

Charter School Application Report

Pioneer Technology & Arts Academy Nevada

Recommendation for the Summer 2021 Charter Application Cycle

General Information

Proposed Name	Pioneer Technology & Arts Academy Nevada
Proposed EMO/CMO	CMO: SSS Education Corporation
Proposed Mission	To empower and engage students, especially underserved and underrepresented populations, to reach their full potential as global leaders who enhance their communities and world through an inquiry-based STEAM curriculum that emphasizes creativity, collaboration, and innovation.
Proposed Grade Configuration	Opening Year: Kindergarten – 8 th grade Full Scale: Kindergarten – 12 th grade
Proposed Opening	August 2022
Proposed Location	Temporary location for first year: 1840 N. Bruce Street North Las Vegas, NV 89030
Zip Codes to be Served	89030, 89027, 89032, 89034, 89081, 89101, 89106, 89107, 89110, 89115, 89117, and 89191

Process/Key Dates for Pioneer Technology & Arts Academy

- March 9, 2021 – Notice of Intent is received
- April 12, 2021 – New Charter Application Training
- July 15, 2021 – Application is received
- September 20, 2021 – Clarifying Questions sent to applicant; responses received within 3 business days
- October 7, 2021 - Capacity Interview is conducted¹
- November 5, 2021 – Recommendation is presented

¹ The Pioneer Technology & Arts Academy capacity interview was conducted virtually as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and space limitations within the SPCSA's offices.

Planned Enrollment Chart

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
K	68	115	115	115	115	115
1	68	115	115	115	115	115
2	68	115	115	115	115	115
3	68	115	115	115	115	115
4	68	115	115	115	115	115
5	56	85	85	85	85	85
6	88	115	115	115	115	115
7	88	115	115	115	115	115
8	76	106	112	112	112	112
9		84	102	102	102	102
10			78	102	102	102
11				78	102	102
12					78	96
Total	648	1,080	1,182	1,284	1,386	1,404

Executive Summary, Process and Recommendation

Upon receipt of a charter application, SPCSA staff reviews the submission for completion and ADA compliance. Should an application be deemed complete, it is assigned to a formal review team and moves to the independent review phase. Members of the review team read and rate each application independently and compile a list of clarifying questions in advance of the capacity interview in an effort to gather additional detail and information about the application prior to the interview. After the capacity interview is conducted, review team members rerate each section of the application against the rubric before finalizing a recommendation.

The review committee, which included one member of the SPCSA staff and two external reviewers, identified shortcomings in three of the five components of the submitted application. The review committee and SPCSA staff find that the proposed *Academic* and *Financial Plans* meet the standards as outlined in the charter application rubric. The *Meeting the Need* and *Operations Sections* were found to not meet the standards as outlined in the charter application rubric. Furthermore, the additional *Addendum Section* required of an application that contemplates contracting with a Charter Management Organization (CMO) also did not meet the standard.

The review committee and SPCSA staff find that the *Meeting the Need* section of the application ‘Approaches the Standard’ as defined by the charter application rubric. The proposed board and other members of the applicant team expressed a desire to create a high-quality school in a community that has multiple one and two-star schools. The proposed principal and at least two members of the proposed board appear to have strong ties to the community that the school aims to serve. However, based on the submitted application and the capacity interview, it is not clear that this same community has been involved in shaping the proposal. Specific, community-based partnerships are underdeveloped. Some evidence of demand is provided, but it is challenging to confirm that sufficient demand is centered in the vicinity of the proposed school as the applicant team did not collect zip codes in all cases, and some

documentation is from 2020. Input on this application was requested from the Clark County School District and is expected to be provided following the school district's board meeting on October 28, 2021 and will be posted alongside this recommendation.

The application review committee and SPCSA staff find that the *Academic Plan* 'Meets the Standard' as outlined in the charter application rubric. The proposal describes in detail the P-TECH program, which is to be replicated from established schools in Texas that have performed above state standards historically. The application also provides important details regarding teacher support and professional development, noting important systems to be used to ensure high-quality teaching throughout the year. Concerns were identified within assessment plan for students, and some questions remain about the proposed goals to be used to monitor performance for key subgroups such as at-risk students, students with disabilities and EL Learners.

The application review committee and SPCSA staff find that the *Operations Plan* 'Does Not Meet the Standard' as outlined in the charter application rubric for a few noteworthy reasons. Most concerning is the proposed makeup of the governing body which would hold the charter contract with the State of Nevada. Questions remain about the majority of members listed in the application and their ability to be independent when overseeing school performance, including that of the proposed CMO. Furthermore, SPCSA staff understands that one member of the proposed board was unaware of being listed as a board member in the application, raising considerable concerns about the engagement of proposed members, collective capacity of the members in addition to the proposed governance structure.

Additional questions in the *Operations Plan* include the process used to select and hire the principal named in the application. Information shared by the applicant team during the capacity interview did not match the process for selecting this individual as outlined in the application, and raise questions about how the proposed board made this decision. Additionally, the review committee could not conclude that a significant number of parents/students from the community have demonstrated interest in the school. Evidence of parents and prospective families attending information meetings held earlier this year was provided, but in some cases, the applicant did not collect zip code information. The same is true for other documents submitted, making it challenging to conclude that the school would primarily serve the target community. Other evidence includes surveys/intent to enroll forms from 2020, raising other questions.

