21 school year. As we look forward to the 2021-22 school year, SPCSA staff expects to build on these initial steps by identifying other avenues by which we can elevate our focus on equity.

Initial Steps to Elevate our Focus on Equity

Site Evaluations

- The Site Evaluation Handbook was updated in August 2020 and during the 2020-21 school year, staff worked with schools to ensure more representative focus groups. Additionally, schools provided information through their presentations on culturally responsive practices. Staff anticipate building on these efforts through revisions to the site evaluation protocol for the 2021-22 school year.

New School and Amendment Applications

- SPCSA staff updated the charter school contract amendment application 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 new school application and during prospective new school applicant trainings.

Renewal Application

- 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. Additionally, the 2021 renewal application includes questions on how the school engages parents and families, training provided for staff regarding diversity, equity and inclusion, and the demographics of the school compared to local schools and the local school district as well as efforts to ensure that the school's population is representative of the community.

Access to Equity Data

- In December of 2020, the Authority received presentations on student enrollment, graduation rate, and discipline data, all of which included data disaggregated by student group.
- During the winter of 2021, staff provide schools with training for school staff on how to examine their school's discipline data by student group.
- In February of 2021, 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.
- In February of 2021, the Authority reviewed data regarding the demographics of licensed educators for the 2020-21 school year.

Focus on Schools

- Over the last year, the Authority heard from several schools about how they are directly addressing issues of equity:
 - Beacon Academy
 - Equipo Academy
 - Democracy Prep at the Agassi Campus
 - Doral Academy of Northern Nevada
 - Pinecrest Academy of Northern Nevada
 - SPCSA-Sponsored schools that contract for services and support with Academica Nevada

Community Working Group

- The Community Working Group met quarterly throughout the 2020-21 school year. In addition, the Equity Subcommittee had two additional meetings. During these meetings, working group members discussed 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, over the last year, 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. The Community Working Group will continue to meet quarterly during the 2021-22 school year.

SPCSA-wide Training

- SPCSA staff conducted a survey of school leaders regarding existing training and the need for training on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. This data showed that of those that responded, 60% provided training on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the last year and 90% would be interested in facilitated by the SPCSA.
- Through the Project Aware Grant, the SPCSA will be providing sponsored schools with access to diversity, equity, and inclusion training. Additionally, trainings will be provided on other related topics including restorative justice practices, social-emotional learning, and trauma informed care and instruction.

Equitable Access

- The SPCSA's website has been updated to provide more streamlined access to information for parents/families seeking to find a charter school. Additionally, a plugin has been added that allows a user to translate the SPCSA's website to a several languages. Finally, the SPCSA has added a section of the website in Spanish. This section includes content aimed at meeting the needs of parents and families.
- 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. Memoranda of Understanding have been developed with each of these agencies and are in the process of being finalized. In addition, staff from child welfare agencies and the juvenile justice system have participated in the Community Working Group.

Engaging with School Boards

- A letter was sent to the board chairs of each SPCSA-sponsored school that 1) summarized the SPCSA's efforts to elevate equity in our work, 2) proposed initial action steps for school boards to elevate their focus on equity, and 3) invited board members to join meetings to discuss the memo and how they are elevating equity at their school. Three meetings were held in late April and early May of 2021 and representatives from ten of the SPCSA's sponsored school boards participated in these meetings.