



STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

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ACTION MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Board
FROM: Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing
SUBJECT: **Alpine Academy Amendment Request to:**
- Expand within grade levels offered/approved
- Implement a weighted lottery
DATE: February 15, 2022

Summary of Request and Recommendation

Alpine Academy has submitted an amendment request to expand enrollment to the middle school grades as well as to increase its enrollment cap. Alpine is a brick-and-mortar, single site public charter school that currently serves 135 students in 9th – 12th grades and operates out of one campus in Sparks. Alpine Academy was renewed for a new, six-year term beginning July 1, 2021, and as such, is in its first year of the current charter term.

With regard to expansion, the submitted amendment contemplates increasing the enrollment cap for the school as well as slow-growth expansion to the middle school grades. According to the amendment submission, Alpine Academy's original charter agreement has an enrollment cap of 140, which accommodates approximately 35 students per grade level. The amendment submission states that this original charter cap was finalized prior to the inclusion of Dual Credit program where a percentage of Alpine students attend classes full-time off campus. Alpine Academy believes that with the recent enrollment increases compared to prior years, efforts to improve retention, and a growing number of students attending the Dual Credit courses, the school can accommodate more students and is requesting that the enrollment cap be increased to 185 for the 2022 – 23 school year. Alpine also requests that it be approved to offer 8th grade for the 2022 – 23 school year, and eventually add a full middle school program over the next several years.

Alpine Academy also requests approval to implement a weighted lottery for the application and enrollment period for the 2022 – 23 school year.

After reviewing the amendment, requesting additional information from Alpine, and speaking with members of the Alpine leadership team, SPCSA staff recommends that the Authority approve a modified version of the amendment request submitted by Alpine Academy, allowing the school to increase its enrollment cap from 140 to 160 for the 2022 – 23 school year for grades 9 – 12 only. Staff recommends this action as Alpine Academy was able to provide some evidence of targeted marketing and outreach in recent months. While academic performance at Alpine has historically been at or above the 3-star level, the school exhibits large demographic

gaps when compared to data at surrounding schools, specifically in two key areas: students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch and English language learners. SPCSA staff also recommends that the Authority approve Alpine's request to implement a weighted lottery. SPCSA staff would like to see additional, sustained efforts of ongoing outreach in order to approve a higher enrollment cap. If approved, SPCSA staff is committed to working with the school on a future amendment submission to increase the cap beyond 160 and potentially serve middle school grades as early as the 2023 – 24 school year.

A proposed motion can be found on page 4 of this memo.

Background

Alpine Academy is currently rated as a 3-star high school program according to the 2018 – 19 NSPF ratings, and these ratings have been carried over for the following two years as the Authority is aware. For the 2017 – 2018 school year, Alpine was rated as a 4- star school. It is noteworthy that the school has not earned less than a 3-star rating during the current charter term according to the NSPF.

According to the amendment submission, Alpine Academy serves those students residing in Washoe County, and provides a small learning environment focused on student achievement. The amendment notes that parents often seek out Alpine enrollment for various reasons including: a more academically rigorous environment, small class sizes, and to ease worries or concerns about bullying.

As previously noted, Alpine states in the amendment application that the school believes that their facility can accommodate more students. Because the school has seen enrollment increase in the past two years, Alpine seeks to increase its enrollment cap beginning in the 2022-2023 school year. The amendment notes that the school has internal measures that indicate it is performing at a high level outside of the NSPF rating, including graduating students with an IEP at a rate of 100% with a standard or advanced diploma over the past two years. Alpine is confident that the school reach a 100% graduation rate for this same subgroup for 2022.

The amendment also describes the school's plans to more closely resemble schools in the community, noting that the school plans to conduct more targeted marketing and outreach so as to enroll more students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. The amendment goes on to say that the school does not have a school lunch program, which results in families failing to turn in the form. However, the school has pivoted this school year and has held multiple nights where families could turn in the form, established "Checkpoints" to ensure this form was being filled out, and attempted to incentivize forms being turned into the office. While the majority of students are reported, Alpine still lags behind nearby high schools. Lastly, Alpine describes its plan to conduct interest workshops for families at neighboring school and continue to help provide resources for families, including bus passes, carpool assistance, and uniform cost assistance.

The second, non-expansion request included in the submitted amendment is to implement a weighted lottery for the application and enrollment period for the 2022 – 23 school year in place of their current, traditional lottery system. The proposed weighted lottery policy is included in the amendment and states that Alpine Academy will adopted a weighted preference of 2.0 in its enrollment lotteries to students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch. The weighted lottery will take place only if it is determined that the percentage of students at the Alpine Academy campus who qualify for free and reduced lunch is less than 90% of the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in Washoe County School District comparison school(s).

Applicant Eligibility

Existing charter schools that are sponsored by the SPCSA may submit a charter school contract amendment application to the SPCSA – which is reviewed by SPCSA staff and presented for SPCSA Board action – in order to, among other things, increase enrollment, add grade levels above and beyond what the charter school is approved to serve, or add a new campus. Only those existing charter schools that are meeting expectations in regard to academics (under both the Department of Education's Nevada School Performance Framework -- the

“Star Ratings” -- and the SPCSA’s Academic Performance Framework), are compliant in regard to the SPCSA’s Organizational Framework, and are fiscally sound may be approved for expansion. Furthermore, the academic, organizational, and financial performance of other charter schools that contract with the same Charter Management Organization or Educational Management organization is taken into account when reviewing an expansion application.