Overall, the review committee and SPCSA staff find that the *Financial Plan* 'Meets the Standard' as outlined in the charter application rubric. The proposed CMO possesses financial expertise, and the budget narrative demonstrated an understanding of local context. The proposed facility to be used by the school during at least the first year of operations also appears to be viable available to the school at a market-friendly lease rate. Minor concerns center on proposed student fees and the repayment of a loan from the CMO.

Finally, the *Addendum Section* was rated as 'Does Not Meet the Standard' as outlined in the charter application rubric by both the review committee and SPCSA staff. While past performance of schools in the PTAA network in Texas are promising, significant concerns remain regarding the readiness for the CMO to expand in Nevada to effectively open a high-quality school, and if the CMO has the necessary capacity to do so. The past performance of the CMO in Nevada, through its contract with 100 Academy, raises questions about its ability to support a high-quality program in the first years of operation. Additionally, information presented in the capacity interview and application review do not present a clear picture of the relationships between the proposed CMO, sister schools, other schools in the PTAA network and entities also employing CMO staff such as PNC Partners. Inconsistencies were also identified in the roles and responsibilities of CMO staff and school staff.

For these major reasons, in addition to those outlined throughout this document, staff's recommendation is to deny the charter school application for the Pioneer Technology & Arts Academy

Nevada.

Notwithstanding the SPCSA staff's recommendation to deny the Pioneer Technology & Arts Academy Nevada charter application, NRS 388A.255(2) provides applicants with an opportunity to resubmit their charter application. Unsuccessful applicants may resubmit their charter application to the SPCSA within 30 days after receiving written notice from the SPCSA that their charter application was denied and correct any deficiencies noted in the SPCSA's notification. In this regard, please note that SPCSA staff typically sends out the written notification required by NRS 388A.255(2) and containing the deficiencies in the charter application within 7 to 10 days after the SPCSA board votes to deny a charter application.

Given the lengthy and rigorous application process utilized by the SPCSA in regard to charter applications, as well as the limited timeframe specified in NRS 388A.255(2) for an unsuccessful applicant to resubmit their charter application, the SPCSA encourages only those unsuccessful applicants that the SPCSA has found limited or specific areas where the application does not meet standards to resubmit their charter application. Unsuccessful applicants that the SPCSA has found numerous or significant issues within the application that do not meet standard are encouraged to submit a new charter application during the SPCSA's next application window.

Proposed motion: Deny the Pioneer Technology & Arts Academy Nevada application as submitted during the 2021 Summer Application Cycle based on a finding that the applicant has failed to satisfy the requirements contained in NRS 388A.249(3) and designate Director Feiden and Director Modrcin to meet and confer with the applicant.

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, plus an addendum, as outlined below. 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/

Summary of Application Section Ratings

Rating options for each section are Meets the Standard; Approaches the Standard; Does not Meet the Standard.

Application Section	Rating
Meeting the Need	Approaches the Standard
Mission and Vision	Meets the Standard
Targeted Plan	Approaches the Standard
Parent and Community Involvement	Approaches the Standard
Academic Plan²	Meets the Standard
Transformational Change	Meets the Standard
Curriculum & Instructional Design	Approaches the Standard
Promotion & High School Graduation Requirements	Meets the Standard
Dual Credit Partnerships	Meets the Standard
Driving for Results	Approaches the Standard
At-Risk Students and Special Populations	Approaches the Standard
School Structure: Culture	Meets the Standard
School Structure: Student Discipline	Meets the Standard
School Structure: Calendar and Schedule	Meets the Standard
Operations Plan	Approaches the Standard
Board Governance	Does Not Meet the Standard
Leadership Team	Does Not Meet the Standard
Staffing Plan	Approaches the Standard
Human Resources	Approaches the Standard
Student Recruitment and Enrollment	Approaches the Standard
Incubation Year Development	Approaches the Standard
Services	Approaches the Standard
Facilities	Meets the Standard
Ongoing Operations	Meets the Standard
Financial Plan	Meets the Standard
Addendum	Approaches the Standard
Leadership for Expansion	Approaches the Standard
Scale Strategy	Approaches the Standard
School Management Contracts	Approaches the Standard
Charter Management Organizations Applying Directly	Meets the Standard

² The Pioneer Technology & Arts Academy proposal did not contemplate Distance Education or Pre-Kindergarten. Therefore, the corresponding sections of the rubric were not scored.

Meeting the Need Section

The applicant team has identified a target community that has the potential to align to the SPCSA Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment. Specifically, the proposal seeks to create a high-quality school in an area where there are a majority of one- and two-star schools as a majority of the targeted zip codes are identified in the Needs Assessment. Additionally, multiple members of the applicant team appear to have strong ties to the local community in which the school seeks to locate.

