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Arizona State Board for Charter Schools
P.O. Box 18328
Phoenix, AZ 85009
CC: Ms. DeAnna Rowe, ASBCS Executive Director

November 6, 2013

Dear Arizona State Board for Charter Schools:

As the Authorized Charter Representative of The Rising School (TRS), I am writing to request a Good Cause Extension of the opening of our school to August 4, 2014. We understand that this is a *one-time* extension. We believe that we have good cause to extend the opening of our school, and we thank you in advance for considering the following information in support of our request.

This letter is in response to Ms. Johanna medina's email of November 1, 2013. In her email, Ms. Medina wrote:

I will need RSI to provide the following:

1. Evidence (i.e. contract, denial letter, appeal, etc.) that supports the reasons for not being able to open timely in August 2013.
2. A new timeline for implementing the plans (Educational, Operational, and Business) contained in the application package, and why the timeline is viable and adequate for achieving the proposed start-up date of the school and appropriate for operating a charter school in accordance with the performance frameworks adopted by the Board and requirements of statute and rule.
3. Clear and specific action steps with target completion dates that will enable RSI to implement the plans contained in the application package in accordance with the timeline provided.

We appreciate ASBCS's consideration of our Good Cause Extension to open our school in August 2014. We believe we have good reasons for this extension. Thanks very much!

Sincerely,

George G. Rising, PhD
Authorized Charter Representative
The Rising School

P.S. The following information and accompanying attachments provide the additional information requested by Ms. Medina and ASBCS:

Evidence Supporting Rationale for Not Opening in August 2013

TRS was chartered by the ASBCS on January 22, 2013. A week later, TRS submitted its application for an Arizona Charter School Program (AZ CSP) grant. TRS intended to use the first year of AZ CSP funding to take a planning year from April 2013 through July 2014, opening on August 4, 2014. Several sources within ASBCS, AZ CSP, ACSA, and ADE recommended taking a planning year. However, on March 25, 2013, TRS's application for an AZ CSP grant was denied.

- Evidence: Exhibit 1. Denial of AZ CSP award_03-25-2013

There were irregularities in the grant process, so TRS immediately appealed the denial of the AZ CSP grant.

- Evidence: Exhibit 2. Letter to State Board of Education_04-03-2013

The AZ CSP appeal process was complex and time consuming, and it eventually took six months to resolve.

In the meantime, on April 11, TRS's Governing Board met to discuss the situation. TRS's Board concluded that taking a planning year without an AZ CSP grant was unwise. Consequently, the Board voted to move aggressively to open in August 2013, with the one change that the school would plan to start with 50 students rather than 100 and in a correspondingly smaller (and less expensive) facility.

- Evidence: Exhibit 3. Board meeting 2013-04-11 minutes

TRS immediately instructed its real-estate agent to assertively search for facilities. After touring several sites, TRS found a seemingly excellent building: it was the right size (just over 3,000 square feet) and was in a complex with three other vacant buildings totaling another 12,000 square feet, which would enable the school to easily increase enrollment in the ensuing years. Furthermore, the landlord granted $60,000 in tenant improvements to redesign the building and to bring it up to E-occupancy code. The landlord assured TRS that he was experienced in these matters and that this $60,000 would cover all costs, including architectural design to our specifications, demolition of the interior, and build out of our design. Additionally, the facility was located directly across the street from Townsend Middle School, a Tucson Unified school that was being closed, so its students may have been looking for a new neighborhood school. Within two weeks of searching for a facility, on April 12, TRS signed a five-year lease for the 3,000 square-foot space that included an option for first right of refusal to lease the other 12,000 square feet of space in future years as the school population grew.

- Evidence: Exhibit 4. Lease agreement_2222 Craycroft_signed

With a facility secured, TRS inaugurated a recruiting blitz for students. TRS Board members, friends, community members, and six paid canvassers went door-to-door to houses, apartments, and businesses in the community on a daily basis. The school also used targeted direct mail,

signs, and community meetings to market the school to neighborhood parents and students. In seven weeks, TRS enrolled 14 students and had six others who said that they planned to attend the school; these 20 recruited students represented an average of three students recruited per week. During this period, moreover, TRS also put up ads for faculty, interviewed dozens of candidates, and eventually hired four excellent teachers.

- Evidence: Exhibit 5. Marketing Materials

By May 22, TRS had completed all of its requirements outlined in its charter-acceptance letter. On that date, I signed the charter contract with ASBCS Executive Director DeAnna Rowe. Ms. Rowe advised me that, if the school decided not to open in August, we should make the decision sooner rather than later; it proved to be wise counsel.