At this time, SPCSA staff finds that Alpine Academy is meeting expectations in regard to academic expectations, are compliant in regard to the SPCSA’s Organizational Framework, and are fiscally sound. Recently, the network was rated as ‘Meeting the Standard’ for FY21 under the Organizational Framework, earning a perfect 100 points. SPCSA staff also finds the school to be meeting performance standards under the Financial Performance Framework. More information on past performance can be found on page 4 of this memo.

Summary and Recommendation

SPCSA staff has conducted a thorough review of this amendment since it was received in October, and has received additional information from the school leadership team in recent weeks in response to some questions and concerns. SPCSA staff has also met with Alpine leadership during the review process in an effort to inform the final recommendation. While Alpine Academy has historically demonstrated above average academic, organizational and financial performance, available demographic data from the 2021 -22 school year indicates that the school lags behind the Washoe County, SPCSA and Statewide averages in serving certain historically underserved groups as identified in the SPCSA’s Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment:

	Alpine	WCSD	SPCSA	Nevada
FRL	8.1%	45.4%	43.4%	77.7%
IEP	14.0%	13.6%	9.8%	12.1%
ELL	*1	14.1%	8.8%	13.7%

These demographic gaps are significant, particularly for FRL students. Additionally, SPCSA staff has concerns about recommending approval of a significant number of additional seats and grade levels without stronger, sustained evidence that Alpine has engaged in targeted marketing and community outreach over an extended period of time. While Alpine leadership has provided evidence that outreach has occurred since submission, SPCSA staff recommends that the Authority approve only a small increase to the enrollment cap for 2022 – 23 school year until additional evidence can be provided, and results of a weighted lottery become available. More information that demonstrates Alpine has leveraged grassroots, data-driven outreach and recruitment strategies such as door-to-door visits, open houses and forums, and community conversations is needed to endorse the level of proposed growth in the submitted amendment. Furthermore, SPCSA staff would like to see more evidence of alignment to the agency’s Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment.

For all of these reasons, SPCSA staff recommends the Authority approve a modified version of the enrollment cap increase requested by Alpine Academy, and approve the request of the school to implement a weighted lottery. SPCSA staff is also prepared to continue working with the governing board and leadership team of the network.

¹ Indicates population size >0 and <10; rate data is suppressed to protect privacy.

Proposed Motion:

Approve a modified version of the Alpine amendment request to:

- **Increase the enrollment cap for the school from 140 to 160 starting in the 2022 – 23 school year for grades 9 -12; and**
- **Adopt a weighted lottery policy for the application and enrollment period beginning in the 2022 – 23 school year.**

If approved, Alpine Academy will have the following enrollment caps for the remainder of the current charter term:

	2022-2023	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-2027
Enrollment Cap	160	160	160	160	160
Grades Served	9-12	9-12	9-12	9-12	9-12

Appendix: School Performance and Demographics: Alpine Academy

School Year	NSPF Rating
2020 – 2021 ²	3 stars
2019 – 2020 ³	3 stars
2018 – 2019	3 stars
2017 – 2018	4 stars
2016 – 2017	Not Rated by the Nevada Department of Education
2015 – 2016	No Star Ratings published by the Nevada Department of Education

Year	Total Enrollment	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
15-16	120	0.8%	3.3%	71.7%	13.3%	3.3%	7.5%	0.0%	22.5%	0.0%	25.0%
16-17	111	2.7%	12.9%	43.4%	18.5%	0.9%	7.2%	0.0%	5.4%	3.1%	33.3%
17-18	133	4.5%	1.5%	64.7%	22.6%	1.5%	4.5%	0.8%	24.8%	3.0%	23.3%
18-19	113	4.4%	0.9%	59.3%	29.2%	1.8%	3.5%	0.9%	31.0%	0.9%	27.4%
19-20	103	2.9%	1.0%	63.1%	27.2%	1.9%	2.9%	1.0%	23.3%	1.0%	8.7%
20-21	116	0%	1.7%	66.3%	28.4%	0.8%	1.7%	0.8%	16.3%	n<10 ⁶	13.7%
21-22	135	0.7%	0.7%	60.7%	31.1%	2.9%	2.2%	1.4%	14.0%	n<10 ⁶	8.1%

² Due to COVID-19, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) applied for and was granted a 2020 – 21 school year waiver from the US Department of Education for certain requirements established by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Nevada statewide assessments were administered in the 2020 – 21 school year, but the NDE did not calculate Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) school ratings for the 2020 – 21 school year.

³ Due to COVID-19, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) applied for and was granted a 2019 – 20 school year waiver from the US Department of Education for certain assessment, accountability, school identification, and reporting requirements established by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Accordingly, for the 2019 – 20 school year, Nevada statewide assessments were not administered and the NDE did not calculate Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) school ratings.