A number of identified deficiencies prevent this section from being rated as 'Meets the Standard'. First, the information presented in the application does not provide sufficient evidence of demand for the proposed school from the target zip codes, and some of the documentation provided is over a year old. Additionally, while the narrative and responses from the capacity interview indicate that the applicant has conducted outreach in the community, it is not clear that the community and prospective parents have helped to shape the proposal. Finally, proposed national partners are identified with outlined commitments, but partnerships from the local community are not fully developed or specific. Given these chief concerns, this section was rated as 'Approaches the Standard'.

Areas of Strength

- The mission and vision statements of PTAA Nevada are clear, focused, and appear interwoven throughout the application as the school and network seeks to help students be engaged, global leaders by progressing through a STEAM curriculum. The mission statement identifies the role of the school in working to solve the problem that the school seeks to address.
- The application proposes to serve families in a number of zip codes that are identified in the SPCSA Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment as having a large number of one- and/or two-star schools. While it is not clear that the demand for this school originates from these zip codes, the proposed location does appear to align with the geographic component of the Needs Assessment.
- Multiple members of the proposed applicant team appear to have strong ties to the local community. Additionally, the proposed CMO is currently working with a local charter school, giving them a direct tie to Clark County.

Areas of Concern

- Some evidence of demand is included in a variety of forms within the application. This includes intent to enroll forms, surveys to gauge interest, and evidence of informational meetings held in 2021. The applicant team also indicated that approximately 25,000 mailers were sent out about the proposed program during the capacity interview. However, only a subset of the provided evidence of demand are intent to enroll forms, all of which are from 2020. A majority of the stated evidence of demand comes in the form of surveys to assess interest in key components of the proposed model and satisfaction with current educational options. Additionally, the application includes evidence that over 60 parents and families attended informational meetings in 2021. While there is certainly some interest in this proposed model, it does not appear to represent a significant percentage of first year enrollment from the intended community. The applicant has not demonstrated that there is currently sufficient demand for this proposal outside of the relationship with the operating private school³. More evidence is needed to confirm that families living in the proposed zip codes, but not attending the private school, support this model and are interested in attending PTAA Nevada.

³ PTAA Nevada contemplates locating in a current private school facility for year one of operations.

- During the capacity interview, the applicant team spoke of open houses and forums held both at St. Christopher's as well as other locations to gauge interest in a STEAM program. Nevertheless, it is not clear how the proposed community and prospective parents were involved in developing the plan for how the PTAA model would be implemented in their community. Information from the application signals that these were intended to raise awareness about the proposal rather than to seek input that shaped the proposed program. More information is needed to understand how parents, the neighborhood, and the community at-large has helped shape the proposal.
- The majority of letters of support contain little information about how these organizations may be committed to the school. Limited evidence is presented that specific partnerships that have been developed, and during the capacity interview, the applicant team acknowledged that this work is ongoing. While the proposed partnerships with Microsoft and Sharp are well developed and were identified as a strength of the application, proposed partnerships from the local community that the school intends to serve are underdeveloped. Organizations named in the application have the potential to support the needs of the target population, but letters of support provided in the application offer very limited information about how they would directly work with the proposed school. Details such as clear, measurable, time-specific deliverables from the partner which are clearly relevant to the needs of the target population are not provided. Prospective local partnerships are underdeveloped.

Academic Section

PTAA Nevada proposes to bring a unique and innovative school model that emphasizes a STEAM curriculum and a high school P-TECH model, and PTAA schools in Texas have a history of strong academic performance. The program is enhanced by national industry partners which provide opportunities to students through internships as well as classroom instruction from industry professionals. Students may also pursue certifications and associates degrees through the proposed academic model. Finally, the proposal outlines an in-depth professional development program for teachers.

While this section was rated as 'Meets the Standard', a few minor gaps were identified. The application does not present a strong, cohesive internal assessment plan that will foster the school's ability to collect and analyze student data while also aligning with state requirements. Performance goals for the school, specifically those identified as at-risk, ELL or students with a disability, may not lead the school to strong rating under the Nevada School Performance Framework or the SPCSA Academic Performance Framework.

Areas of Strength

- The written application describes plans to implement a P-TECH model at the high school, similar to those established through other PTAA schools in Texas. This was reaffirmed through the capacity interview, where the CMO was also able to describe potential avenues for applying for the proposed school to become a recognized P-TECH school, given that this would be the school of its kind in the state. The proposed academic program will prioritize 21st century skills, emphasize student investigations, offer differentiated individual educational plans, provide a STEAM curriculum, and include project-based and blended learning. The core academic curricula are designed to encourage all students to see interdisciplinary connections between STEAM subjects. The course progression includes computer coding for all students in grades kindergarten through 8th grade. The academic plan presents an innovative educational program with distinguishing features that are supported by evidence of schools currently operating in Texas.
- The proposed CMO has established relationships with national industry partners, Sharp and Microsoft, that can ultimately benefit students as they progress through the proposed model. Both of these partners would assist with the two primary pathways—software development and network administration. As a result of the capacity interview, it appears that these partners are woven into the proposal and can be involved at the proposed school post authorization.
- The application indicates that certifications and associates degrees would be available to students attending the school, in addition to internship opportunities at Sharp as well as the opportunity to work with representatives from Microsoft in the classroom. These pathways demonstrate that the school is promoting college and career readiness, as well as a culture of high expectations.
- The applicant describes a robust teacher development program and schedule. Teacher development includes preservice training, web-based learning modules, twice weekly in-class coaching sessions, weekly feedback meetings, twice weekly data team meetings, and monthly early release days for additional development. In addition, the proposed school's professional development is connected directly to curriculum, instructional goals and processes, and data-driven decision-making.
- The applicant team provides a comprehensive description of how its MTSS program would support students, including those who are over-age for their grade level. According to the application, PTAA will provide tutoring, advisory and/or college readiness supports, and layered social and

