AGENDA ITEM: NEW CHARTER APPLICATION – PENSAR ACADEMY

Pensar Academy submitted a complete new charter application package to serve grades 4-8 for the Board's consideration. The revised application package meets the minimum scoring requirements set by the Board for the 2016-2017 application cycle.

REPORT SUMMARY

Applicant Name: Pensar Academy

Authorized Representative Name: Sandra Zupetz

Proposed School Name: Pensar Academy

Proposed School Location: Glendale Avenue East of the US-60 in Glendale, Arizona

Mission Statement

Pensar Academy will develop middle school students with the essential skills to be agents of change in a 21st century global society.

Target Population

Pensar Academy plans to target students in 4th through 8th grade in the northwest quadrant of urban Phoenix. According to the Applicant, there are no schools in this area with a letter grade of A or B and school proficiency data for reading is at or below 67 percent per school in the 2013/2014 school year.. Each school in the surrounding area has a Free and Reduced Price Lunch rate between 90-97 percent and a zip code analysis identified that between 53-70 percent of students speak a language other than English at home. On average, over 75 percent of students are in a minority subgroup.

Student Count

Year	Grades Served	# of Students
1	4-6	150
2	4-7	300
3	4-8	400

School Calendar
Standard, 183 days

Target Start Date
August 8, 2016

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		No	
		Percent Meets		Percent Meets
Educational Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	No	80%	Yes	100%
Operational Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	Yes	96%	Yes	100%
Business Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	No	80%	Yes	100%

The Technical Review Panel (TRP) provided the Applicant with written technical assistance based on its review of the preliminary written application package and the Applicant submitted a 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 each Plan (Educational, Operational, Business).

The capacity interview was attended by three board members and one potential board member. Two of the attending board members - the school founders - will transition to leadership roles within the school if the application is approved. The applicants effectively addressed the TRP's questions and concerns about the school's shared leadership model and were optimistic, but realistic, about the challenges they will face serving a high-poverty, high-ELL (English Language Learner) population.

The TRP's greatest concern was the dynamic between the two school leaders, specifically, how they interact under pressure while working closely together. It was beneficial seeing them in the interview setting, noting how comfortably and naturally they interact, and observing how they are drawn together through their shared vision of founding Pensar Academy and serving the target community. Both leaders are strong communicators and appear to be comfortable delegating to one another if necessary. Both school leaders have lived and worked in the target area (Pensar Capacity Interview, 36:23). The leaders also shared their experiences visiting high-performing charter schools such as KIPP in Houston and Renaissance in Los Angeles and discussed how they were inspired to focus on building a strong, supportive, school culture based on what they observed at both schools (Pensar Capacity Interview, 1:06:00).

The other two members spoke less, but were engaged throughout and clarified important questions about the board's role in providing oversight and establishing strong financial processes. The strengths of all team members - particularly in the areas of finance and facilities - augmented the founders' strengths, though all shared an obvious familiarity with, and commitment to, serving the target population.

Qualitative Analysis Summary

The TRP recommends that the application for Pensar Academy be approved because the plan presents a rigorous high-quality school that focuses on post-secondary success and teaches more than just the standards. Additionally, the operations and business plans are detailed; support the school's mission and vision; and the school leaders are passionate, committed, and have experience working with students in the target area.

The Applicant successfully demonstrates that students in the target area will need more than knowledge of the standards to be successful in college; they will need to learn how to think critically and collaboratively. Pensar Academy will teach students these necessary skills and will expose them to positive college role models and real-world projects, campus visits, and academic trajectory planning to be sure they are adequately prepared for their future success.

The school's operations and business plans are clearly drawn and provide needed support to the school leaders. The office manager and an office aide will handle time-consuming reporting and other administrative tasks, leaving the leaders free to focus on other things (Operational Plan, B.3, p. 4). The school will also seek administrative support through parent and community volunteers.

The shared leadership structure is clearly delineated and duties are enumerated in detail. This level of specificity will increase efficiency and ensure that there is no confusion about ownership of responsibilities. The proposed school leaders are both strong communicators and appear to be comfortable collaborating and delegating where necessary. Although one leader plans to direct school instruction and the other plans to direct school operations, they appear to be conversant in either role, giving them the flexibility to provide assistance if necessary. This kind of flexibility adds tremendous capacity to the leadership team.