- Evidence: Exhibit 6. Charter contract ASBCS-RSI_signed_05-22-2013

In early June, the landlord informed TRS that the tenant improvements would cost $150,000, $90,000 more than the $60,000 allowance that TRS had been given. Furthermore, future tenant improvements for the three adjacent buildings would cost another $600,000, for a total of $750,000. Thus, the cost was prohibitive, far above the budgeted amount, which $0 for TRS. Although the landlord was contractually obligated to pay 80% of the overrun for the first 3,000 square feet of space (TRS's portion was 20%), the landlord would not commit to giving any allowance to cover the projected $600,000 worth of future tenant-improvement expenses for the rest of the space. In a meeting with the landlord, TRS presented its case about how costs overruns by the landlord's contracted construction company had made the facilities financially unviable in the near term and even more so in the longer term for both TRS and the landlord.

- Evidence: Exhibit 7. Presentation to 2222 Craycroft landlord

After negotiations, the landlord agreed to a settlement that terminated the five-year lease.

- Evidence: Exhibit 8. 2222 Craycroft Settlement Agreement and Release_09-21-13

In addition to the issues of finding a new facility, the school would need to recruit another 36 students over the next eight weeks. While this was certainly possible, it was ambitious and risky. Consequently, on June 13, TRS's Governing Board voted to shut the operation down and to open in 2014 rather than 2013. The Board also voted to begin negotiating a termination of the lease.

- Evidence: Exhibit 9. Board meeting 2013-06-13 minutes

The process of appealing the denial of an AZ CSP grant was complex and time consuming. On September 25, after six months, the Arizona State Board of Education ruled in TRS's favor, thereby granting TRS an AZ CSP grant for $230,000 for FY 2014, with a possible two-year renewal, for a total of $690,000. This ruling enabled TRS to continue its planning year to prepare for opening in August 2014.

- Evidence: Exhibit 10. AZ CSP grant award letter_09-25-2013

Timeline for Implementing Educational, Operational, and Business Plans, with Action Steps with Target Completion Dates

The accompany spreadsheet lists the educational operational, and business action steps that The Rising School (TRS) will complete by August 2014 in order to open the school. The action steps are sorted chronologically in a viable-and-adequate timeline.

Completing the action steps essential to opening TRS (or any charter school) requires three main attributes:

1) the knowledge and experience to identify which specific tasks are necessary to undertake as action steps;
2) the knowledge, experience, and judgment to ascertain when to complete which action step, i.e., the ability to prioritize action steps in a logical manner; and
3) a plan with a system of accountability ensuring that action steps are completed in a correct, complete, and timely manner.

TRS's leadership—from years of training, experience, and planning—possesses these three attributes. As a measure of proof, TRS has already completed many of the action steps necessary to open, e.g., analyze the demographics of the potential student population, create marketing materials, implement an accounting and payroll system, etc. (please see the action-step timeline for many more examples). Moreover, TRS's CEO/Principal, Dr. George Rising, in his former school leadership positions, has previously supervised completion of many of the action steps that TRS will need to complete before opening. Also, TRS has obtained, through professional training and experience at other schools, model drafts for most of the documents required to open a school, e.g., employee handbook, student-enrollment form, first-day student packet, etc. Finally, TRS has developed and implemented a plan with an accountability system to ensure that actions steps are completed in a correct and timely manner. This accountability system includes the Governing Board, CEO/Principal, and Office Manager. It also includes outside accountability through a business coach, contracted accountant/financial advisor, and contracted attorney.

The planning and execution of opening a school requires effective leadership. TRS's leadership team consists of six leaders, each with a long background of successful leadership. Co-founder and CEO/Principal George Rising has a wide-ranging record of teaching, published scholarship, and school leadership. Dr. Rising has served as principal or head of school at four Tucson schools, including the #1 ranked charter school in America. Co-founder Stephanie Rising is a longtime businesswoman and a leading coaching consultant and marketer for small businesses in Tucson. The Governing Board consists of five accomplished professionals with strong, longtime ties to the Tucson community. Board Secretary Gregory J. Berger, J.D., is a Tucson attorney and adjunct law professor at the University of Arizona. Mr. Berger previously taught history for nine years at St. Gregory Prep School, where he chaired the History Department. He has done pro bono work for many nonprofit organizations, including several local schools. Rosie Garcia, M.Ed., has taught Spanish at Tucson's Sunnyside High for 37 years. She has chaired the World Languages Department for two decades and has served in leadership posts for many organizations, including as a former board member of two other Tucson charter schools. Board Treasurer Margret Huebner is the co-owner of Commercial Carpet Cleaning, Inc., an award-winning small business. She has a strong background in finance and community relations. Kevin

Stombaugh is Managing Director—Public Finance at Grant Thornton LLP, one of the world's leading independent audit, tax and advisory firms. Mr. Stombaugh's volunteer activities focus on education, including having served as a school board member. Dr. Rising is the final Board member.

