



NEVADA STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

November 5, 2021

The State Public Charter School Authority Board Meeting was conducted virtually and at the following physical location:

Nevada Department of Education
2080 East Flamingo Road
Board Room
Las Vegas, Nevada

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT IN-PERSON:

Member Erica Mosca
Member Lee Farris
Member Mallory Cyr
Vice Chair Sheila Moulton
Chair Melissa Mackedon

AUTHORITY STAFF IN-PERSON:

Rebecca Feiden, Executive Director
Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing
Ryan Herrick, General Counsel
Jennifer King, Administrative Assistant IV

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT VIRTUALLY:

Member Javier Trujillo
Member Tamika Shauntee Rosales
Member Tonia Holmes-Sutton

AUTHORITY STAFF PRESENT VIRTUALLY:

Michael Dang, Management Analyst IV
Michael Gawthrop-Hutchins, Management Analyst III

AUDIENCE IN ATTENDANCE IN-PERSON:

Tamara Shear	Hugh Anderson
Whitney Mcintosh	Ryan Woodward
Kyle McOmer	Kim M.
Oyaima Canman-Calvo	Danette B.
Robert Anderson	Lula Edwards
Adam Gerlach	Yifei Wang
Anthony Sudweeks	Theodore Guerrero
Rudy Pamintuan	Virginia Johnson
Cathy Thompson	
Rick Blanc	
Derrick Love	
John Etzell	
Merrick Murray	
Rick Jager	
Jonathan Johnson	

AUDIENCE IN ATTENDANCE VIRTUALLY:

Karli Casto	Lindsey
Jai Mallory	Brandi Catlin
Tammy Malich	Angela Rose
Lorna James-Cervantes	Kaitlin Karpinski
Sarah Boldin	Justina
Whitney McIntosh	Sherah LeBoeuf
Cecelia Gonzalez	Frank A. Ingargiola
Rocio Martinez	Alain Bengochea
Lani Luo	Nikko Lee
Gun Ruder	Jacob Allen
Dinisha Mingo	
David Becerra	
Mark Losee	
Tara Raines	
Angela Cook	

Agenda Item 1 – Call to Order and Roll Call, and Pledge of Allegiance [00:00:38]

Melissa Mackedon, State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA), Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:01am and facilitated the pledge of allegiance. There were some technical issues and the virtual members in attendance were recorded as present and the remaining members were present in-person and reflected in the video and as indicated above.

Agenda Item 2 – Public Comment #1 [00:02:44]

Written public comment received:

1. Kim Matsumoto, regarding agenda item 9(f).

Public comment on the line:

1. Gil Lopez introduced himself as the recently selected Executive Director of the Charter School Association of Nevada.

Public comment in the board room:

1. Hugh Anderson, regarding agenda item 9(f).
2. Ryan Woodward, regarding agenda item 9(f).
3. Tamra Shear spoke on behalf of Jana Wilcox-Lavin, regarding agenda item 9(f).

Agenda Item 3 – 9:00 A.M. Public Hearing for Proposed Regulatory Changes – Legislative Counsel Bureau File No. R043-21 [00:14:13]

Executive Director Feiden said this item is the regulatory hearing regarding proposed changes to Nevada Administrative Code 388A.260, which can be found in Legislative Counsel Bureau’s file R043-21 and is attached in the meeting materials.

For context, they alerted the Authority that they were considering changes to this regulation in the July 30 meeting, and they provided an update in the August 27th and October 1st board meetings and staff held a regulatory workshop on September 13th. Thus far, they have not heard any concerns or issues with the proposed changes and have reached out proactively to some key stakeholders for feedback as well. She then discussed the specific regulatory changes before the board today.

First, to be clear, they are discussing possible changes to existing regulations they are not contemplating any new regulations. In particular, they are discussing possible changes to Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 388A.260, which deals with the process for applications to form a charter school, including letter of intent and the application itself. She summarized the proposed changes.

First in paragraph 1, NAC 388A.260, articulates when applications to form a charter school may be submitted to the SPCSA. Currently applications may be submitted between January 1st and January 15th of each year as well as between July 1st and July 15th of each year. SPCSA staff is proposing to change from the current two cycles per year to one cycle per year, as seen in proposed section 1. Staff is proposing the applications be due between April 15th and April 30th of each year.

Additionally, NAC 388A.260 currently requires that a letter of intent to submit a new charter school application be submitted to the SPCSA staff at least 120 days prior to the submission of the application itself. As seen in paragraph 2, staff is proposing to slightly shorten this timeline so that notices of intent would be due 90 days prior to the submission of the application.

