



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: **Young Women’s Leadership Academy**
1. Approve the Good Cause exemption request to hear this matter,
2. Reduce first year enrollment cap from 150 to 110 students
DATE: June 27, 2022

Summary of Request and Recommendation

Young Women’s Leadership Academy (“YWLA”) is a charter school approved for operation by the SPCSA board in the November 5, 2021 SPCSA board meeting. According to the amendment application the school wants to reduce its first-year enrollment cap from 150 students to 110 students. This will enable the school “to continue focusing on the educational excellence and development of the students currently registered in grades 6 and 9 while permitting additional marketing efforts to promote YWLA’s unique educational program to additional prospective students both in the targeted communities and targeted grade levels.” The YWLA Governing Board has voted on the proposed amendment prior to submission. The YWLA Board is now seeking SPCSA board approval to:

1. Grant its Good Cause exemption request to hear this matter, and
2. Reduce first year enrollment cap

After a thorough review of the amendment application, SPCSA staff recommends that the Authority grant YWLA a Good Cause Exemption and approve the amendment request to reduce first year enrollment cap to 110 students from its prior approved enrollment of 150 students for the 2022-2023 school year.

Background and Analysis

YWLA’s application to become a SPCSA charter school was approved by the SPCSA board at the SPCSA board meeting on November 5, 2021. 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 school’s opening year grade configuration

is 6th and 9th Grades after which the school will grow until it reaches its full-scale range of grades from the 6th through the 12th Grade.

According to the amendment application, the school will temporarily locate for up to the first two years at the Palabra Viva Las Vegas, Assemblies of God church, at 3415 South Mojave Road, Las Vegas, NV 89121 (South of E. Desert Inn Road). As approved by the Authority, the school will fulfill the condition to provide 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, and that the school will comply with any statutes, regulations or guidelines related to any public school operating out of a religious facility.

The school is situated to serve students and families in the following zip codes: 89101, 89104, 89119, 89121, 89142, and 89169. There are over 30 potential feeder schools in this area with nearly 20,000 students.

YWLA was established to nurture the intellectual curiosity and creativity of young women and to address their developmental needs. According to the amendment, the school aims to cultivate dynamic, participatory learning, enabling students to experience great success at many levels, especially in the fields of math, science, and technology. Students are encouraged to achieve their personal best in and out of the classroom. YWLA strives to work with families and instill in the students a sense of community, responsibility and ethical principles of behavior – characteristics that will help make them become leaders of their generation. The amendment notes that YWLA will establish a school community that prepares students not just for academic and career success, but also ensures that young women from underserved communities develop the knowledge, skills, and agency to define for themselves what a meaningful, impactful life will be, and to act in service of the values and equity-focused critical lens that they've developed within their school community.

History

According to the amendment application, YWLA's first campus was in East Harlem in 1996 as "The Young Women's Leadership School." The school has grown into a national network of excellent all-girls college prep schools all driven by the same mission and vision: to nurture the intellectual curiosity and creativity of young women. Young Women's Leadership Schools accomplish this by supporting the 'whole girl' and seek to maximize the academic achievement, social emotional well-being, and post-secondary success of each student.

The YWLA amendment adds that the schools are guided by teachers and staff dedicated to creating a supportive and academically challenging environment, investing in each girl's potential to achieve high standards in every area including math, science, and technology. Each school integrates a very supportive school culture that includes daily advisory, after-school academic tutoring, and regular contact with parents. The amendment notes that students have opportunities for challenging work both in the classroom and through partnerships with many outside organizations. For example, one such organization (Student Leadership Network) supports Young Women's Leadership Schools with a wide range of programs to help prepare our students for leadership in their communities.

Furthermore, Young Women's Leadership Schools are also supported by the CollegeBound Initiative (CBI), which promotes college access and financial aid options for every student. CBI college counselors are hired as staff to guide students and parents through the process of visiting and choosing colleges, applying to college, and applying for financial aid. Since its inception, Young Women's Leadership Schools have been extremely successful, with near perfect graduation and college acceptance rates.