Finally, both proposed school leaders have worked with the target population in the past and are passionate about working with this population again. This passion is supported by a wealth of experience working with underserved populations as instructors and as administrators. In discussing the multiple instructional strategies outlined in the plan, it was apparent that these strategies were chosen because the leaders have used them with this population and found them to be successful. Based on the strength of these leaders, combined with the strength of all three sections of the application package, the TRP recommends the approval of this application.

A. EDUCATIONAL PLAN

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

Plan Summary

Pensar Academy proposes to open Pensar Academy, serving grades 4 – 8, and teach them to "critically navigate new challenges to resolution; collaborate and communicate with purpose and production; and reach their full potential in post-secondary education to become agents of change within the community." The school plans to open with grades 4 – 6 and add a grade each year, ultimately growing to serve grades 4 – 8. The school plans to offer instruction based on individualized student growth plans, blended learning, project-based learning, and a backward-design model that encourages students to organize and plan proactively as they prepare for high school, college, and beyond.

The Applicant plans to use the Scholastic Reading Program and Study Island Online for ELA (English Language Arts) instruction and SRA or Read Naturally for ELA interventions. Math instruction will be delivered through teacher-designed projects, Study Island Online, and Khan Academy. Science instruction will be delivered through projects designed by the Buck Institute for Education, Scholastic Science World, and through teacher-generated lessons.

Pensar 's teachers will follow a blended-learning rotational model. In this model, students move through three different levels: direct instruction, differentiated support, and project-based application, based on past performance and with ongoing teacher support. Within each of these levels, course content is learned through a combination of direct whole group instruction, online learning, targeted small group intervention, and project-based learning. Movement through these levels corresponds to skill development and increased mastery and knowledge application.

Mastery is determined through daily end-of-lesson assessments, student portfolios, and end-of-unit assessments. The Scholastic Reading Inventory and the Basic Reading Inventory will be used for ELA screening. Quarterly benchmarks will be given as summative assessments in addition to tests such as the AzMERIT.

Academic Systems Plan

The Academic Systems Plan (ASP) for new Applicants is for the purpose of ensuring the school's essential systems are in place and appropriate for providing a quality education for each student it serves through the creation of a comprehensive, sufficiently detailed and implementable plan in the Areas of Curriculum, Assessment, Monitoring Instruction, and Professional Development. It is also intended to focus the school on meeting the Board's Academic Performance Expectations.

The Applicant submitted an ASP that met the criteria in all areas.

Curriculum Samples

Curriculum samples were provided for grades 4-8. The table below indicates which curriculum samples in the revised application package met all Board requirements (+), and which had deficiencies (-).

Grade	Math	Reading	Writing	Science
4	+	+	+	+
5	+	+	+	
6	+	+	+	
7	+	+	+	
8	+	+	+	+

Educational Plan Findings

	Preliminary TRP Scores		Revised TRP Scores	
Educational Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	No	44 of 55	Yes	55 of 55
Number of "Falls Below" ratings	0		0	
Number of "Approaches" ratings	11		0	

Analysis of Educational Plan

The Educational Plan meets the standard for approval because the Applicant's post-secondary focus addresses specific needs in the target population, the school's focus on strong and varied instructional strategies supports its aggressive goals, and because the emphasis in planning and time-management will support students in the classroom and beyond.

The Applicant makes a persuasive case for the importance of middle-school grades as the "make or break" academic years by presenting compelling data showing a decline in achievement in middle-school math and reading scores at traditional schools in the target area (Educational Plan, A.1, p. 5). Only seven percent of residents in the target community have attained a bachelor's or master's degree. Pensar Academy addresses this challenge by extending its focus to cover not just the standards, but to teaching students how to think critically and collaboratively. Pensar Academy will keep students engaged by ensuring that they are armed with academic prowess, training in the college process, and exposure to college role models. This post-secondary focus is an innate part of Pensar Academy's culture and reinforced through assigning real-world projects, campus visits, and academic trajectory planning (Educational Plan, A.1 p.3).

The school founders are both experienced teachers and this is reflected in the application's focus on the importance of strong teachers and strong teaching practices. The Applicant points out that a highly effective classroom teacher "can have 2-3 times more of an impact than external factors such as environment and home life in student academic achievement and math" (Educational Plan, A.1, p.7) and repeatedly emphasizes and defines what "highly-effective" means in the context of this program. Teachers will not only be evaluated in terms of their students' test scores and through other quantitative and qualitative criteria, but also for their passion for expanding their background knowledge in their respective academic area(s). Beyond teacher quality and commitment, the Educational Plan describes a multitude of instructional strategies that complement one another and align with the school's mission and vision: cooperative learning, essential elements of instruction, universal design for learning, response to intervention, and project-based learning are just a few examples (Educational Plan, A.1, p. 7). These strategies are introduced and described as opportunities for strong and caring instructors to interact with students, to differentiate instruction, and to support and develop students.