Additionally, staff is proposing adding the specific information that must be provided within the letter of intent to this regulation. She discussed the specific information staff is proposing.

These are three relatively technical changes. With regard to the process, if the Authority approves these changes to regulation today, they will go to the Legislative Commission for consideration and would go into effect after approved by the Legislative Commission.

MOTION: Vice Chair Moulton made the motion to accept the proposed regulatory changes as presented by staff. Member Holmes-Sutton seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Item 4 – Approval of October 1, 2021 Board Meeting Action Minutes. [00:19:19]

MOTION: Member Farris made the motion to approve the October 1, 2021 board meeting action minutes. Member Mosca seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Item 5 – SPCSA Executive Director’s Report. [00:20:00]

a. Initiatives related to Serving All Students Equitably

Executive Director Feiden began with sharing a few updates regarding their initiatives to serve students equitably. First, a brief update regarding their (multi-tiered systems of supports) MTSS and Project Aware work which incorporates a focus on restorative practices, meeting individual student needs, trauma informed instruction and restorative justice, staff has done a number of trainings through the fall with some of their partners and look forward to picking those back up this coming January. Additionally, as a reminder to the Authority, they have 23 schools in their MTSS cohorts currently and those schools are receiving training and coaching to implement MTSS with fidelity. In addition, and related, staff is preparing to review restorative justice plans with some additional expertise through their Project Aware grant and their contracted staff through that grant. They are looking forward to providing additional feedback on these plans. Equity continues to be embedded in the work staff does on a daily basis and this will continue to be an agenda item so staff can continue to report on updates, as well as provide a forum for discussion for the board to continue to elevate the focus on equity.

b. COVID-19 Update [00:22:14]

Executive Director Feiden began the COVID-19 update by sharing the update regarding the number of COVID-19 cases that have been reported to the SPCSA. At this point they have seen 791 cases reported amongst students and staff. This includes individuals on and off campus at the time. As a result of these cases, schools have reported a total of just over 2,000 students and staff members who have been excluded or quarantined as a result of potential exposure. While these numbers are substantial and have no doubt impacted school operations and student learning, they are continuing to see things level off a bit in terms of the number of cases. Staff has continued to focus on increasing access to testing at their schools, bringing online a third testing platform that provides PCR tests by mail. Fifteen of their schools have signed up for the program and it is beginning to roll out this week. She noted this will be particularly important given the new guidance released by the federal government, regarding the vaccine or testing requirement for employees. They expect to receive further guidance from the state and expect that to roll out early in January. SPCSA staff continue to urge schools to prepare for the requirement and testing that may have to take place at their school sites for employees not vaccinated. Additionally with recent news regarding vaccines for children, staff will be working with health authorities and state agencies to support any communication regarding those vaccinations and will also be providing their schools that are interested in providing clinics at their school sites with information about who to contact. Staff remains in close communications with their local health districts and their health inspections this year also require to be in compliance with state directives.

c. The SPCSA’s Local Plan for the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services pursuant to Section 2001(i) of the American Rescue Plan [00:24:44]

Executive Director Feiden reminded the Authority that the American Rescue Act (ARP) was signed into law in March and included numerous provisions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and provided relief to address those impacts among these was the allocation of \$122 billion dollars to the ARP ESSER fund to be used to help safely reopen and sustain safe operations of schools and address the impacts of the COVID-19 on the nation’s students. As a condition in receiving these funds, each LEA, including the SPCSA, was required to developed and post a

plan for the safe return to in-person instruction and the continuity of services in accordance with the federal requirements and guidance issued by the Department of Education. The Authority adopted this plan on June 25th. A copy of the plan is provided within the materials for today's meeting. Federal and state guidance indicates that the LEA must seek input on whether to revise its plan and on any revisions to its plan no less than every 6 months, taking into consideration any changes in context, state directives, CDC guidance, etc. SPCSA staff has begun looking at the current version of the plan and expect to make minor adjustments to ensure alignment with the most recent guidance and encourage anyone with additional input or feedback to share that with staff, as well as the Authority. SPCSA staff plans to bring an updated version to the December meeting.

