



STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

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ACTION MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Board
FROM: Mike Dang, Manager, Financial and Organizational Performance
Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing
SUBJECT: **Strong Start Academy Amendment Request to**
1. Approve the Good Cause exemption request to hear this matter, and
2. Occupy a Permanent Facility Earlier than Previously Approved
DATE: June 27, 2022

Summary of Request and Recommendation

Strong Start Academy Elementary School (“SSAES”) is a charter school approved for operation by the SPCSA board in the January 2022 SPCSA board meeting for the charter school applicant, the City of Las Vegas. The SSAES Governing Board has voted on the proposed amendment prior to submission. The SSAES Board is now seeking SPCSA board approval to:

1. Grant its Good Cause exemption request to hear this matter,
2. Occupy a permanent facility earlier than previously approved.

The change will allow for all SSAES students and staff to be located at one permanent facility, rather than at three separate, temporary facilities. The approved charter application contemplated this occurring prior to the 2023 – 24 school year, so this amendment request comes earlier than previously planned and stands to ameliorate school operations, among other aspects of the school.

After a thorough review of the amendment application, SPCSA staff recommends that the Authority grant Strong Start Academy a Good Cause Exemption and approve the amendment request to allow the school to operate out of one facility starting in the 2022 – 23 school year.

Background and Analysis

SSAES was approved by the SPCSA board at the SPCSA board meeting on January 28, 2022 to open beginning in the 2022 – 23 school year. The term of the original Charter Contract begins on July 1, 2022, and the Charter Contract is scheduled to expire on June 30, 2028.

The SSAES Vision is: Strong Start Academy Elementary School is a culturally diverse learning community that prepares children to excel academically in two languages and have a positive impact on an increasingly evolving and global society.

The SSAES Mission is: The mission of Strong Start Academy Elementary School is to provide equitable, high-quality academics as we prepare our bilingual, civic-minded thinkers to maximize their potential in their community and the world.

The school's opening year is this August 2022 with an approved grade configuration of Kindergarten – 2nd Grade. At full scale, the school expects to teach students in the Kindergarten – 5th Grade levels. Planned enrollment information is provided further below.

The school amendment states that initial approval and plans were to open at three incubation sites: 1617 Alta Dr., 700 Twin Lakes Dr., and 2950 E. Bonanza Road. Since approval, however, the SSAES Board of Directors secured a lease at one permanent location, the 9th Bridge School at 302 S. 9th Street in Downtown Las Vegas, NV 89101 (near the Las Vegas Academy of the Arts) according to the amendment. As such, Strong Start Academy entered into a lease for the entirety of the 2022 – 2023 school year with 310 9th Street, LLC. The leased property is part of the estate of Tony Hsieh. It is anticipated that within the next several months, the City of Las Vegas will purchase the facility from the Hsieh Estate and the City of Las Vegas will then enter into a new long-term lease with the charter school. SSAES intends to complete any required facility improvements and open be open students in August 2022 at this 302 S. 9th Street location.

The zip codes the school intends to serve include 89101, 89102, 89104, 89106, 89107, 89108, and 89110. Over two dozen one- and two-star elementary schools were identified by SPCSA staff to be operating in these areas so the school has opportunities to help many students in the area.

The SSAES amendment indicates that class sizes will be capped at 20 students per class and all students will be engaged in a dual language educational model. The school leadership team is committed to hiring bilingual, TESL/bilingual endorsed teachers. The Board is comprised of a highly qualified set of individuals including experienced, bilingual educators, college professors, human resources experts, and a parent. The Leadership Team includes a highly qualified and experienced Executive Director, several highly experienced educational consultants, and a team of teacher leaders.

The amendment goes on to state that serving all students at one site will also assist the Executive Director in providing quality observation, coaching, and feedback to all staff members to ensure implementation of the school's vision and provide a high- quality instruction for all students. It will also eliminate the need to provide transportation for students or parents from one site to another. It also assists parents in meeting with teachers of multiple children in multiple grades, and in having a single drop-off/pick-up point for their children.

Legal Authority and Requirements Related to Amendment Requests

Existing charter schools sponsored by the SPCSA may submit a charter school contract amendment application to the SPCSA. The application is reviewed by SPCSA staff and presented for SPCSA Board action. Amendment requests typically are to, among other things, increase enrollment, add grade levels above and beyond what the charter school is approved to serve, add a new campus, or change mission and vision statements. In this case, SPCSA staff find that a change in instruction locations, from three locations to one location, constitutes a material change to the charter contract, necessitating consideration and possible approval by the Authority.

Applicant Eligibility

When reviewing an amendment application for RFA eligibility, SPCSA staff reviews the academic, financial and organizational performance of the applicant charter school. Academically, the first Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) Report Card for Strong Start’s elementary school is expected at the conclusion of its upcoming first school year, ending June 2023. A table summarizing the academic performance of Strong Start is expected to be provided after the school’s first year of instruction ending June 2023¹.

While Strong Start has yet to begin its first year of operation as a SPCSA charter school, Strong Start has been cooperative with SPCSA staff regarding any financial and organizational and operational information matters.

Considering the above findings and given that this requested change represents a change previously contemplated by the charter application, but on an expedited timeline, SPCSA staff finds Strong Start’s amendment request as eligible to be approved.

Summary and Recommendation

Staff notes a key reason for the request from Strong Start, namely, that the change will allow for all Strong Start Academy students and staff to be located at one permanent facility, rather than at 3 separate, temporary facilities on an earlier than anticipated timeline. This has many benefits as outlined in the amendment submission.

As such, SPCSA staff recommends the SPCSA board approve the request of Strong Start to change its location, subject to the condition(s) stated in the Proposed Motion.

Proposed Motion:

Grant Strong Start a Good Cause Exemption Request and approve Strong Start’s amendment request to Change the location of the school, subject to the condition that the school continue to complete the SPCSA Pre-Opening process prior to the start of the 2022 – 23 school year, which includes securing a Certificate of Occupancy and all required permitting necessary to operate out of the permanent facility.

SPCSA’s charter school contract with SSAES has an enrollment cap as follows for the remainder of the charter term:

School Year	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Grade Levels	K-2	K-3	K-4	K-5	K-5	K-5
Total Enrollment	180	240	300	360	360	360

Historical Performance and Demographic Information

- 1. Academic ratings information expected after students complete first year of school (SYE 23).**
- 2. School Total Enrollment and Demographics expected after year one statistics available (SYE 23).**

¹ Due to COVID-19, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) applied for and was granted a 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) for both the 2019 – 20 and 2020 – 21 school years. 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. For the 2020 – 2021 school year, Nevada statewide assessments were administered, but the NDE did not calculate new NSPF school ratings for the 2020 – 21 school year.