AGENDA ITEM: NEW CHARTER APPLICATION – PS CHARTER SCHOOLS, INC.

PS Charter Schools, Inc. submitted a complete new charter application package to serve grades K-5 for the Board's consideration. The revised application package did not meet the minimum scoring requirements set by the Board for the 2014-2015 application cycle.

REPORT SUMMARY

Applicant Name: PS Charter Schools, Inc.

Authorized Representative Name: Kami Cothrun

Proposed School Name: Pieceful Solutions Charter School

Proposed School Location: 550 W. Warner Rd., in Chandler

Mission Statement

Empowering, challenging and supporting our students to achieve educational, life, social, and vocational goals towards becoming an active and productive member of their community. Relying on the principles of a variety of research based teaching strategies and data based decision making.

Target Population

The Applicant intends to serve students with autism spectrum disorders from the Phoenix metro area and elsewhere in the state.

Student Count

Year	Grades Served	# of Students
1	K-5	120
2	K-5	120
3	K-5	120

School Calendar
Standard, 180 days

Target Start Date
August 13, 2014

Application Package Scoring

	Preliminary TRP Scores		Revised TRP Scores	
Any **Falls Below the Expectations** ratings?	No		No	
Any section in which more than one evaluation area scored **Approaches**?	Yes		Yes	
		Percent Meets		Percent Meets
Educational Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	No	49%	No	87%
Operational Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	No	75%	Yes	96%
Business Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	No	80%	Yes	97%

The TRP provided the Applicant with written technical assistance based on its review of the preliminary written application package and, if applicable, the revised written application package prior to the in-person interview.

In-Person Interview Summary

During the in-person interview the Applicant responded to the questions regarding the submitted (Educational, Operational, Business) Plan.

The in-person interview included the two corporate principals. This interview provided valuable context for understanding the proposed target population and the education program designed to meet its needs. The Applicant, comprised of two founders with experience operating private schools for students with autism, demonstrated a strong understanding of the community intended for enrollment in the school, as well as an academic program designed to serve all types of students along the autism spectrum (and the capacity to serve students without disabilities should they enroll). The TRP's concerns about the clarity of the program and its accessibility to all students were alleviated by the Applicant's detailed explanation of curriculum and instructional methods appropriate for both low- and high-functioning students. The Applicant also demonstrated an understanding of special education requirements.

The TRP also had concern regarding the Applicant's organizational capacity; however, the Applicant proved knowledgeable regarding the challenges of starting and operating an educational organization. The Applicant presented clear expectations and strategies for recruitment and hiring, along with an organizational structure based on experience. In addition, the Applicant was keenly aware of the unique challenges of starting a charter school, and indicated a desire for external perspectives on the school board as well as the inclusion of funds for strategic planning and management support services.

Qualitative Analysis Summary

The TRP recommends that the application package for PS Charter Schools, Inc. be approved because it provides a unique option for a highly-underserved student population. The application package provides a well thought-out educational plan that is based on the founders' experience working with the target population. The program is specifically designed to support all types of students with autism (and can accommodate students without disabilities) by utilizing a diverse set of curriculum resources and instructional approaches. The Applicant demonstrates high expectations for students with disabilities, and the plan incorporates a systematic approach to assessment and data collection to monitor student progress.

The organizational plan includes a reasonable organizational structure, and the three primary administrators have already been identified, each having experience working in a similar school and/or with a similar student population. The school governing body will be separate from the corporate board and is anticipated to have external members who will lend an independent perspective to governance. Finally, the plan includes a range of contracted services to meet the unique needs of the school program and supplement the inexperience of the founders with chartering.

The business plan includes an already secured facility that is suitable for serving students with autism. The personnel plan reflects the needs of the school, including one teacher for every class supported by instructional assistants, the number of which varies depending on the function level of the students. The plan presents a balanced budget with a healthy surplus should assumptions regarding revenues be overly optimistic. It also includes expenditures in line with the mission and educational program, including substantial funds for contracted services for special education.

A. EDUCATIONAL PLAN

The following summary was created from excerpts and summaries of the documents submitted for the Applicant's Educational Plan.

Plan Summary

Pieceful Solutions Charter School is designed to serve students affected by autism spectrum disorders (ASD). It would open with grades K-5 and continue to serve that grade span for the charter term. The target population is students with ASD in the Phoenix Metro area, but the founders anticipate the school may draw students from across the state and country. The proposed academic program is based on the founder's experience operating a private school that currently serves students with ASD on two campuses, in Mesa and in Chandler. The Applicant

proposes a model that will meet the needs of the target population "by providing a highly individualized, goals-driven, standards-aligned, research-based, data-driven education program in a small school, small class size and small student-to-teacher ratio with highly qualified staff, specially trained and chosen for their exceptional skills and commitment to working with children with special needs and autism."