There was further discussion regarding the recently released federal guidance.

d. Information related to validated demographic enrollment data for SPCSA-sponsored charter schools for the 2020-2021 school year [00:32:15]

Executive Director Feiden said this item is related to their October 1 count. They do not yet have the official data but expect that it will be released this month. They will be bringing a presentation to the Authority at the December meeting that will include demographic data for this school year, as well as the graduation data. With regard to their focus on equity, they continue to disaggregate the data by student group and by special populations and will do that for the December meeting as well.

e. Grant Monitoring [00:33:08]

Executive Director Feiden said she provided an update to the Authority regarding this item a year ago but wanted to make sure to bring this back around. Under federal guidance, the SPCSA, as an LEA, is also considered a non-federal pass-through entity. As a result, they have a responsibility to conduct subrecipient monitoring, which is basically monitoring of their charter school grant programs. Last year, SPCSA staff worked to formalize their approach to monitoring, which included ensuring they were conducting differentiated grant monitoring based on risk of noncompliance with the grants. This means they apply more monitoring to schools that have more issues in meeting grant requirements. SPCSA staff wrapped up their first year of grant monitoring over the summer and have been finalizing reports over the last couple of weeks. SPCSA staff is going into the year with a number of lessons learned and have made a number of updates to their process. Staff will be sharing the overview of their process at the December meeting. However, since there has been some recent activity in this area, she wanted to share some updates with the Authority.

First, she indicated they wrapped up their fiscal year 2022 and just wrapped up their risk assessments of their schools to determine how much and what monitoring they will be doing. Schools all received a risk rating of either low, moderate, or high risk. Staff is beginning to prepare for the monitoring processes and all of their schools regardless of risk level will be involved in desktop monitoring throughout the year. In addition, they are about to kick off onsite monitoring, which is typically for their high-risk schools, however, they also are required by law to conduct onsite monitoring at all schools at some point in a multiyear cycle. In addition to the high risk schools, they randomly select a subset of schools for onsite monitoring each year. She said the Authority will get a detailed deep dive into this in the next month and in the meantime there are summary documents included in the meeting materials for this agenda item.

f. Pre-Opening for 2022 [00:37:18]

Executive Director Feiden said the SPCSA has a pre-opening checklist used for new and expanding schools. Historically they have kicked off pre-opening in January, this year they intend to start this process in November to ensure a longer runway for those new schools. In addition, they have added a focus in some areas that have posed challenges for our schools in the past. Today's materials include the draft checklist, and she does not anticipate any additional changes but certainly would like to hear if any members of the Authority have anything that they have questions or recommendations on. They will be kicking off this process with a meeting with their new schools and this will include the 4 schools slated to open next year as well as any schools approved here today.

Agenda Item 6 – SPCSA Charter School Governing Body Governance Standards. [00:39:00]

Chair Mackedon said recently they approved the Governance Standards for themselves and their schools and they will take about 90 seconds every meeting for each board member to focus and discuss one. Today the standard she will focus on is under 1, the second bullet point which is to commit to the academic, behavioral, social, and emotional success of all enrolled students and the overall academic success of the school. As a school leader, she was not prepared for the amount of behavior issues. She believes ultimately this is something that will come back to the board as something that schools are dealing with. Next month Vice Chair Moulton will pick one to focus on.

Agenda Item 7 – Charter School Contract Amendment Applications. [00:41:41]

- a. Sage Collegiate Public Charter School** – enrollment increase; change in grade levels served during first year of operation

Member Cyr and Member Mosca recused themselves from this agenda item.

Michael Gawthrop-Hutchins presented the overview of the charter school’s amendment application as submitted and [staff’s recommendation](#). Sage Collegiate Public Charter School is requesting approval to adjust their enrollment for year 1 and subsequent years until they are at capacity. This request also included a change in grade levels offered beginning in year 1. SPCSA Staff recommends approval of the amendment request.

There was further discussion between the Authority and staff around the reasons for the approval.

***MOTION:** Member Farris made the motion to approve the Sage Collegiate request to increase enrollment and add additional grades as proposed in the amendment application. Member Holmes-Sutton seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

- b. Eagle Charter Schools of Nevada** – request to adjust approved zip codes for location [00:48:08]

Michael Gawthrop-Hutchins presented the overview of the charter school’s amendment application as submitted and [staff’s recommendation](#). Eagle Charter Schools of Nevada is requesting approval for the school to locate in an existing facility within a zip code not previously approved for the school. SPCSA staff recommends approval of the amendment request.

Member Cyr asked if the choice to not disclose the location is given to all applicants. Executive Director Feiden said if they are looking at their general application criteria, there is a pathway for approval whether the facility is identified or not. If not, staff wants clear information that it is reasonable in terms of cost and that there is evidence of a viable plan. Member Farris asked if the school would need final approval of the location when it is selected? Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing, said as part of their pre-opening process they have to do a number of facility related items, so if there is a concern for any reason, and they do not believe there is one, they will certainly address that with the school.