emotional supports to students as needed through community partnerships and service providers. Summer school will be offered to high school students who need remediation and/or credit recovery, and those interested in credit acceleration. Furthermore, since the proposed school would offer opportunities to gain real world skills via concurrent community college enrollment and work-based learning experiences, the high school program will provide significant relevancy to struggling learners and those who are over-age and under-credited.

Areas of Concern

- While it appears that most chosen curricula are aligned to Nevada Academic Content Standards, it is not clear how some of the chosen curricula will work simultaneously together and whether all final decisions have been made regarding curriculum, as noted in the incubation year plan. Ultimately, more evidence and information are needed to confirm that all proposed curricula are aligned to the Nevada Academic Content Standards.
- The applicant does describe a clear plan for internal assessments. Conflicting information was presented in the capacity interview from the narrative, and it is not clear that the applicant understands the required K-8 assessments in Nevada other than the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC). More information is needed to understand how the school will effectively implement both Renaissance 360 and NWEA MAP together to effectively measure and monitor individual students, student cohorts, and school level results. During the capacity interview, the CMO stated that the school will continue to adopt Renaissance 360, but it is not clear what this means for the proposed school.
- While the application emphasizes the importance of student data, performance goals for specific student groups including students with disabilities, English learners, and students who may be at-risk may not lead to a four- or five-star school as proposed. More information is needed to understand how the proposed school will monitor the performance of these student groups, and if these goals are rigorous enough to lead the school to a high rating under the Nevada School Performance Framework.

Operations Section

The applicant team, including the CMO, proposed board, and school leader bring relevant experiences to the proposal, and are committed to the proposed school. The application also identifies a realistic facility option for the first year of operations that is financially advantageous and provides a reasonable timeline for identifying a long-term facility for year two of operations and beyond. The submitted incubation year plan also identifies key milestones to be completed prior to the start of school, and the applicant team was able to identify priority items that the board should be monitoring regularly during the scenario exercise at the capacity interview.

Despite these strengths, a number of shortcomings were identified over the course of the initial review and capacity interview that prevented this section from being rated as 'Meets the Standard'. The proposed board raises a multitude of concerns. The review process was unable to establish that the proposed board is independent and has sufficient capacity to successfully oversee the school given changes to board membership that occurred since the application was submitted, and perceived conflicts that were identified. These reservations call into question the ability of the proposed board to oversee the performance of the CMO, and do not establish that current members have a structure in place to ensure meaningful oversight. Additionally, significant outstanding questions remain regarding the process and selection of the proposed principal of the school given the information contained in the application. A final chief concern within this section is the insufficient demonstration of student demand from within the identified zip codes, as presented in the application. For these reasons, among others, this section was rated as 'Approaches the Standard'.

Areas of Strength

- The application identifies a viable educational facility that meets the needs of the students and accommodates the programmatic and operational needs of the school for at least year one. Additional information provided in responses to clarifying questions addressed initial concerns related to the first year of operations and indicates that a long-term facility will be identified by March 2022.
- The Incubation Year plan presented in the application identifies key tasks to be completed, and during the capacity interview, the applicant team was able to highlight critical-path items to prioritize throughout this period. Additionally, the incubation year plan identifies multiple individuals that will be devoting time to the proposed school, increasing the likelihood that milestones during this time are likely to be completed.

Areas of Concern

- A number of concerns regarding the proposed board exist, specifically centered on potential perceived and/or real conflicts of interest, current membership, and governance structure.
 - It was confirmed during the application process that a proposed board member, who resides in Nevada and whose name and information were provided in the application, was unaware that the PTAA Nevada application had been submitted to the SPCSA, that their name had been included in the submitted application, and that a capacity interview had been conducted. This raises fundamental questions about the capacity of the board and their ability to successfully oversee a school, as well as concerns that the listed board members⁴ have been actively working together to develop the application with the

⁴ The SPCSA was later notified by this board member of their resignation from the proposed board on October 11, 2021.

proposed CMO.