The application package presents a range of curriculum and instruction programs designed for a range of needs, including SRA Kaleidoscope, Reading A-Z, Lindamood-Bell Learning, TouchMath, Singapore Math, and SRA Math. In the application package and in-person interview, the Applicant indicated that the school, in addition to providing instruction in the academic core content areas of math, reading, science, writing, spelling, and social studies, will administer intensive, language-based interventions to promote communication and enhance access to the academic curriculum. These interventions will focus on the use of language through either speaking or the use of augmentative and alternative communication such as voice-output devices or the Picture Exchange Communication System. Finally, the curriculum will focus on developing social/emotional skills to mitigate the primary deficits often seen in communication, appropriate behavior, play, and peer interaction as well as life skills to prepare students for work and independent living. Teachers will submit weekly lesson plans to the assistant director for review to ensure alignment with state standards, school-developed curriculum maps, and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), as well as Personalized Education Plans (PEPs) for students without an IEP.

The school will utilize "multi-grade, multi-age classrooms that will group students based on their needs and abilities" and use a variety of instructional techniques. Upon intake the school will evaluate students' prior achievement and administer diagnostic assessments to determine needs and placement. According to the application package, formative assessments will include pre- and post-tests, formal and informal observations, and self-evaluations. AIMSWeb, a standardized assessment, will also be used as a formative assessment tool. Teachers will track performance daily on a data sheet aligned to the students' IEP goals. Summative assessment will include administration of AIMS and AIMS-A.

PMP

The Performance Management Plan (PMP) for new applicants is a continuous school improvement plan that demonstrates the Applicant is ready to implement systems for meeting the Board's academic performance expectations. The Applicant submitted a PMP that did not meet the criteria in all areas for both Reading and Math. Details for areas that did not meet the standard can be found in the attached Scoring Rubric (presented in the application portfolio: C. Scoring Results).

Curriculum Samples

Curriculum samples were provided for grades K-5. The table below indicates which curriculum samples in the preliminary application package met all Board requirements (+), and which had deficiencies (-). Details for areas that did not meet the standard can be found in the attached Scoring Rubric (presented in the application portfolio: C. Scoring Results).

Grade	Math	Reading	Writing	Science
K	+	+	+	
1	+	+	+	
2	+	+	-	
3	+	-	+	
4	-	+	+	+
5	+	+	+	

Educational Plan Findings

	Preliminary TRP Scores		Revised TRP Scores	
Educational Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	No	33 of 68	No	59 of 68
Number of "Falls Below" ratings	0		0	
Number of "Approaches" ratings	35		9	

Analysis of Educational Plan

Although the Educational Plan scores are below the 95 percent threshold, the TRP finds that the plan meets the standard for approval because the Applicant effectively clarified the characteristics of the target population and complexities of the academic program during the in-person interview. The written application package did not meet a number of criteria related to the Performance Management Plans, including providing a description of a system to monitor the integration of Arizona Standards into instruction and evaluate the instructional practices of the teachers. However, during the in-person interview, the Applicant provided a clear and comprehensive explanation of the target population, the proposed academic program, and the plan for instructional leadership.

The Applicant described with specificity a program designed to serve all types of students with ASD, including low-functioning students who might be non-verbal and require communication devices and toilet training as well as students at the other end of the autism spectrum who might be academically above grade level. Based on current experience in their private school, the founders anticipate 25 percent of students will be low-functioning and the majority higher-functioning, though perhaps with low test scores due to anxiety and social interaction issues. In describing a typical day, the Applicant noted a "hand to hand valet system" to convey students from their parents to their classrooms and an immediate focus on greetings to develop social interaction skills. Activities are broken into 15-20 minute blocks, and the adult-to-student ratio might be as low at 1:2 for very low-functioning students. The Applicant described a systematic approach to ensuring that students' needs are identified and met. For example, each student will travel with a folder containing his or her IEP goals, and staff will use daily data collection to monitor progress. In addition, a picture schedule is attached to the folder to guide students to their activities. In addition to academic instruction, the school will also provide regular sensory stimulation, including pressure, swinging, and jumping for students with sensory processing disorders. The TRP also inquired about the school's open enrollment policy and ability to serve students without disabilities, should they apply. The Applicant demonstrated awareness of charter enrollment requirements and satisfactorily described how the school's academic program, which uses differentiated instruction and variable teacher-to-student ratios, could adjust to meet the needs of all students.