***MOTION:** Member Farris made the motion to grant the request for a good cause and Approve the Eagle Charter Schools of Nevada request to locate within the 89110 zip code. Member Holmes-Sutton seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Agenda Item 8 – New School Application Process. The Authority will hear an overview from SPCSA staff regarding the New School Application Process. [00:54:25]

Director Modrcin provided the new school application overview and presentation which can be found in the supporting materials. Applications always start with a letter of intent in the spring and follow by a formal application in July. After they confirm applications are complete, staff move to the independent review phase which is followed by the capacity interview and that leads to a final recommendation which is presented between 90 and 120 days which is today for this cycle. He spoke to the two cycle timelines before moving to the application

sections and the application review process. Once that is complete staff that presents recommendations to the Authority and applicants that are denied may elect to resubmit their application within 30 days once they are notified. He reiterated that their application process is intentionally rigorous. Staff is planning to present any resubmission recommendations at the January meeting. Once a school is approved, they enter into the charter school lifecycle as seen in the presentation. With regard to the application process, the Needs Assessment essentially added a layer as applications are expected to be strong as outlined in their rubric as well as meet at least one of the needs outlined in the SPCSA Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment. He talked about the specific rubric criteria and ratings before opening it up for questions.

A 5-minute convenience break was taken.

Agenda Item 9 – New Charter School Applications. [01:07:08]

a. PilotEd – Cactus Park Elementary

Member Mosca and Member Holmes-Sutton recused themselves from this agenda item.

Executive Director Feiden provided the overview of the PilotEd – Cactus Park Elementary charter application as submitted and [staff's recommendation](#). For the reasons outlined throughout staff's recommendation, SPCSA staff recommend approval of the pilotED – Cactus Park Elementary charter application with conditions as described in the recommendation and below.

Cecilia Gonzalez, Assemblywoman and board member of PilotED Cactus Park Elementary, introduced herself and said she is joined by proposed board members Dinisha Mingo, Angela Cook, proposed school principal, Karli Casto, community coordinator David Becerra, CMO/CEO Jacob Allen, CMO/COO Lani Luo. Jacob Allen, Karli Casto, John Becerra, and Lani Luo provided introductions and brief remarks.

MOTION: *Vice Chair Moulton made the motion to Approve the pilotED – Cactus Park Elementary charter application as submitted during the 2021 Summer Application Cycle, with conditions outlined below, based on a finding that the applicant meets the requirements contained in NRS 388A.249(3).*

1. *By January 1, 2022, and before the school begins accepting student applications, provide an updated lottery policy that complies with Nevada Revised Statutes and Nevada Administrative Code.*
2. *By February 1, 2022, identify and onboard at least one additional board member who has experience and expertise in finance.*
3. *Provide a quarterly report to SPCSA staff during the incubation year on the status of fundraising 5 and grant awards as well as a description of any impacts to the school's budget.*
4. *Provide updates regarding the newly established CMO, including (a) a copy of the fiscal year 2022 financial audit for the pilotED Foundation, once completed, and (b) notification to SPCSA staff in the event that the pilotED Foundation or an organization intending to contact with the pilotED foundation as a CMO submits an application to open a charter school in any state.*
5. *Clarify terms of the consulting agreement to detail specific services to be provided during the incubation year, as outlined in the incubation plan and scale strategy.*
6. *Complete the SPCSA pre-opening process for new charter schools.*

Member Farris seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

b. Young Women's Leadership Academy [01:47:15]

Director Modrcin provided the overview of the Young Women's Leadership Academy charter application as submitted and [staff's recommendation](#). For the reasons outlined throughout staff's recommendation, SPCSA staff recommend approval of the Young Women's Leadership Academy charter application with conditions as described in the recommendation and below.

There was brief discussion between the Authority and staff.

Gunlek Ruder, proposed board chair, Rob Goldstein, President and CEO of the Sands Corporation, Olivia Carbajal, Principal at Mater Academy, and in the room they have their founding principal, Whitney McIntosh, virtually they have Sarah Boldin, from the student leadership network, and in the room, Kyle McOmer from Academica Nevada. The Young Women's Leadership Academy representatives provided introductions and brief remarks.

There was further discussion between the Authority and the proposed charter school representatives.