- Two of the six proposed board members reside out of state. While Nevada statute allows a minority of board members to reside outside of the state, this raises questions about the local community actively governing and providing oversight of the proposed school.
 - While one proposed board member disclosed a prior relationship with the CMO, a second proposed board member has a longstanding relationship with the CMO in multiple capacities. During the capacity interview, this same proposed board member stated that they report to Dr. Love, the Regional Director of the proposed CMO, in a full-time role working for a Colorado school affiliated with PTAA. Available information also indicates that this same member is on the governing body of another school in Arizona that has a relationship with PTAA. Prior relationships with the CMO raise concerns about the ability of the board to hold the CMO accountable through independent board members. Concerns regarding board independence are compounded by the application narrative which does not propose to add parents to the local board until the school's second year of operations. While the proposed board brings a variety of experiences and backgrounds that can overall benefit the school, the application does not establish that the local community has helped shape the final school proposal, does not appear to consider perceived conflicts, and does not establish that the proposed board can be fully independent.
 - Additionally, the application notes that there are not any existing relationships that could pose actual or perceived conflicts, but one proposed board member is an employee of the Diocese of Las Vegas which is to be the lessor of the facility for the school in year one. While the applicant team provided some reassurances during the capacity interview, concerns remain regarding this potential conflict of interest. Additionally, Nevada law⁵ may preclude the employee of a lessor of a school facility from serving as a board member.
 - During the capacity interview, proposed board members referenced developing working groups to support the proposed governing body. Only an advisory group is described with any detail in the application narrative. Additional information is needed to understand the purpose of the proposed working groups, how they will be guided, and how any meetings will be compliant with open meeting law requirements.
- The board goals as outlined in the narrative are not clear, measurable, nor do they appear to be impactful or have a strong likelihood of leading the school to strong academic outcomes. Proposed goals tie the proposed academic model, but target outcomes are not ambitious and may not help the proposed board drive improved student outcomes. More information is needed to understand how these goals help the board determine success and positively impact the organization.
 - It is not clear that the proposed board has a defined structure that would enable it to collect the information necessary to evaluate the proposed CMO, SSS Education Corporation. During the capacity interview, no specifics were referenced by the proposed board regarding how it will evaluate the CMO, and the narrative lacks sufficient evidence that performance metrics are fully developed.
 - Questions remain about the proposed school leadership team, specifically the identified principal and regional director of the CMO.
 - During the capacity interview, the board was unable to speak to the process used to select the principal listed in the proposal. This raises concerns about whether or not the proposed

⁵ NAC 388A.525(2)

board and CMO followed their own process as outlined in the application. These concerns are enhanced given the ties between this applicant and the private school, which currently employs the proposed principal. Additionally, the proposed principal does not appear to possess administrative experience at a high school or a strong background leading the implementation of a STEAM program. While the application narrative notes that the principal will receive professional development on the PTAA model, this does not fully address all reservations.

- The regional director role is not clearly defined, and the job description and information in the narrative imply that this individual would oversee charter school staff. The decision-making flow chart indicates that the principal oversees school staff, but the regional director job description notes that this individual would coach and supervise staff. This evidence contradicts the regional director role as described in the application. More information is needed to understand how these two roles work together to support the success of the school, in addition to how the regional director will divide his time between the proposed schools and others affiliated with the CMO.
- As previously noted, some evidence of demand is included in a variety of forms within the application. This includes intent to enroll forms, surveys to gauge interest, and evidence of informational meetings held in 2021. The applicant team also indicated that approximately 25,000 mailers were sent out about the proposed program during the capacity interview. However, only a subset of the provided evidence of demand are intent to enroll forms, all of which are from 2020. A majority of the stated evidence of demand comes in the form of surveys to assess interest in key components of the proposed model and satisfaction with current educational options. Additionally, the application includes evidence that over 60 parents and families attended informational meetings in 2021. While there is certainly some interest in this proposed model, it does not appear to represent a significant percentage of first year enrollment from the intended community. The applicant has not demonstrated that there is currently sufficient demand for this proposal outside of the relationship with the operating private school⁶. More evidence is needed to confirm that families living in the proposed zip codes, but not attending the private school, support this model and are interested in attending PTAA Nevada.

⁶ PTAA Nevada contemplates locating in a current private school facility for year one of operations.

Financial Section

The submitted application underscores that the CMO possesses financial expertise and has extensive experience in financial management, which was reiterated during the capacity interview. The budget narrative demonstrated an understanding of local context, and this expertise would help guide the proposed governing board through regular reporting that uses multi-year budgets, historical data as well as cash flow projections. Finally, the proposed facility represents a potential windfall in terms of cost savings for at least year one as the school is able to obtain a lease rate significantly below market value.

While this section was rated as 'Meets the Standard', two minor concerns were identified. It is not clear that the school has a well-developed plan to ensure that student uniforms are available to all students, or how the school will communicate and ensure that uniforms are made available to all families at no cost students. Additionally, the budget relies on a \$150,000 loan from the CMO, but the proposed budget does not present a clear plan for repayment. Nevertheless, this section was rated as 'Meets the Standard.'

Areas of Strength

- The CMO has financial expertise to assist the school with financial management, oversight, and day to day operations if needed. This was reiterated during the capacity interview when CMO representatives assisted the proposed board with addressing financial questions and concerns.
- The budget narrative presents a baseline understanding of GAAP principles, and demonstrates a basic understanding of Nevada context and budgeting concepts. The narrative notes that the Board will annually review a three-year budget, historical income and expenses, and a cashflow forecast for the upcoming year.
- Evidence presented in the application indicates that PTAA schools in operation in Texas are performing soundly and meeting financial performance standards.
- During the capacity interview, the CMO representatives noted that despite a very favorable, below-market lease rate for the proposed year one facility, the current budget notes that forecasted substantial expenditures are still included as anticipated expenses for years one through six. If the proposed facility is secured for at least year one, this would positively impact the financial health of the school.

