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ACTION MEMORANDUM

TO: SPCSA Board
FROM: Mike Dang, Manager of Organizational and Financial Performance
Jennifer Bauer, Interim Executive Director
SUBJECT: Transportation Plan: Mater Academy of Nevada Bonanza
DATE: November 3, 2023

Background

[Assembly Bill 400 \(2023 Session of the Nevada Legislature\)](#) appropriated \$7 million to the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) for each year of the upcoming biennium (the 2023-24 fiscal year and the 2024-25 fiscal year) to award to charter schools, including SPCSA-sponsored and district-sponsored charter schools, to fund student transportation. To receive funding, a charter school must submit a Transportation Plan to the SPCSA and the SPCSA may approve the Transportation Plan and award funding to the charter school if the plan meets the following criteria:

1. “The transportation plan is comprehensive and likely to be successfully implemented;
2. The transportation plan will materially improve access to education in the region served by the transportation plan;
3. The transportation plan demonstrates that the charter school will be able to comply with statutory and regulatory transportation requirements, including, without limitation, the certification of bus drivers and vehicle safety;
4. The transportation plan is financially viable;
5. The transportation plan would not cost more, on a per pupil basis, than the average cost for transportation for other public schools operating in the school district in which the charter school is located; and

6. The academic, financial and organizational performance of the charter school indicate that the transportation plan is in the interest of pupils who will be served by the transportation plan.”¹

It is important to note that pursuant to NAC 388A.330(4), a charter school is only permitted to provide transportation to pupils if the school has approval to do so from its sponsor. Therefore, charter schools that are not already approved to provide student transportation will be required to submit to their sponsor a contract amendment request in order to implement the Transportation Plan. For those schools sponsored by the SPCSA, the amendment request to provide student transportation was incorporated into the application process, and the SPCSA Board will consider approval of the amendment request in conjunction with the Transportation Plan.

Applications for the 2023-24 school year will be accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis from July 7, 2023 and through September 30, 2023². While the SPCSA hopes to fund all applicants that submit a compliant transportation plan, because there is only \$7 million available in each school year, the SPCSA may prioritize funding Title I charter schools.

Additional details and form associated with the Transportation Plan and Funding Application can be found on the [SPCSA’s website](#).

Transportation Plan Overview

Mater Academy of Nevada Bonanza (Mater Bonanza) is requesting a total of \$481,599 for the 2023-24 school year and \$490,380 for the 2024-25 school year to implement the school’s Transportation Plan. Below is an overview of the proposed Transportation Plan for Mater Bonanza, as provided in the application.

“Mater Academy of Nevada (Mater) is a public charter school system on the east side of the Las Vegas valley. The Mater system includes three (3) campuses: Mater Mountain Vista (opened in 2014), Mater Bonanza (opened in 2017), and Mater East (opened in 2020 for virtual instruction during the pandemic shutdown [Mater East provided all in-person learning as COVID-19 subsided and students were allowed to attend in person]).

Mater Bonanza is a Pre-K-8th grade campus with a 1st quarter Average Daily Enrollment (ADE) for the 2023-24 school year of 1,020 students.

The purpose of this transportation plan is both to remove barriers for families in an effort to maintain enrollment of underserved students at the Mater Bonanza campus as well as to reduce students’ chronic tardiness and/or absenteeism.

Mater Bonanza’s Transportation Plan is three-fold.

First, effective in January 2024, or as soon thereafter as possible depending on approval of this plan, Mater Bonanza would like to provide daily transportation to high school students attending

¹ Section 28.5 of Assembly Bill 400 (2023 Session of the Nevada Legislature)

² After September 30, 2023, the SPCSA will determine if there are remaining funds that have not yet been awarded. If funds remain, the SPCSA will re-open the transportation application.

Mater East who have younger siblings attending Mater Bonanza. Initially, Mater Bonanza would work with Mater East to provide daily transportation for high school students of families identified with the most immediate need based on needs assessment surveys. Upon approval of the transportation plan, Mater Bonanza would purchase one (1) school bus that would then provide transportation to additional high school students.

Second, effective in January 2024, or as soon thereafter as possible depending on approval of this plan, Mater Bonanza would like to provide daily transportation to and from Mater Bonanza for McKinney-Vento and other students identified with special circumstances.

Third, effective for the 2024-25 school year, Mater Bonanza would like to contract with an independent bus company to offer daily transportation to all Mater Bonanza students in need of services.