MOTION: *Vice Chair Moulton made the motion to approve the Young Women's Leadership Academy of Las Vegas charter application as submitted during the 2021 Summer Application Cycle, with conditions outlined below, based on a finding that the applicant meets the requirements contained in NRS 388A.249(3).*

1. *By January 1, 2022, and before the school begins accepting student applications, provide an updated school enrollment policy that makes clear that any student, regardless of gender, may apply and enroll at the school.*
2. *By March 1, 2022, YWLA will submit board-approved procurement policies.*
3. *By July 1, 2022, YWLA should submit a long-term facility plan to SPCSA staff for review to ensure that the school has sufficient space beyond year one of operations.*
4. *By July 1, 2022, YWLA Las Vegas enters into a memorandum of understanding with one or more community colleges, state colleges and universities to offer dual credit courses pursuant to NRS 389.310.*
5. *By July 1, 2022, YWLA Las Vegas provides a signed attestation by both the lessor and YWLA Board Chair confirming that the proposed year one facility and organization will not exercise any control over the educational program of the charter school, pursuant to NRS 388A.090. Additionally, the attestation will confirm the school will comply with any statutes, regulations or guidelines related to any public school operating out of a religious facility.*
6. *Complete the SPCSA pre-opening process for new charter schools.*

Member Shauntee Rosales seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

c. Strong Start Academy [02:40:17]

Director Modrcin provided the overview of the Strong Start Academy charter application as submitted and [staff's recommendation](#). For the reasons outlined throughout staff's recommendation, SPCSA staff recommend denial of the Strong Start Academy charter application.

The Strong Start Academy representatives provided introductions and brief remarks.

There was further discussion between the Authority and the proposed charter school representatives.

MOTION: *Member Farris made the motion to Deny the Strong Start Academy Elementary School 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. Vice Chair Moulton seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

d. Wallace Stegner Academy [03:27:22]

Executive Director Feiden provided the overview of the Wallace Stegner Academy charter application as submitted and [staff's recommendation](#). For the reasons outlined throughout staff's recommendation, SPCSA staff recommend denial of the Wallace Stegner Academy charter application.

The Wallace Stegner Academy representatives provided introductions and remarks.

There was further discussion between the Authority and the proposed charter school representatives.

MOTION: *Vice Chair Moulton made the motion to Deny the Wallace Stegner Academy of 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. Member Holmes-Sutton seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

A 15-minute break was taken.

e. Pioneer Technology and Arts Academy Nevada [04:17:00]

Director Modrcin provided the overview of the Pioneer Technology and Arts Academy Nevada charter application as submitted and [staff's recommendation](#). For the reasons outlined throughout staff's recommendation, SPCSA staff recommends denial of the Pioneer Technology and Arts Academy Nevada charter application. Director Modrcin mentioned that late last night staff received a document from the applicant team through Executive Director Feiden. Given the timing of this, SPCSA staff has not had time to review this document in detail, but it does appear to be additional information for the application.

Mr. Herrick noted with regard to the information received last night, some of the information is marked as confidential and private, which under the charter school statutes and regulations, the SPCSA is required to publish the application on the SPCSA website as well as this also raises open meeting law and public records act concerns.

Member Trujillo asked how much time staff would need to go through the document that was submitted late last night. Executive Director Feiden said they had a cursory look at the document and would consider this the kind of information that should be submitted through the resubmission and go to the Authority in January to discuss.

The Pioneer Technology and Arts Academy of Nevada representatives provided introductions and remarks.

There was further discussion between the Authority, staff and the proposed charter school representatives.

MOTION: *Vice Chair Moulton made the motion to 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. Member Cyr seconded the motion. The motion carried 7-1 with Member Mosca as a nay.*

f. Rooted School – Clark County [05:57:05]

Executive Director Feiden provided the overview of the Rooted School – Clark County charter application as submitted and [staff's recommendation](#). For the reasons outlined throughout staff's recommendation, SPCSA staff recommend denial of the Rooted School – Clark County charter application.

The Rooted School – Clark County representatives provided introductions and remarks.

There was further discussion between the Authority, staff and the proposed charter school representatives.

MOTION: *Vice Chair Moulton made the motion to Deny the Rooted School – Clark County 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. Member Holmes-Sutton seconded the motion.*

Roll call vote

Member Trujillo: Yes.

Member Mosca: No.

Member Farris: No.

Member Shauntee Rosales: No.

Member Holmes-Sutton: Yes.

Member Cyr: Yes.

Vice Chair Moulton: Yes.

Chair Mackedon: Yes.

The motion carried 5-3.

Agenda Item 10 – Long-Range Calendar. [07:19:06]

Executive Director Feiden said looking ahead to December they are looking at contract amendments, reviewing renewals recommendations, as well as looking at graduation and validation day data. As mentioned previously they will be looking at the Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Learning as well as an overview of grant monitoring and then looking ahead to January, they are expecting to take the charter application resubmissions as well as changes to the needs assessment and that will be on the agenda for December as well. She also plans to identify a school for the focus on schools item.

Agenda Item 11 – Public Comment #2 [07:20:27]

There was no public comment on the line or in the board room. Chair Mackedon called out the remaining public comment cards that were submitted regarding Pioneer Technology and Arts Academy Nevada.