Areas of Concern

- The application proposes a \$200 fee/student to cover uniforms, activities, and other school items that supplement the educational programming. In response to clarifying questions, the applicant indicated that these fees are optional to students, which is reassuring, but does not provide clarity as to how this fee would be communicated to the school community and how parents would be made aware that it is optional. The proposed budget indicates that the school anticipates over \$100,000 in revenue from these school fees in the first year of operation and over \$200,000 in revenue in each subsequent year. From a budget perspective, this line item was discussed during the capacity interview, and the applicant provided some examples such as the proposed year one facility, that indicate revenues would still exceed expenditures within the proposed budget even if the expected revenue from these fees were not realized. Nevertheless, while certain extracurricular fees may be permissible, it is concerning that the budget includes over \$100,000 of student fees as these revenues should not be relied upon.

- The budget narrative indicates that PTAA Nevada will have a no-interest loan from the proposed CMO for \$150,000. However, the budget does not appear to account for the repayment of this loan.

Addendum Section

In accordance with Assembly Bill 419 from the 2021 Session of the Nevada Legislature, the SPCSA is required to consider the academic, financial and organizational performance of any charter schools that currently hold a contract with the proposed CMO or EMO. Information gathered through the *Addendum Section* examines the past performance of affiliated charter schools, as well as readiness of the CMO or EMO to expand and the specific services that are to be provided to the proposed school. The *Addendum Section* is required for those applications that seek to contract with a CMO or EMO, or are applying for sponsorship directly.

Academic performance data included in the application indicates that PTAA schools in Texas are performing well according to the state accountability system. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the most recent ratings are from the 2018 – 19 school year, and all schools were issued one of the two highest ratings. Additionally, contract terms between the proposed board and CMO appear reasonable given the scale of services described in the narrative.

Several concerns were identified in this section, however, including the capacity of the proposed CMO to effectively scale and support the proposed school, and inconsistencies in the scale strategy that fail to provide clarity around roles and responsibilities. The capacity interview also raised significant questions about the ability of the board to effectively oversee and monitor the proposed school's given the lack of clarity within the proposed contract regarding performance metrics that would be used to evaluate the CMO. Finally, the past performance of the CMO in Nevada, through its support of 100 Academy, raise questions about its ability to support a high-quality program in the first years of operation. For these reasons and others, this section of the application was rated as 'Approaches the Standard'.

Areas of Strength

- While some schools within the PTAA network in Texas are not yet at full scale, and other affiliated schools in Arizona and Colorado do not have performance data, available performance data for sister schools outside of Nevada signal that schools are meeting or exceeding academic performance standards.
- Evidence presented in the application indicates that PTAA schools in operation in Texas are performing soundly and meeting financial performance standards.
- The proposed fee structure for the CMO is clear within the narrative and proposed contract. While the fee is high compared to other CMO/EMOs that operate and support schools in Nevada, the CMO will be supporting, implementing and overseeing many operational pieces of the proposed school. The operations and services outlined in the narrative appear to closely align to the services contemplated in the contract.

Areas of Concern

- The CMO has seen rapid growth in Texas, having expanded from two charter schools in 2016 to six as of 2020. The CMO has recently expanded to both Colorado and Nevada (providing services to a Clark County School District sponsored charter school), and the application notes that PTAA is now operating a charter school in Arizona. However, the applicant does not provide information on how the CMO has or will scale to meet this expansion, and information shared during the capacity interview heighten these concerns about the plans to scale the model. It is not clear that the proposed CMO has sufficient staff and capacity to support this school. For example, the proposed superintendent of the CMO is working across multiple states and for multiple employers at one time, and their dual employment was confirmed during the capacity interview. To a lesser extent,

the same appears to be true for multiple members of the CMO that would be dedicated to supporting the proposed school in Nevada as well as others affiliated with the CMO. These staffing arrangements contradict information provided in the staffing plan which lists full-time CMO employees supporting the proposed school.