If approved, Year One of this grant funding would be used to:

- Purchase two (2) vans or other vehicles that are designed for up to 10 passengers;
- Pay all allowable daily transportation expenses, including but not limited to driver salaries, registrations, insurance, fuel, and maintenance;
- Order one (1) school bus; and
- Begin negotiations with an independent bus company such as American Transportation.

If approved, Year Two of this grant funding would be used to:

- Complete purchase of one (1) school bus;
- Pay all related daily transportation expenses, as noted above; and
- Finalize and fund vendor contract with an independent bus company such as American Transportation.”

Analysis and Recommendation

Mater Bonanza is a Title I School and is requesting approval of its Transportation Plan and funding to implement the Transportation Plan. In addition, because Mater Bonanza is not currently approved to provide transportation, the school is also requesting to amend its charter contract to provide transportation and has submitted a good cause exemption request to have this amendment considered outside of the established amendment windows.

SPCSA staff has reviewed the Transportation Plan and find that the Plan meets the requirements set forth in Assembly Bill 400.

1. The Transportation Plan is comprehensive and likely to be successfully implemented.
2. The narrative provided by the school explains that “The goal of any school is to educate students. In particular, Mater Bonanza’s goal is to build a community of well-educated, confident, career-ready adults who are prepared to face tomorrow’s challenges and to lead by example into a better future, for themselves, their families, and for their communities. This goal can only be accomplished by rigorous study, hard work, and

daily education. None of which can be achieved if the students are unable to get to school. Students typically come to Mater Bonanza 2-3 grade levels behind their cohorts. The pandemic only widened that gap, resulting in lower data and a lower than anticipated star rating. It is essential for academic success that students attend school every day.

In addition, Mater Bonanza offers an extended learning year by providing summer school during the month of June, including a Literacy Camp operated in cooperation with the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) and the Read by Grade 3 (RBG3) team with the goal of addressing literacy gaps. While this program is not mandatory, it is highly recommended for many students, some of whom are not able to attend summer school because of the lack of transportation.

Mater's Transportation Plan will provide consistency to families and will get students to school, into a classroom and in front of a teacher." This demonstrates that the Transportation Plan will materially improve access to education in the region.

3. The Transportation Plan includes details regarding how the charter school will ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory transportation requirements.
4. The budget provided within the Transportation Plan demonstrates that the Transportation Plan is financially viable.
5. The average daily enrollment for Mater Bonanza during the first quarter of the 2022-23 school year was 1020. Mater Bonanza is located in Clark County where the four-year average (per pupil) in transportation funding for the 2023-24 school year is \$481. The total funding request for Mater Bonanza was \$481,599 for the 2023-24 school year and \$490,380 for the 2024-25 school year, which is less than or equal to the average cost, per pupil, for transportation within the Clark County School District.
6. The academic, financial and organizational performance of the charter school indicate that the transportation plan is in the interest of pupils who will be served by the transportation plan. Specifically, the Transportation Plan indicates that transportation will reduce instances of tardiness and chronic absenteeism, a claim supported by large-scale national research. Mater Bonanza's academic performance and course offerings are draws for students to come from across the valley. Transportation has become necessary in attracting and retaining those students, especially students whose families are in transition that would otherwise require them to change schools due to the lack of transportation. Mater has a strong history of financial stability and organizational adherence to all applicable laws, statutes, regulations, and requirements, demonstrating the school's ability to successfully implement their proposed transportation plan.

Therefore, SPCSA staff recommend approval of the Mater Bonanza Transportation Plan, along with funding to implement the plan. Furthermore, SPCSA staff recommend approval of the good cause exemption and amendment request to enable the school to provide transportation to students.

Proposed Motion:

1. Approve the Mater Academy of Nevada Bonanza Transportation Plan, along with funding to implement the Plan and allow SPCSA staff to work with the school to make budget revisions as long as the total funding does not exceed the average per pupil cost in the local school district.
2. Approve the charter contract amendment request for the school to allow the school to provide student transportation.
3. Require the school to provide SPCSA staff with documentation to demonstrate that the school is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations prior to beginning to transport students.
4. Require the school to provide SPSCA staff with a draft of any transportation service contract prior to contracting with a transportation service provider.

If approved, the enrollment for the remainder of the contract term will remain unchanged:

School Year	2023-24	2024-25
Grade Levels	PK-8	PK-8
Total Enrollment	984	984