Agenda Item 12 – Adjournment [07:21:18]

The meeting was adjourned at 4:23pm.

DRAFT

State Public Charter School Authority

November 5, 2021 Board Meeting

Las Vegas

Name	Representing	Agenda Item #
Rick Sosa	Rooted School	9
Kim Metcalf	Self	—
HUGH ANDERSON	VEGAS CHAMBER	9.
Tamara Shear	Opportunity 180	9
Ryan Woodward	VEGAS CHAMBER	9
Whitney McIntosh	YWLA - LV	9
Danielle Babin	Opportunity 180	9
Jonathan Johnson	Rooted School	9
Merrick Murray	Rooted School	9
Ted Guerrero	SNUMA + PTAA	—
Derrick Lew	PTAA	

Name	Representing	Agenda Item #
Lula Edwards	PTAA	
Nadia Mohammad	PTAA	
Yifei wang	PTAA	
John Eitzell	Rooted	#9

From: [Kim Matsumoto](#)
To: [SPCSA Public Comment](#)
Subject: Rooted School Charter Approval
Date: Thursday, November 4, 2021 2:01:05 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

To Whom It May Concern,

I recently attended a Community listening session about Rooted School opening in Clark County and was blown away! I was impressed learning high schoolers could graduate with the necessary skills and a way into an appropriate career path without the debt of a college education. It's been brought to my attention that their charter might not get approved. As a parent of a student who will be entering high school soon I would ask that you reconsider. I think a Charter School would greatly improve our area and children's future better than another CCSD Public school would.

Thank you!
-Kim Matsumoto

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To the Honorable Members of the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority,

For those who I have not met, my name is Jonathan Johnson and I'm the founder and CEO of Rooted School Foundation based in New Orleans. We are a research, development, and action non-profit that tests place-based strategies to accelerate upward economic mobility for youth. By age 22, we aim to place 90% of youth across our schools and programs into jobs that pay above the average household income in their city. This milestone is one step in a journey to help reduce the racial wealth gap with partner communities, a gap that would take more than 228 years to close by current forecasts.

In 2019, our team was invited by Opportunity 180 to explore the potential of opening Rooted School in Nevada. Jana Wilcox Lavin visited our first school in New Orleans and believed our mission, vision, and success could create new opportunities for youth in Clark County, while addressing an acute and persistent challenge in the county's public schools. Since 2019, we have focused our efforts on meeting with over 200 community leaders and prospective families to hear feedback on the model, conducting 4 focus groups between December 2020 and March 2021, identifying and training the founding School Leader, and submitting a quality charter application.

The idea for Rooted School began when I was in third grade. I'm originally from Anaheim, California and I came home to the sound of my mother crying because she and my dad were losing the home I grew up in. Our neighborhood was gentrifying and, unable to retrain themselves for higher paying jobs, they could no longer afford the rise in fees. I was heartbroken by this. I didn't know that you could lose the home you grew up in. Then that anger became a seed. How might I do something with my life so that other third graders don't have to lose their home like I did. And perhaps build a better life than the one given to them at birth.

While not the same, my story is similar to many children across Clark County. During the recession wrought by the pandemic, their families have lost jobs, have had to take on multiple jobs to survive, and/or have had to move in with multiple families. Many parents are struggling to retrain themselves for the modern economy and worry that their children will be prepared to build a better life than the one they were able to give them. This is what we've heard from families across CCSD over two years. I know this struggle intimately as my own sisters, one 41 the other 30, lost their jobs and needed to move in with my parents to get back on their feet. Fortunately, my fate was different.

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By 2010, I paid my way to become the first person in my family to graduate college in California. After college, I chose to teach youth whose stories were similar to mine and became a founding 8th grade social studies teacher at KIPP Central City Academy in New Orleans, LA.

By 2014, after four years of teaching at KIPP Central City Academy in New Orleans, I was recognized by the Fishman Prize for Excellence in Teaching. This is a national teaching award given to exceptional educators who demonstrate success working with youth in high-poverty and high-trauma settings. That success gave local leaders confidence to offer me the chance to start a first-of-its-kind high school in a city where the graduation rate has not gone higher than 78% since Hurricane Katrina. At the time, New Orleans was seeing its technology sector grow at a rate that outpaced the national average. Jobs produced by this sector were high-growth/high-wage and didn't require 4-year college degrees. At the same time, the average household income for a white family was \$56,000. And, do you know what it was for black and Laintx families? \$25,000 and \$36,000 respectively according to research conducted by Harvard University's Opportunity Insights. I believed then as I do now that there is more our public school systems could do to reduce that gap faster.