During the in-person interview, the TRP explored the Applicant's curriculum selection and development process and found evidence of clear criteria and deliberate choices designed to ensure all types of students have access to the curriculum. With regards to alignment to state standards, the school intends to develop IEP goals aligned to standards and use assessments, such as AIMSWeb, to monitor progress toward standards and to prepare eligible students for state tests.

In order to successfully implement such a specialized program, the Applicant described a robust professional development and teacher supervision plan, including intensive training in the summer informed by instructional leaders and a team of therapists. During the in-person interview, the Applicant described a systematic approach to clinical teacher supervision, including growth plans and weekly meetings with leadership, modeling, observation and feedback, and lesson plan review.

B. OPERATIONAL PLAN

The following summary was created from excerpts and summaries of the documents submitted for the Applicant's Operational Plan.

Plan Summary

The school governing body will be separate from the corporate board, and the application package describes specific responsibilities of the governing body, which will include the approval of school policies and adherence to Open Meeting Law requirements. The corporate board will include the two founders and a third member. The school governing body will also include the founders, and, according to the application package, "the Corporate Board of Directors shall appoint 3 more individuals to serve on the School Board."

According to the application package, "The management and operation plan for Pieceful Solutions Charter School envisions four full time administrative positions for the first three years of the school's operation – Director, Assistant Director, Business Manager and Administrative Assistant/Registrar." This structure will remain consistent over the first three years.

The proposed school will contract for a number of services, including karate, yoga and music therapy, chef training (part of life skills program), and occupational and physical therapy if needed. The school will also contract for other special education services and professional development for staff. Speech will be provided by in-house staff. On the business side, the proposed business manager will do the bookkeeping with some assistance from a contracted accountant. The school also intends to contract for legal, audit, janitorial, strategic planning, and management support services.

The table below delineates the composition of the school governing body as described in the narrative:

School Governing Body Member Type	Name
Charter Organization	Kami Cothrun
Charter Organization	Ryan Cothrun
Community	TBD

Principal Background Information

Authorized Representative and Principal: *Kami Cothrun*
Confirmed Education History: Master of Education in Special Education, Northern Arizona University, December 2006
Confirmed Employment History: Owner, Pieceful Solutions, LLC, June 2008-present; Owner, Exceptional Expectations, November 2004-present
Arizona FCC Expires: 08/18/2018
Current or Past Charter Affiliations[1]: None

Principal: *Ryan Cothrun*
Confirmed Education History: Bachelor of Science in Engineering Project Management, Arizona State University, May 2003
Confirmed Employment History: Accounting, Pieceful Solutions, LLC, July 2012-present; Project Manager, Willmeng Construction, May 2001-July 2012
Arizona FCC Expires: 09/07/2018
Current or Past Charter Affiliations[1]: None

[1] *In this section, "Current or Past Charter Affiliations" refers to a leadership or decision-making role in an existing charter school operation, such as charter representative, charter principal, or school site leader.*

Operational Plan Findings

	Preliminary TRP Scores		Revised TRP Scores	
Operational Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	No	18 of 24	Yes	23 of 24
Number of "Falls Below" ratings	0		0	
Number of "Approaches" ratings	6		1	

Analysis of Operational Plan

The Operational Plan meets the standard for approval because it includes an acceptable corporate governance structure and a reasonable plan for management, as well as contracted services. At the time of the in-person interview, only the two school founders had been identified for the governing board, though the Applicant indicated there are four candidates under consideration. The Applicant demonstrated an understanding of effective governance and accountability in prioritizing recruitment of new board members who are independent of the school and can provide an external perspective. Articulated criteria for board members included community connections and diversity. The Applicant also stated a firm commitment to open meetings and the value of input, including different ideas and experiences. Finally, the Applicant demonstrated awareness of the potential conflicts associated with the two founding board members being married, which would be alleviated by the planned enlargement of the board and adherence to open meeting laws.

The application package includes clear job descriptions for the school's management that describe a reasonable distribution of responsibilities and qualifications aligned with the mission and program. The director and assistant director will handle instructional leadership. Moreover, the Applicant indicated that they have already identified an experienced assistant director.