- During the capacity interview, the CMO was asked about how it evaluated readiness to expand. The CMO indicated that expansion had been driven by invitations or demand from other states, but did not discuss how the CMO had determined that the organization was ready to support additional schools.
- The capacity interview did not provide sufficient evidence that the proposed board is prepared to effectively monitor and evaluate the CMO's performance. Additionally, the proposed service contract provides for general performance indicators, but specific targets in each of these areas is not provided. For example, the services contract states that MAP Growth, Student Attendance and Staff retention will be used in the evaluation, but no benchmarks have been established. More information is needed to understand the plan to be used by the board to evaluate the proposed CMO as lines of authority between the board, network and school are not clearly defined.
- Inconsistencies between the narrative, job descriptions and organizational chart raise questions about the roles and responsibilities of the regional director role and the supervision of the principal. Responsibilities overlap and the managing and coaching relationship as described in the narrative raises questions, particularly around how this structure enable the board to address performance concerns at the school. More information is needed to understand how these two roles work together to support the success of the school.
- Questions remain about the CMO and their readiness to open and support a high performing school in Nevada. Currently, the proposed CMO is supporting 100 Academy, a public charter school authorized by CCSD. 100 Academy is partially meeting state standards according to the most recent Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) for both the elementary and middle school and the latest available data for 100 Academy indicates that proficiency levels have not improved. While the relationship between the CMO and 100 Academy is relatively new and the impacts of COVID-19 have likely affected the implementation of the program and ability to collect reliable student assessment data, available data does not data demonstrating that the CMO has been able to implement a program that has driven significant academic gains for students in Nevada.
- Inconsistencies were identified between the written application and the capacity interview regarding the services to be provided by the proposed CMO, including those specified for the incubation year. The draft contract provided in the written application does not appear to support necessary work to be performed in the incubation year, and it is not clear that how the proposed board has the capacity to monitor and oversee the CMO during this year as well as the proposed charter term. The capacity interview did not resolve these concerns. Additional information is needed to ensure that appropriate oversight exist, and that the proposed board has a mechanism to evaluate the performance of the CMO beginning in the incubation year as the board metrics for this period are underdeveloped.
- The three most recent audits for existing schools in Texas reference PNC Partners and SSS Education Corporation and note that the Superintendent of the proposed CMO has financial interests in both entities, raising potential concerns about fiscal policies and procedures. When asked about the relationship between the SSS Education Corporation and PNC Partners during the interview, the proposed board affirmed that any and all contracts would be reviewed and approved by the board.

However, more information is needed to understand the related entities and determine if they represent a potential issue for the proposed school in Nevada.

- Previous findings from a financial audit provided in the application raises questions about internal financial policies and procedures.

Capacity Interview Summary

Based on the independent and collective review of the application, the review committee conducted a virtual capacity interview of the applicant to assess the capacity to execute the application’s overall plan. The capacity interview for Pioneer Technology & Arts Academy Nevada was conducted on Thursday, October 7, 2021 and lasted approximately 120-minutes. Various representatives of the proposed CMO were present at the interview, in addition to all members of the proposed board with one exception. Questions during the capacity interview focused primarily on these areas:

Targeted Plan	Leadership Team
Parent and Community Involvement	Student Recruitment and Enrollment
Curriculum & Instructional Design	Facilities
At-Risk Students and Special Populations	Financial Plan
Driving for Results	Scale Strategy
School Structure: Discipline	School Management Contracts
School Structure: Calendar and Schedule	CMO Applying for Sponsorship Directly
Board Governance	

Prior to the capacity interview, the review committee sent the applicant team a list of clarifying questions to provide an additional opportunity for details and information to be presented. These responses were considered by the review team, and were used to better inform the capacity interview.

Lastly, the capacity interview included a scenario-based question that probed the applicant team’s capacity to oversee and monitor the progress of the proposed school during the incubation year.

District Input

Per Assembly Bill 462 (2019), now codified in NRS 388A.249, the SPCSA solicited input from the Clark County School District regarding this application.⁷ The timeline regarding this request for input is below and the response provided by the Clark County School District is attached.

- August 5, 2021 – Memo sent to CCSD soliciting input.
- The SPCSA expects to receive input following the CCSD board meeting scheduled for October 28, 2021. This input will be posted alongside this recommendation.

⁷ NRS 388A.249(2)(a): “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.”

Appendix (Rubric Detail)

The information below indicates *rubric criteria that the applicant did not substantially meet*.

Meeting the Need

- **Targeted Plan**
 - *Clear and compelling rationale for the selected community based on academic or demographic need.*
 - *Clear and comprehensive explanation of how the proposed model meets identified community needs.*
 - *Demonstrated capacity, credible plans, and thorough research and analysis in order to intentionally serve the identified student populations, prevent at-risk students from dropping out, and/or provide more high-quality schools in underserved areas, as defined in the Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment*
- **Parent and Community Involvement**
 - *Demonstrates clear evidence of the involvement of parents, neighborhood, and/or community members representative of target population in the development of the plan. The application establishes that the local community has helped shape the final school proposal.*
 - *Identifies specific partnerships which are shown to be relevant to the needs of the target population, including partners located in the community that the applicant intends to serve.*
 - *Partnerships are evidenced by specific letters of commitment outlining the accountabilities of both parties and clear, measurable, time-specific deliverables from the partner which are clearly relevant to the needs of the target population.*

Academic Plan

- **Curriculum and Instructional Design**
 - *A clear explanation, supported by evidence, demonstrating how the school's academic program, including the curriculum, aligns to the Nevada Academic Content Standards, including both the Common Core Academic Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards, and that the school teaches all required subjects at each grade level.*
- **Driving for Results**
 - *Internal and mission-specific goals are SMART: goals and objectives are specific, measurable, ambitious and attainable, relevant, and time bound.*
 - *The assessment plan is sufficiently detailed to demonstrate collection and analysis of individual student, student cohorts, school level, and network-level performance over time (interim, annual, year over year), including a clear process for setting and monitoring ambitious academic goals.*
 - *Sound plan for measuring and reporting academic performance and progress of students for both individual schools and the network (if applicable).*
- **At-Risk Students and Special Populations**
 - *The Committee to Form provides a logical method supported by research according to which they will assess the needs of at-risk students. The Committee to Form also outlines a continuum of programs, strategies, and supports that corresponds with the needs identified for each student and is supported by research.*
 - *The Committee to Form outlines the methods according to which the school will remediate academically underperforming students, including the system according to which the school will track progress, facilitate teacher collaboration, and the research supporting the school's*

remediation strategy.