And we did. By June 2021, Rooted delivered on its promise of offering a chance at a college acceptance in one hand and a job offer in the other. Rooted School graduated its first class ever in New Orleans. 100% of students who wanted 4-year college were accepted and are attending competitive universities such as Tulane, Villanova, and Case Western Reserve. 43% of those students were the first in their family to attend college. And we obtained \$1M in scholarships for those 20 students. Additionally, 100% of students who wanted direct placements in high-growth/high-wage industries were placed. For the first time in these employers' company history, they hired students directly from high school. Students who qualified for F&R lunch were placed in jobs making more than \$32K/year with full benefits (which is more than the average household income for someone age 35 in New Orleans). Companies they work at include Fortune 500 companies like Entergy, Ochsner, and Lucid. In each case, our students doubled their household earnings in a matter of weeks and we're on track to exceed the number of students placed directly in information industries from last school year. What we've seen be true for students in New Orleans can be true for students here.

Like New Orleans in 2014, Clark County faces a tremendous opportunity. CBRE, the world's largest commercial real estate and services company rated Las Vegas within its 'Next 25' up-and-coming tech markets over the next 5 years as it makes a post-pandemic recovery. These jobs are high-growth/high-wage and don't require

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4-year college degrees, and could lift thousands of families out of poverty right now. We heard Hugh Anderson from the Vegas Chamber and Governor's Workforce Development Board speak to this earlier today. Yet, all youth in Clark County aren't equitably prepared for these opportunities in their own back yard.

By age 35, the average household income of a child growing up in CCSD is \$30,000 according to the Opportunity Atlas. That's not enough to put their children through college, buy a home, or end the generational poverty that many of their families have endured for years. Nevada, specifically Clark County, is leading the U.S. right now in unemployment at roughly 7.5%. Though, according to Nevada's chief economist, David Schmidt, this disruption in employment is seen more in the casino and hotel industry than all other industries. Employment recovery is happening faster in other industries like the information industry—where Rooted School—Clark County is focused. We have an opportunity today to act boldly to change this.

It is my understanding that the goal of this Board is to bring new models to the state that serve students in high needs areas with new and innovative models that have demonstrated success previously. In the SPCSA staff's recommendation for denial, there were multiple mentions of Rooted School—New Orleans' "C" rating from two years ago. This would roughly translate to a 3-star rating here if we purely used the state's rating system from previous years. Though I want this board to be clear that Rooted School is nationally recognized for pushing the limits of what's possible in public education and setting a high bar for youth from historically underserved communities.

In 2020, only our third year of existence, we were recognized by the Clayton Christensen Institute as one of the 130 most innovative schools in the U.S. by a panel of leading organizations for education innovation. The CCI is a nonprofit, non-partisan think tank dedicated to improving the world through disruptive innovation. In 2019, we became the earliest multi-state expansion funded by the Charter School Growth Fund in their organization's 15-year history. We were funded for continued growth in New Orleans and new expansion in Indianapolis when that city approved Rooted for its second school. Charter School Growth Fund invests in talented leaders of the U.S.'s highest-performing charter organizations and helps support their growth with funding and technical support. Their senior leadership, which includes some of the most prominent educational leaders in the U.S. invested in Rooted School because, in 7 years, our team has quickly become a national leader in workforce development, job placement, and Industry Based Credential attainment while in high school. CSGF is currently preparing to invest in Rooted's growth in Vancouver, WA (we were approved for our third school there in December 2020) and our fourth school in Clark County if approved. It is my understanding that the SPCSA review team did not speak with CSGF

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about their decision to invest in Rooted despite their nationally-recognized rigorous process. A question I invite this board to consider today is what diligence does the Clayton Christensen Institute, CSGF, and Indianapolis (in the state with the top charter law in the U.S.) conduct for Rooted that the SPCSA does not?

In December of 2020, the Washington State Charter Commission (Washington's statewide authorizing board) unanimously approved Rooted School to open the first charter school in southwest WA history after two years of community listening interviews and focus groups. Washington's charter law is ranked 3 in the U.S. and their process is considered among the most rigorous in the U.S. in a state that typically has not supported non-local charter organizations. Yet, they unanimously approved Rooted School–Vancouver in December 2020. This decision was not easy for the state board. Their application review team flagged similar concerns that the SPCSA review team flagged. However, the recommendation was to approve given our track record of listening to those directly impacted before making decisions, building long-lasting relationships that benefit Rooted students, and balancing Rooted's expansion into other communities while maintaining the integrity of Rooted School–New Orleans in its startup years. Currently, Rooted School–Vancouver is on track to meet all pre-opening conditions to successfully launch fall 2022 despite the review team's initial concerns. Not to mention, they relied on feedback from leaders who had visited the schools in New Orleans and Indianapolis, talked to members of our school boards, and sought to understand why funders like Charter School Growth Fund invested in us. It is my understanding that no one from the SPCSA visited our schools, talked to the WA State Charter Commission, WA Charter School Association, or talked to the boards of our local schools in their diligence of Rooted School–Clark County. A question I invite this board to consider today is what diligence did the state of WA conduct for Rooted that the SPCSA review team did not to inform its recommendation of our denial today?