The TRP sought rationales for the types and costs of contracted services as outlined in the application package, which included educational and operational services, and received satisfactory responses. The Applicant based the costs of instructional services on experience serving similar students. The Applicant also acknowledged being new to chartering, which explained the plan to contract for strategic planning and management support services to guide them through financial planning, compliance, and reporting. The founders also demonstrated that they are well aware that the authorizer has rigorous accountability and compliance expectations. The application package identified a vendor with charter experience that had provided cost quotes for the budget. In the interview the Applicant acknowledged that this was the same vendor that owns the facility that the school will lease, but the Applicant recognized the potential conflict and indicated that they could find alternative consultants.

C. BUSINESS PLAN

The following summary was created from excerpts and summaries of the documents submitted for the Applicant's Business Plan.

Plan Summary

The application package states, "The facility has all applicable licenses to operate as a public charter school, including certificate of occupancy and up-to-date clean fire marshal report. The total built-in space is 11,700 SF. The facility has 11 instructional classrooms (700+ SF), most of which have been specially subdivided with partition walls into two smaller classrooms (approx. 375 SF each) to accommodate the specific program of instruction and small group individualized instructional environment. Additionally, the school building has administrative space (4 office rooms), spacious reception area, IT room, kitchenette/copy room, 7 service/storage rooms, two spacious separate playground areas with playground equipment and three ramadas, lots of restrooms with direct access to each classroom, including a disabled access restroom, and two restrooms with access from the outside playground area."

In addition, the application package states, "The building has large windows allowing natural light in all classrooms/offices, as well as large skylights in the reception and atrium areas. The availability of natural light throughout the entire school building is a major plus of the facility in view of the specific program of instruction and the studies indicating behavioral problems associated with school buildings that have only fluorescent lighting and no windows/natural light in the classrooms. Additional features of the school building include: recent installation of 11 brand new energy-efficient A/C units with a thermostat and climate/temperature control individual for each classroom and office room – such feature allows optimal climate environment in each room of the building; spacious covered patio; complete technology infrastructure - wiring for telephony and Internet with one or two drops in every classroom/office and sufficient technology infrastructure equipment already in place; Wi-Fi capacity of the entire building and outside patios; recent installation of panic hardware for all major exit doors of the facility; easy access - great street exposure on a major traffic artery (Warner Road) in a fast growth area – Chandler/Mesa/Gilbert with proximity to Hwy 101, Hwy 202 and Hwy 60."

Facility Information

Proposed School Name:	Pieceful Solutions Charter School
Proposed Location:	Confirmed location: 550 W. Warner Rd., Chandler
Facilities Requirements:	The total built-in space is 11,700 SF. The facility has 11 instructional classrooms (700+ SF), most of which have been specially subdivided with partition walls into two smaller classrooms (approx. 375 SF each). Additionally, the school building has "two spacious separate playground areas with playground equipment and three ramadas, lots of restrooms with direct access to each classroom, including a disabled access restroom, and two restrooms with access from the outside playground area."

Budget Summary

The Applicant has secured a loan from Pieceful Solutions, LLC for start-up purposes. The secured funds, in the amount of $20,000 as stated by the Applicant, are available as confirmed by Bank of America.

The table below presents a summary of the budgets by year:

	Startup Period	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Projected Full Enrollment:	N/A	120	120	120
# Students Budget Based On:	N/A	120 (100%)	120 (100%)	120 (100%)
Total Revenue:	$20,000	$2,996,314	$3,263,836	$3,560,388
Total Expenditures:	$17,250	$2,726,042	$2,697,012	$2,701,930
Ending Balance:	$2,750	$270,272	$566,824	$858,459

The budget is based on full enrollment of 120 students each year and assumes 100 percent of students will have autism and qualify for the Autism-Self-Contained (A-SC) student count add-on. Projected revenue is solely from state funding using estimates based on these high-need students. The largest cost is personnel, accounting for almost 60 percent of expenditures each year. The personnel plan is comprised of four administrative staff, nine teachers, 27 instructional assistants, a speech therapist, and a speech assistant. The Applicant estimated that the average cost per student related to outside services in special education will be $3,000, for a total of $360,000 each year. The building lease is $159,148 in year one, rising about $4,000 each year. An additional $80,000 is set aside each year for building and land improvements.

Business Plan Findings

	Preliminary TRP Scores		Revised TRP Scores	
Operational Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	No	24 of 30	Yes	29 of 30
Number of "Falls Below" ratings	0		0	
Number of "Approaches" ratings	6		1	

Analysis of Business Plan

The Business Plan meets the standard for approval because it presents a secured facility, a staffing plan aligned with program requirements and with a number of key positions already filled, and a sound budget.

The unique target population requires specialized facilities. The Applicant has already secured a facility that is currently used as a school for autism and is therefore ready to open the school from a facility perspective.