Finally, Pensar Academy's plan to model and teach backward design principles to students who will then use this tool to manage their own schedules and chart their own academic trajectories is a strong strategic complement

to their larger, post-secondary focus (Educational Plan, A.1, p.6). By teaching students to begin with the end in mind, Pensar Academy will empower students to manage their own time and their own lives, much as they will have to do in high school, in college, and in the world outside of school.

B. OPERATIONAL PLAN

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

Plan Summary

Pensar Academy is a non-profit corporation, located in Litchfield Park, Arizona, that was created on March 26, 2015 for the purpose of establishing, marketing and operating one or more public charter schools with three Directors: Patricia Paddock (took office April 6, 2015), Sandra Zupetz (took office April 6, 2015) and Tricia Mercado (took office March 26, 2015).

Pensar Academy's governing body and corporate board are the same and were established for the express purpose of founding and governing Pensar Academy. The board's responsibilities, as presented in the application package - and reinforced during the capacity interview - are to promote the school's mission and vision; to fundraise; to monitor program effectiveness; to provide financial oversight; to hire, support, and evaluate the school leaders; to promote the school to the public; to represent it in the community, and to create committees to facilitate the board's work (Operational Plan, B.3, p.1).

Named board officers are president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. The school leaders, Ms. Zupetz and Ms. Paddock, currently serve as founding board members, but will move to ex officio members should the application be approved. Additional board members will be added with expertise in charter school facilities, Response to Intervention (RTI) and instruction, sales, marketing, and governance.

The board plans to implement the following standing committees to aid in the start-up operations of the school: governance, finance, academics, and development. The governance committee will, among its other duties, oversee the recruiting, drafting, and training of new board members.

The day-to-day management of the school will be delegated to the leadership team of Ms. Zupetz and Ms. Paddock, who will serve as director of operations and director of student learning, respectively. The board will employ and evaluate the leaders' performance. The leadership team will be supported by an office manager and an office aide and plans to seek administrative support through parent and community volunteers. Contracted services will include financial management, employee benefits, special education services, legal services, and food services. The application package contains information on each of these services and lists possible providers.

School Governing Body Member Type	Number	Name
Organization Principal(s)	3	Patricia Paddock, Sandra Zupetz and Tricia Mercado

Principal Background Information

Authorized Representative and Principal: *Sandra Zupetz*
Confirmed Education History: Master of Education in Educational Leadership, Northern Arizona University, 2008
Confirmed Employment History: Glendale Elementary School District, Teacher, June 2010 to present.
Arizona FCC Expires: December 6, 2016

Current or Past Charter Affiliations[1]: None

Principal Name: *Tricia Mercado*
Confirmed Education History: Bachelor of Science in Accountancy, Arizona State University, 2008
Confirmed Employment History: Klecka, Williams and Klecka, CPAs, Accountant, December 2008 - February 2014; ECS, Controller, February 2014 - November 2014; Desert Botanical Gardens, Controller, December 2014 to present.
Arizona FCC Expires: February 11, 2019
Current or Past Charter Affiliations[1]: None

Principal Name: *Patricia Paddock*
Confirmed Education History: Master of Education in Educational Administration, Grand Canyon University, 2012
Confirmed Employment History: Glendale Elementary School District, Teacher, August 2006 - December 2014; Great Hearts Academies, Exceptional Student Services Coordinator, January 2015 to August 1, 2015
Arizona FCC Expires: May 3, 2018
Current or Past Charter Affiliations[1]: None

Operational Plan Findings

	Preliminary TRP Scores		Revised TRP Scores	
Operational Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	Yes	24 of 25	Yes	25 of 25
Number of "Falls Below" ratings	0		0	
Number of "Approaches" ratings	1		0	

Analysis of Operational Plan

The Operational Plan meets the standard for approval because it provides a clear description of the responsibilities and structure of the board that follows Arizona requirements. In addition, it provides a clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities for administering the day-to-day activities of the school and presents a clear and detailed picture of all contracted services. Finally, the shared leadership model described in the petition and in the capacity interview by Ms. Zupetz and Ms. Paddock puts two knowledgeable, high-capacity leaders in a position where they can stretch and adapt to meet challenges.

