



STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

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ACTION MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Board
FROM: Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing
Mike Dang, Manager of Organizational and Financial Performance
SUBJECT: **Girls Athletic Leadership School request to:**
1. Change the name of the school;
2. Modify the Mission and Vision statements;
3. Modify the Academic and Operational Plans; and
4. Reduce the approved Enrollment caps for remainder of the charter term.
DATE: June 27, 2022

Summary of Request and Recommendation

Girls Athletic Leadership School (GALS) of Las Vegas is requesting that the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) grant a Good Cause Exemption request and approve the school to change their name, modify the mission and vision statements, modify the Academic, Financial and Organizational plans previously approved through the initial charter application, and reduce the enrollment caps for each year remaining under the charter term. According to the amendment application, the requested modifications of the mission and vision, academic and operational plans, and name change stem from the recently approved separation from the previous CMO for the school, Girls Athletic Leadership Schools, (GALS) Inc. This separation was approved by the Authority at its April 15, 2022 board meeting with the condition that the school work with SPCSA staff to outline specific changes to the operations, academics, and finances that would be required to operate as a stand-alone charter school. The requested reduction to the enrollment cap is due the severe impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on the school's ability to effectively market and recruit new students according to the amendment since it opened for the 2020 – 21 school year.

SPCSA staff has reviewed the application and recommends that the Authority grant the school's request for a Good Cause Exemption and approve all elements of the school's amendment proposal, as outlined within this memo.

Background and Analysis

GALS – Las Vegas is a middle school specifically designed to meet the needs of girls. The school originally set a goal to ultimately enroll approximately 405 students in grades 6th-8th. The GALS charter school application was approved by the SPCSA Board at the January 31, 2020 board meeting and the school opened in August 2020 with 95 students at the Boys and Girls Club located at 920 Cottage Grove Ave, later relocating to a permanent facility at 4220 S Maryland Parkway, Las Vegas, NV 89119 in August of 2021.

According to the amendment application, the school has struggled to achieve their initial enrollment goals, in no small part due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the amendment request indicates that the school has also struggled with turnover in leadership and dissatisfaction with GALS Inc., the former CMO. Despite these challenges, the school was able to meet standards on both the financial and organizational frameworks in the first year of operations.

Following the separation with the former CMO and several conversations with SPCSA staff, during their June 6, 2022 board meeting, the GALS LV board voted to change the name of the school, modify the Academic, Financial and Organizational plans of the school due to the recent separation with the CMO, update the mission and vision statement, and reduce the approved enrollment cap for each year remaining under the current contract. Each proposed change is detailed in separate sections below. SPCSA staff recommends approval of all four requested changes, and a proposed motion can be found on page 5 of this memo.

Request #1: Change the name of the school to Girls Empowerment Middle School (GEMS)

GALS – Las Vegas seeks to change the school’s name to Girls Empowerment Middle School (GEMS) as a result of the separation between the local school and Girls Athletic Leadership Schools (GALS) Inc. The Authority approved this separation at its April 15, 2022 meeting.

GALS proposes to change its name due to the close affiliation with the former CMO.

SPCSA staff recommends that the Authority approve the school’s request to change their name to Girls Empowerment Middle School, or GEMS.

Request #2: Change the Mission and Vision of the school

The governing board of the school has approved modifications of the school’s mission and vision since the separation from the former CMO, GALS, Inc. The revised statements are as follows:

- Mission: GEMS Las Vegas empowers girls to excel academically, develop their voices, and lead fearlessly in a safe, caring educational environment.
- Vision: At GEMS Las Vegas, our vision is a world where all young people have the tools and ability to create a better future for themselves and their communities.

As stated in the amendment application, the driving force behind the charter will remain the same, and the school will fundamentally be the same with these revised statements.

SPCSA staff recommends that the Authority approve the school’s request to change their mission and vision statements.

Request #3: Modify the Academic and Operational plans

As of February 28, 2022, the CMO for GALS – Las Vegas, GALS, Inc., terminated its affiliation with the Las Vegas school. This separation was approved by the Authority on April 15, 2022, and necessitated that the local school develop revised plans for the school in the 2022 – 23 school year and beyond.

The amendment application notes that many aspects of the school will remain unchanged, including the current curricula and instructional design of the school. Additionally, the school anticipates following a similar calendar and daily structure for all grades, closely aligning with the Clark County School District, to simplify arrangements for families with students in multiple grade levels.

There are, however, several changes proposed in the amendment. First, the school anticipates including several minimum days of instruction to allow the school and staff time to focus on using student data to guide instruction. Additionally, the amendment notes that student-led conferences will begin starting this year so as to further empower students in their own learning. Student led conferences will allow students to identify their own strengths and areas for growth while communicating how their parent(s) can support them.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the amendment notes that the school has faced significant student attendance challenges. The school notes in their amendment that there are plans to increase the office staff to assist in the daily tracking of attendance, thereby allowing for more time for student and family communication. Additionally, since each student at the school has a graduation plan, this will be reviewed during ongoing communication to ensure credits are earned.

From an operations standpoint, the school anticipates functioning somewhat similarly without a CMO. The board composition, roles and responsibilities are not changing, although the school will no longer maintain a presence on the GALS Inc. network board nor will the Executive Director serve on the GALS Inc. network leadership team. The amendment also notes that there will no longer be two non-voting seats held for GALS Inc. network team members on the local school board.