The staffing plan provides one teacher for each class and a number of paraprofessionals depending on the function level of the students. The TRP inquired during the in-person interview about the number of staff required to effectively meet the needs of low-functioning students with autism; the Applicant described classes with adult-to-student ratios as low as 1:2, which is based on experience at its private school. Pieceful Solutions will depend on highly qualified staff, and during the in-person interview, the Applicant described a rigorous recruitment and hiring process. The Applicant indicated that, based on experience teaching in and operating schools for students with autism, the proposed school will require instructional staff to have experience serving students with autism and will open with a mix of veteran and novice teachers. Teachers will be responsible for supervising paraprofessionals who will have planned instructional responsibilities and be considered an "extension" of the teacher in the classroom. Thus, paraprofessionals will be expected to have either an associate degree or pass the paraprofessional exam. In addition, the Applicant noted that paraprofessionals will provide a pipeline of potential teachers for the school.

The Applicant presents a balanced budget accumulating large and growing surpluses each year. However, the proposed budget assumes all students will receive per pupil revenue based on a high need category. During the in-person interview, the TRP inquired about the possibility of the school enrolling some students in lower need categories, which would reduce anticipated revenue. The Applicant provided reasonable contingencies, noting that the major variable cost is staff, which is directly related to the function level of its students. Should students without disabilities enroll, the Applicant described how the school could provide instruction with a traditional teacher in line with the revenue those students would generate. In addition, the budget includes a surplus over $270,000 in year one, which grows each year.

The TRP raised concerns about potential conflicts of interest between the private schools operated by the founders and the proposed charter school. The Applicant clarified the relationship between the private schools and the proposed charter school, stating that they would be totally separate, have distinct budgets and staff, and not share space.

EVIDENCE OF CAPACITY

Applicant Summary

The table below lists the participants in the In-Person Interview:

Name	Role	Attended Interview?
Kami Cothrun	Applicant Principal, School Director	Yes
Ryan Cothrun	Applicant Principal, School Business Manager	Yes

Analysis of Applicant Capacity

The TRP finds that the Applicant has or can secure the range of knowledge, skills, and experience needed to open and operate a high quality school because of the founders' experience operating schools serving a similar target population and explicit plans and budget to secure the expertise necessary to operate the school in a viable fashion. Though the written application package presented a compelling need, it raised a number of questions about the characteristics of the target population and the design of the academic program to meet its varied needs. However, the in-person interview convincingly demonstrated the Applicant's knowledge of and experience with operating a school for all types of students along the autism spectrum. The private school operated by the founders of the proposed charter school has doubled enrollment annually, and, in addition to demand, the Applicant cited student performance results from the private school program as evidence of the academic success of the model on which the proposed school is based. The application package reported that in 2012-2013 the private school students mastered 252 out of 336 written IEP goals with an 80 percent mastery level. Moreover, the Applicant knows and is connected to the autism parent community, which should prove invaluable in recruiting students to this proposed new public school. Finally, the Applicant was knowledgeable about educational programming for students with autism, including both low- and high-functioning students. The founders both understand special education requirements and demonstrate high expectations for all types of students. Finally, the Applicant is aware of charter school enrollment requirements and is prepared to accept and educate students without disabilities should they apply.

The TRP's concerns about the Applicant's inexperience with operating a public charter school were alleviated by responses to a number of specific questions in different domains. As noted above, the Applicant demonstrated a commitment to transparent and independent governance, seeking to appoint members to the governing body from outside the school. The Applicant also anticipated the steep learning curve associated with starting and growing a charter school based on experiences successfully founding private schools for students with autism. The budget reflected this by including funds for strategic planning and management support services to assist the founders with start-up and operations.

BOARD OPTIONS

Option 1: The Board may approve the application package. Staff recommends the following language for consideration: Based upon review of the contents of the portfolio provided for this Applicant and the information provided by the representatives of the Applicant during consideration, and given it is within the sole discretion of the Board to approve or deny a charter, I move to approve the application package and grant a charter to PS Charter Schools, Inc. to establish Pieceful Solutions Charter School charter school to serve grades K-5.

Option 2: The Board may deny the application package. The following language is provided for consideration: Based upon a review of the contents of the portfolio provided for this Applicant and the information provided by the representatives of the Applicant during consideration, and given it is within the sole discretion of the Board to approve or deny a charter, I move to reject the application package and deny the request for a charter of PS Charter Schools, Inc. to establish a charter school for the reason(s) that its application failed to meet the requirements of Title 15, Chapter 1, Article 8 due to: (specific statement made by the Applicant during Board consideration).