When I asked SPCSA staff if they spoke with our New Orleans and Indianapolis authorizers about our capacity for growth, they said they had but did not disclose who specifically. This mattered because SPCSA staff mentioned their conversations with both authorizers did not give them confidence that we had the capacity to support Rooted's launch in Clark County. Our team is confused by this response. After COVID last year, we had more than 90% teacher and student retention and are fully enrolled in both schools. We were recently given automatic charter renewal by our New Orleans authorizer because of our previous performance and confidence that we would improve upon that performance during the next term as one of the highest-performing public high schools in the city. We also had our most successful site visit in the past 5 years last month. In Indianapolis, the Mayor's Office of Education Innovation (the local authorizer) invited us to revise our charter to include a 7th and 8th grade based on our early

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success and community partnerships with the school. Are these actions that an authorizer takes when it doesn't believe an organization has the capacity to grow? Lastly, SPCSA staff had concern about our fiscal solvency as a national organization to support our local schools. Based on our current projections using Afton Education Partners financial model, Rooted School Foundation will be financially sustainable with 60 days cash on hand by FY26 based on its current growth plan. As of now, we don't have any plans underway to scale beyond four schools if approved in Clark County so that we can focus on ensuring each school is delivering on its stated mission and promise within its charter. Charter School Growth Fund is willing to support us in building whatever financial and technical capacity we need to be successful in Clark County if approved.

The SPCSA recommendation report cited that there was a lack of community demand for the model and a concern regarding the underdevelopment of post-secondary and employer partnerships. Currently, we have 96 families who have provided their information for us to follow up if we gain approval. SPCSA staff stated they typically like to see at least half of the intended enrollment by the application deadline which would be 45. David Blodgett, Executive Director of NV Prep (a 5-star school) has also offered for us to co-locate in their new facility during our first year because he intends for his middle school to be a feeder into Rooted School–Clark County.

The SPCSA recommendation report also cited that our post-secondary partnerships were underdeveloped which I agree with. They typically are at this stage of our local school's lifespan and before authorization. Caprice Roberson (Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs for the College of Southern Nevada) submitted a letter of support stating that they would love to partner with Rooted School on dual enrollment given our track record of success in other communities but that they only formally partner with school once the charter is approved. For employer partnerships, Hugh Anderson from the Governor's Workforce Development Board spoke to his support in formalizing those relationships for us if approved. We submitted 15 letters of support from businesses that serve Clark County and Nevada at-large that include top leaders from the Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance, the Las Vegas Chamber, Cox, and the Nevada State Bank. Over two years, we've used a similar strategy for cultivating these relationships that led to our direct-from-high school employment success. It's unrealistic to expect an MOU from a business/university for a school that has not been approved yet. I invite this board to consider adding formal post-secondary partnerships as a condition for conditional approval.

As I close, in the halls of our successful New Orleans and Indianapolis schools, schools and boards that this review team did not visit during their assessment, you'll see a quote

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that I want to share with this board and community gathered here given the significant opportunity we have today given the great unknown we're navigating and the persistent challenges our public schools in Clark County face. "Whether you believe you can or can't you're right." This attitude runs through Rooted's DNA. Since this may be the last time we all see each other, I share the gift of its wisdom with this board.

I enjoyed collaborating with the SPCSA team throughout this process. I found them patient, flexible, and easy to work with. Because of that, I believe, if given the chance, that, together, we could build a first-of-its-kind school in Clark County that connects youth whose stories are similar to mine to high-growth/high-wage jobs in the near and distant future. Jobs that will raise the average household income for a majority of students and residents of color in this city. I believe this because the Rooted team has done it elsewhere. We're not perfect, and have a lot of room to grow over time. The question for people in this room is, while the opportunity stands before us today, will we take that same chance to prove a new possible. I ask that you reconsider the recommendation before you and conditionally approve Rooted School—Clark County. Thank you for inviting me here today.

Sincerely,
Jonathan

Jonathan Johnson
Founder and CEO, Rooted School Foundation