The description of board composition and responsibilities is clearly drawn and emphasizes a commitment to proper procedure, reporting, and fiduciary responsibility. The proposed duties clearly establish an environment in which the board remains above and separate from administrative functions and properly focused on policy and oversight (Operational Plan, B.2, pp 1-3). Although Ms. Zupetz and Ms. Paddock will remove themselves from the board to assume leadership positions at the school, Ms. Mercado, a current board member, and Mr. Klonoski, a potential future board member, who were both in attendance at the capacity interview, have considerable experience in operations, finance, facilities, and charter school development, which are valuable skill sets for board members. Two other board members described in the petition but not attending the capacity interview, Mr. Vazquez and Mr. Tarzwell have instructional and school governance experience (Operational Plan,, B.2, p.7).

The Applicant's description of contracted services is highly detailed and includes not only the names of potential vendors, but also terms of service and costs (Operational Plan, B.3.2). The level of research and attention to

[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.*

detail put into this essential part of Pensar Academy's plan gave the TRP confidence that they will execute their plans with the same amount of care and precision.

Ms. Zupetz and Ms. Paddock will serve as co-leaders for the school. The petition clearly delineates their respective responsibilities, which are enumerated in detail (Operational Plan, B.3, pp 1-2). This level of specificity will increase efficiency as there should be no confusion for staff or parents about leaders' roles. Ms. Zupetz and Ms. Paddock impressed the interview panel with the strength of their shared sense of mission and vision. Given their backgrounds and skill-sets, the leaders convinced the board that they were equally well-qualified to fill either leadership position, and had, in fact, reversed roles when successfully applying for Walton Family Foundation funding (Pensar Capacity Interview, 52:45). This flexibility will allow both leaders to assist in operations or instruction, should it become necessary.

C. BUSINESS PLAN

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

Plan Summary

Facility Information

Proposed School Name:	Pensar Academy
Proposed Locations:	Unconfirmed locations: Pensar Academy plans to locate within the following area: 35th Avenue to 67th Avenue and Camelback Road to Glendale Avenue. A facility has not yet been secured, but two options are under consideration: 5222 West Glendale Avenue, and 4315 West Glendale Avenue.
Facilities Requirements:	The facility must have a square footage between 6,750 and 8,850 square feet. There will be a minimum of six classrooms, a conference room, multipurpose space, restrooms, teacher work rooms, administrative office, resource room, storage room and reception space. The facility will be secured by March of 2015 and the move in date is set for July 2015.

Budget Summary

During the start-up period, Pensar Academy anticipates receiving a $100,000 gift from Martin Zupetz, to be dispensed on April 1, 2016. The secured funds, in the amount of $100,000 as stated by the Applicant, were confirmed by the financial institution. A zero percent-interest promissory note for $7,000, also from Zupetz and used for charter application expenses, will be repaid at $500 each month, with the final payment made in September of 2017. Expenses during the start-up period come from employee salaries, office supplies, instructional supplies, marketing and advertising, fees/permits, furniture, technology purchases, leases, and insurance. The three-year operational budget projects revenues derived only from state funding (equalization assistance) with no add-ons. Revenue is based on 90 percent enrollment. Employee salaries are budgeted to increase by five percent annually.

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

	Startup Period	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Projected Full Enrollment:		150	300	400
# Students Budget Based On:		135	270	360
Total Revenue:	$100,000.00	$862,602.00	$1,687,864.00	$2,217,699

Total Expenditures:	$95,561.72	$845,767.00	$1,608,173.00	$2,003,736.96
Ending Balance:	$4,438.28	$16,835.00	$79,691.50	$213,962.04

Business Plan Findings

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

Analysis of Business Plan

The Business Plan meets the standard for approval because it provides a detailed plan for facility needs and acquisition, a detailed list of start-up activities, and a balanced budget that is conservative and reflects the requirements for implementing the school's academic and operational plans.

Although the Applicant has not yet secured a specific facility, the facilities plan is highly-detailed, the description of need is specific and aligns with the Educational and Operational Plans, and the plan provides options located in the proposed target area. The application package contains a detailed timeline for securing the facility and a comparison of the two proposed school sites (Business Plan, C.1, Facilities Acquisition Narrative, p. 4) and a detailed description of the proposed school layout (Business Plan, C.1, Facilities Acquisition Narrative, pp. 6 -13). Proposed board member Jason Klonoski, who attended the capacity interview, has extensive experience in securing and developing charter school facilities and voiced his engagement with the school to close on a site.