Regarding school leader coaching and training, the school envisions this work continuing in a similar fashion as well. According to the amendment, the principal will conduct a minimum of three formal coaching cycles with each teacher, with informal observations and feedback occurring between these cycles. Peer coaching will also be used as appropriate. The amendment goes on to note that the principal of the school will be coached throughout the year by an experienced administrator, which will include coaching cycles with pre-observation conferences, observations, and post-observation conferences.

Lastly, the school anticipates continuing most fiscal practices as an independent, public charter school. Current fiscal policies and procedures will remain in place and the school anticipates continuing its contract with EdOps to assist in managing the accounting processes, forecasting, budget planning, audit requirements, tax submissions, grant reporting and submissions for reimbursement according to the amendment.

SPCSA staff recommends that the Authority approve the school's request to modify the Academic and Operational Plans as presented.

Request #4: Reduce the Approved Enrollment Caps for the remainder of the charter term

As previously noted, GALS – Las Vegas opened for the 2020 – 21 school year and was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Validation Day data shows that the school had an enrollment of 96 students for the 2020 – 21 school year, down from the original projection of 135 students. The Authority approved a reduced enrollment cap for the 2021 – 22 school year as a result of under enrollment the prior year.

The submitted amendment application states that the school is continuing to develop and adjust the student recruitment process since the school opened smaller than anticipated. The submission goes on to note that since COVID restrictions have been lifted, additional community events at the school site will be scheduled throughout the year to recruit students and families. The school plans to continue to strengthen community partnerships and outreach, including phone calls, email/social media campaigns, flier distributions/postings and community events.

The school proposes that the enrollment caps be adjusted to the following for the remainder of the charter term:

	2022 – 2023	2023 – 2024	2024 – 2025	2025 – 2026
Grades Offered	6 – 8	6 – 8	6 – 8	6 – 8
Current Cap	405	405	405	405
<u>Proposed Cap</u>	140	165	190	215

SPCSA staff recommends that the Authority approve the school’s request to change their enrollment caps to the figures requested starting in the 2022 – 23 school year and continuing through the remainder of the current charter term.

Legal Authority and Requirements Related to Amendment Requests

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.

Applicant Eligibility

For this specific type of Amendment request, the sponsor of the charter school shall review the written request to determine if the written request: (a) Complies with NRS 388A.010 to 388A.640, inclusive, and the regulations applicable to charter schools; and (b) Is complete in accordance with regulations of the Department. This review also includes an assessment of the charter school’s compliance with regards to such applicable law, regulations and SPCSA requirements including those described in the Academic Performance Framework, Organizational Performance Framework, and the Financial Performance Framework.

When reviewing an amendment application, SPCSA staff reviews the academic, financial and organizational performance of the applicant charter school. According to the most recent organizational data, GALS – Las Vegas earned 100 points on the 2021 – 22 Organizational Framework, meeting performance standards for the past school year. Additionally, the school was determined to be meeting performance standards under the SPCSA Financial Framework for the most recent year. While the school has yet to be rated under the Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF), given this information, SPCSA staff finds GALS to be eligible for these amendment requests.

Recommendation

As noted in the amendment submission, GALS – Las Vegas recently separated from its former CMO a few months prior to the submission of this amendment. Since that time, the school has spent significant time reviewing current academic and operational plans to ensure it had a viable path forward as an independent public charter school. SPCSA staff has spent time since the separation from the CMO working with GALS staff and leadership in an effort to support planning and provide guidance where necessary.

Overall, SPCSA staff find the submitted amendment and proposed plans sufficient, and have the potential to lead the school to strong academic results as set forward in the school’s initial charter proposal. SPCSA staff recommends that the Authority approve the requested changes to the school’s charter agreement as proposed, and strongly encourages the school to continue ongoing student outreach to ensure that the school continues to meet future planned enrollment levels as under-enrollment likely presents the biggest challenge to the school’s operational viability in the years ahead.

Proposed Motion: Grant GALS – Las Vegas a Good Cause Exemption and approve the school to:

- 1. change the name of the school to Girls Empowerment Middle School;**
- 2. modify the mission and vision statements to those proposed;**
- 3. modify the academic and operational plans for the school as proposed; and**
- 4. reduce the approved enrollment caps for remainder of the charter term as proposed in the submitted amendment.**

If approved, GEMS would have the following enrollment caps for the remainder of the charter term:

	2022 – 2023	2023 – 2024	2024 – 2025	2025 – 2026
Grades Offered	6 – 8	6 – 8	6 – 8	6 – 8
Enrollment Cap	140	165	190	215

Historical Performance and Demographic Information

Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) – Girls Athletic Leadership School (GALS)

Year	NSPF Ratings
2019 – 2020 ¹	N/A
2020 - 2021	N/A

School Total Enrollment and Demographics since 2017²

Year	Enrollment ³	A	B	C	H	I	M	P	IEP	ELL	FRL
20-21	96	4.1%	18.7%	6.2%	65.6%	0%	3.1%	2%	11.4%	17.7%	>95%
21-22	103	2.9%	26.2%	6.7%	52.4%	0%	9.7%	1.9%	17.4%	21.3%	>95%

- A – Asian
- B – Black
- C - White
- H – Hispanic
- I – American Indian/Alaskan Native
- M – Two or more races
- P – Pacific Islander
- IEP – Individualized Education Plan –A student with a disability/special education student
- ELL – English Language Learner
- FRL – A student who qualifies for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- * - Suppressed data due to n-count

¹ 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.

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.

*indicates a population size >0 and <10; count and rate data are suppressed to protect privacy. <5 is shown for rates below 5% to protect student privacy.