Operations Plan

- Board Governance

- *Proposed governance structure is likely to ensure effective governance and meaningful oversight of school performance, operations, and financials. The proposed governing body demonstrates capacity and expertise to successfully oversee a school.*
- *Clear delineation of authority and working relationship between the governing body and staff.*
- *Describes the process for resolving student/parent objections and the mechanism for removal of governing body members if needed.*
- *Goals are clear and measurable, and contribute to improved academic outcomes for students and overall advancement of the organization.*
- *The board puts into place a structure that enables it to collect the information it needs to evaluate the EMO/CMO, if applicable.*
- *There are no prohibited familial relationships between charter holder board members, charter holder board members and staff, or charter holder board members and EMO/CMO employees within the third degree of consanguinity or affinity nor any supervisory or business relationships.*

- Leadership Team

- *The leadership accomplishments of the school leader or leadership team are demonstrable with empirical data related to student performance as well as the recruitment, hiring, and development of a highly effective staff.*
- *The organizational charter clearly indicates all positions delineating board and management roles and lines of authority.*
- *If identified, school leadership team resumes demonstrate a range of experience including leadership at a high-performing and/or high growth school with management responsibilities, experience establishing a high-performing culture with students and staff, and responsibility for significant student achievement gains with target demographics.*
- *Provides a comprehensive plan for coaching, support and evaluation of school leadership.*

- Staffing Plan

- *Staffing plans matches the proposed budget and is explicitly aligned to both budget narrative assumptions and to budget calculations.*
- *Sound understanding of staffing needs necessary for the new school(s) proposed.*

- Human Resources

- *Articulates process for recruiting and hiring high quality teachers and leaders.*
- *Articulates a recruitment and hiring plan that will result in a school staff reflective of the student body.*
- *School performance management system is likely to retain and promote talented staff, allows for re-structuring and removal of staff as needed, creates opportunities for leadership development, and sets clear expectations.*

- Student Recruitment and Enrollment

- *Articulates proactive plan for recruiting eligible students to the school and describes specific actionable steps for ensuring the school is fully enrolled.*
- *Complies with Nevada laws and regulations regarding enrollment, including but not limited to:*
 - *Minimum 45-day notification period followed by 45-day enrollment period OR a combined 90-day notification and enrollment period.*

- *Demonstrated interest and intent to enroll commitments by a significant number of parents for Year 1. These forms include the following information at minimum:*
 - *Parent name and contact information*
 - *Zip code of residency*
 - *Student name(s) and grade levels for the proposed opening year*
- **Services**
 - *Operations plan includes logical plans for all essential and program-specific non-academic services, including but not limited to:*
 - *Staff structure/plan is adequate for the proposed school and aligns with the educational program; lines of authority are clear.*
 - *Committee to Form articulate clear metrics and process for evaluating effectiveness of services.*
- **Incubation Year Development**
 - *Outlines comprehensive leadership development plans that include training aligned with incubation year goals as well as stated academic goals (these may be either designed by or outsourced by the operator).*

Addendum

- **Readiness for Growth**
 - *Criteria for evaluating readiness for expansion are comprehensive and demonstrate high expectations for academic, financial, and organizational performance.*
 - *Academic Performance data for schools affiliated with the CMO/EMO demonstrate strong performance equivalent to 4- or 5-star performance on the NSPF.*
 - *The three most recent audits of the EMO/CMO and existing schools show no material findings.*
- **Scale Strategy**
 - *The plan to scale the model to new sites is adequately resourced and staffed appropriately.*
 - *Organization has sufficient infrastructure (or plan to develop same) to support the proposed network of schools, including shared services and the costs associated with them.*
 - *Organization charts clearly indicate lines of authority between the board, network, and schools.*
- **School Management Contracts**
 - *Clear rationale for selection of Educational Management Organization (EMO/CMO)/Charter Management Organization (CMO)*
 - *Clear, appropriate delineation of roles and responsibilities between the management organization and the school site(s)*
 - *Demonstrates capacity and commitment of the governing board to oversee the EMO/CMO effectively:*
 - *Plan for board to monitor/evaluate the EMO/CMO's performance*
 - *Clearly outlines the roles/responsibilities of the EMO/CMO in the year prior to the school's opening. The committee to form provides a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that lists specific service agreements for the period of time.*
 - *Clearly defined contract terms including: contract duration; roles and responsibilities of the school governing board, school staff, and EMO/CMO-specific services and resources to be provided by the EMO/CMO; performance evaluation measures and mechanisms; compensation to be paid to the provider; financial controls and oversight; methods of contract oversight and enforcement; investment disclosure; and conditions for renewal and*

termination of the contract, and alignment of the key performance indicators for the EMO/CMO and the hierarchy of sanctions for poor performance with the SPSCA academic, financial, and organizational frameworks intervention ladder.