The proposed start-up activities will be funded through a $100,000 gift, allowing the school to onboard the school leaders two months before school opening and will fund a two-week teacher orientation session, the purchase of furniture, and other supplies well before opening day without incurring debt. This approach gives the TRP confidence that the Applicant understands the importance of long-term planning and preparation and will minimize the likelihood of last-minute challenges by ensuring that processes are set up and paid-for in advance.

The Applicant has submitted a balanced budget that is conservative and establishes a reserve that steadily increases for each year of operation. Revenue is calculated at 90 percent of enrollment for each year of operation, allowing a margin for attrition and establishing a contingency against low enrollment. Although the Applicant anticipates an average distribution of special education and English language learner students (ELLs), revenue projections do not include additional funding for these students, though expenses for serving these students are budgeted. This is consistent with their conservative approach. Each paid position is budgeted anticipating annual salary increases, contingent upon work performance.

The review team was impressed with Applicant responses to Financial Plan questions in the capacity interview. Ms. Mercado, in particular, was succinct, thorough, and knowledgeable in describing the financial controls that will be in place at Pensar Academy. (Pensar Capacity Interview, 1:12:42)

EVIDENCE OF CAPACITY

Applicant Summary

The table below describes the participation of the Applicant in the In-Person Interview:

Name	Role	Attended Interview?
Patricia Paddock	Charter Principal	Yes
Sandra Zupetz	Charter Principal / Director of Operations	Yes
Tricia Mercado	Charter Principal / Board Member	Yes
Jason Klonoski	Potential Board Member	Yes

Analysis of Applicant Capacity

The TRP finds that the Applicant has the range of knowledge, skills, and experience needed to open and operate a high quality school because all team members who are listed in the application package and who participated in the capacity interview displayed a passion for and engagement in the proposed plan, in addition to having robust experience that affords them the capacity to implement it.

Ms. Zupetz and Ms. Paddock have notable resumes that reveal engagement with many different types of students in varied settings, both with a focus on serving underserved students in challenging environments. Both proposed school leaders have worked as classroom instructors, coaches, and administrators, both at the school-level and in the central office. These experiences, together with the passion and engagement they displayed throughout the capacity interview, make them ideal shared leaders for the proposed school. Their shared description of a "day-in-the-life" of a Pensar Academy student was highly detailed and included potential supports and opportunities for struggling students (Pensar Capacity Interview, 8:10). This revealed not only the amount of careful planning they have both invested in this plan, but also their understanding of the challenges students may bring with them to the school. Their responses showed the sense of urgency with which they plan to meet these challenges. Both leaders' involvement with New Schools for Phoenix, a charter school incubator program designed to develop, train, and offer ongoing support to new school leaders, will provide them with ongoing coaching and support (Pensar Capacity Interview, 49:20).

Tricia Mercado, the only Pensar Academy founding member who will remain on the board after approval, answered questions related to the board's role in providing financial oversight competently and completely. She will be a valuable asset to the board and the school as an experienced CPA and charter school auditor.

Jason Klonoski, a potential board member, revealed in the interview that he was drawn to work with Pensar Academy (an Educational Service Provider) because of their connection with and passion for the target community. His experience with Team CFA, particularly related to facility procurement and development, adds considerable capacity to the Pensar Academy team (Pensar Capacity Interview, 29:00).

The TRP had some concern that the board will lose valuable K -12 experience as Ms. Paddock and Ms. Zupetz leave the board to assume leadership roles at the school. The potential board members listed in the petition, Mr. Vazquez, who is currently a classroom instructor and instructional math coach for the Glendale Elementary School District and Mr. Tarzwell, who served on the Balsz school board for seven years, bring this much-needed experience back to the board (Operational Plan, B.2, p.7).

BOARD OPTIONS

Option 1: The Board may approve the application package and the charter. The following language is provided 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, I move to approve the

application package and grant a charter to Pensar Academy to operate Pensar Academy charter school to serve grades 4-8.

Option 2: The Board may deny the charter. 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, I move to deny Pensar Academy's request for a charter for the reason(s) that:

- ❑ The Applicant is not sufficiently qualified to operate a charter school based on (insert the facts that form the basis for determination [i.e., background/fingerprint/credit report of the specific Officers, Members, Directors, or Partners]).
- ❑ The Applicant is not sufficiently qualified to operate a charter school based on the (insert the facts from the financial, operational and/or academic performance of associated schools or affiliated schools that form the basis for the decision).