The amendment notes that YWLA school leadership believes achieving their year one enrollment target might be a challenge. The school board and committee to form had plans to engage in community events and were confident they could meet minimum enrollment targets. However, and as noted in the amendment, YWLA states that a sufficient number of students in the targeted grades of 6 and 9 submitted admission

applications for YWLA's initial school year, and the school has been severely hindered in its ability to secure the necessary paperwork from families in order to confirm many of those students' complete registration.

The amendment goes on to state that although 138 students applied to enroll in YWLA's inaugural class of 150 students, to date, YWLA has only been able to obtain complete paperwork to register 91 of those 138 students despite numerous efforts and multiple contacts to those families. More specifically, although 90 students applied to enroll in YWLA's 6th grade class of 90 students, YWLA has only been able to obtain complete paperwork to register 61 of those 90 students according to the amendment. Similarly, although 48 students applied to enroll in YWLA's 9th grade class of 60 students, YWLA has only been able to obtain complete paperwork to register 30 of those 48 students.

The amendment application goes on to state that the revised enrollment cap for YWLA's opening of school in Fall 2022 is 110 students in grades 6 and 9, and that through ongoing recruitment efforts over the coming summer and throughout the 2022-2023 school year, YWLA's enrollment targets for subsequent years include an increase of 150 new students in grades 6 and 9 as each group of existing students continue to advance a year ahead in their studies.

The amendment application also notes that this reduced enrollment will also ensure adequate resources for providing a robust system of student support for at-risk subgroups, including, but not limited to ELL students, students in need of Special Education Services, and Gifted and Talented students.

In addition to YWLA's target re-enrollment rate is 95%, YWLA also believes that once the school is fully operational, word of mouth networking amongst students and families, social media marketing, and other grassroots, community events promoting the unique educational opportunities afforded at YWLA will contribute to increased student enrollment to achieve the school's anticipated growth at full capacity in 2025-2026.

As the school has reviewed its rate of enrollment given paperwork challenges and considered that it has the fiscal ability to proceed at this time, the school has decided to reduce its first-year enrollment cap from 150 students to 110 students. This will enable the school "to continue focusing on the educational excellence and development of the students currently registered in grades 6 and 9 while permitting additional marketing efforts to promote YWLA's unique educational program to additional prospective students both in the targeted communities and targeted grade levels. The applicant also confirmed contingency plans as well as a commitment from a donor that could be used to support lower enrollment for the first year. The board has a clear understanding of what is needed for their facilities and is continuing to work on the facilities with the proposed EMO, Academica Nevada.

SPCSA staff also noted that YWLA will be affiliated with the Student Leadership Network and the Young Women's Leadership schools in New York City, offering additional support through professional development and recruitment and hiring of staff. In addition, the plan provides a comprehensive plan for coaching, support, and evaluation.

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 the year one enrollment cap, from 150 to 110, 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 YWLA is expected at the conclusion of its upcoming first school year, ending June 2023. A table summarizing the academic performance of YWLA is expected to be provided after the school's first year of instruction ending June 2023¹.

While YWLA has yet to begin its first year of operation as a SPCSA charter school, the school has been cooperative with SPCSA staff regarding any financial and organizational and operational information matters. In light of the above findings, SPCSA staff finds that YWLA's amendment request as eligible to be approved.

Summary and Recommendation

Staff noted the reason for YWLA's request to lower its enrollment cap, that the number of students enrolling has been going slower than initially projected. This is primarily due to two major reasons. The first major reason is processing, essentially in recovering applications for students. The second major reason is after further consideration of the physical space available to it, the school believes it can provide the best first year experience with a smaller enrollment that allows it to focus more on the services it has planned, especially for its at-risk subgroups of students. SPCSA staff recommends the SPCSA board approve the request of YWLA to change its enrollment cap from 150 students to 110 students for its upcoming first year of school beginning this fall of 2022, subject to the condition(s) stated in the Proposed Motion.

Proposed Motion:

Grant YWLA a Good Cause Exemption Request and approve YWLA's amendment request to lower its first-year enrollment cap from 150 to 110 students for the 2022 – 23 school year.

SPCSA's charter school contract with YWLA 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	6, 9	6-7, 9-10	6-11	6-12	6-12	6-12
Total Enrollment	110	300	450	540	570	600

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.