TRS's leadership has completed extensive training and professional development to learn the best practices of how to open and run a charter school. TRS completed the ACSA's Starter Charter program, a rigorous four-month training designed to help organizations successfully open a charter school. TRS remains a member of ACSA and often utilizes its resources and advice. TRS's team also undertook copious research that was required to successfully complete the ASBCS charter application and AZ CSP grant application. This research was invaluable for opening a school; it included researching neighborhood demographics, community organizations, local businesses, and price quotes from numerous vendors. In addition, TRS's leadership has also taken several other trainings by the ACSA, the Arizona Department of education, and other organizations. For example, the Governing Board has two two-day professional development trainings scheduled over the next seven months. Furthermore, Dr. George Rising, TRS's CEO/Principal, has recently completed all of the courses required to earn a Principal's certification and an M.Ed. in Educational Leadership from the University of Arizona. Dr. Rising's courses in educational finance, school law, human resources, and community relations have been invaluable for starting a charter school. His courses in the principalship, superintendency, and instructional leadership provided him with theories, concepts, and practical knowledge to utilize on a daily basis. Finally, Dr. Rising's superintendency internship with Superintendent Dr. Vicki Balentine of Amphitheater Unified School District enabled a close-up view of leadership excellence in action.

In addition to this extensive training, TRS also possesses invaluable experience in running and starting charter schools. Dr. Rising, unlike most leaders of newly chartered schools, has prior school-leadership experience: he has been head of school or principal at three Tucson schools (TRS is his fourth school). Also unlike most new charter-school leaders, Dr. Rising has experience starting two new charter schools. In 2010, as the Head of School of BASIS Tucson, he helped to open, staff, and train BASIS Oro Valley. In 2011, Dr. Rising became the founding principal of the Western Institute for Leadership Development. In this role, he performed many of the tasks required to open that school. Additionally, TRS has contracted with experienced vendors. For financial matters, for example, TRS has contracted with ADI Business Solutions, the leading charter-school accounting agency in Arizona, serving over 30 charter schools. For legal matters, the school has contracted with Marian Abram, Esq., of Karp & Weiss, one of the top legal firms in Tucson. These and other experienced vendors have provided invaluable advice to TRS.

Most importantly, TRS has had the benefit of a "dry run" in opening a charter school. From April through early June 2013, TRS moved aggressively to open the school. In that short nine-week period, TRS completed many of the important tasks required to open. These tasks included:

- working with a real-estate agent to locate a suitable facility;
- working with an architect and construction company to design tenant improvements for the school facility;

- creating a plethora of advertising material (press releases, posters, flyers, banners, door hangers, signs, all of which were designed by professionals);
- using social media to market the school (including creating a professionally designed website, a Facebook page, and a Twitter account);
- using door-door marketing to advertise the school to neighborhood parents, students, and businesses through door-to-door marketing;
- hosting community events to advertise the school;
- hiring experienced and academically successful teachers (of the five teachers hired or in negotiations to hire, two had earned PhDs and two others were completing their PhDs).

In just nine weeks, which included six weeks of advertising, TRS was able to find a suitable facility, hire all needed faculty, and recruit 20 potential students. TRS has nine months until it opens on August 4, 2014, and its leadership team is confident that it can successfully complete all of the tasks required to open the school.

To ensure action steps are completed in a correct and timely manner, TRS has developed and implemented accountability system. This system includes the CEO/Principal, Governing Board, Office Manager, plus vendors who provide outside accountability: a business coach, contracted accountant/financial advisor, and contracted attorney. TRS has created a spreadsheet of action steps similar to the one attached. In addition, TRS has monthly and weekly spreadsheets that have an additional column of "how," i.e., the process of how the action step will be completed (e.g., who needs to be contacted—vendor, government agency, etc. —in order to complete an action step). The Governing Board has access to the action-step timeline, and the Board itself is responsible for completing certain of the action steps on the timeline. Additionally, the Board supervises the CEO/Principal, making sure that he is accountable for completing action steps that it has delegated to him in a correct and timely manner. The CEO/Principal supervises daily operations. The CEO/Principal works closely with the Office Manager to oversee the Office Manager's completion of action steps. The CEO/Principal and Office Manager also meet in a formal weekly meeting every Friday afternoon to 1) follow up to confirm that the week's action steps have been completed, and 2) look forward to the action steps scheduled for the next week, and 3) to review and strategize about how best to complete future action steps timeline/calendar. Additionally, the CEO/Principal and Office Manager meet monthly in a two-hour meeting with a business coach, who supplies an extra layer of accountability. Other outside sources also provide accountability: TRS's contracted accountant alerts, updates, and reminds TRS personnel about financial and tax issues. Similarly, TRS's contracted attorney does the same for legal issues. Finally, various government agencies, especially those associated with the Arizona Department of Education, provide a final layer of accountability.

As the above demonstrates, TRS possesses the knowledge, experience, and judgment to be able to identify which specific tasks are essential to undertake and how prioritize these tasks in a logical manner.

Please see the accompany spreadsheet, which lists the action steps that The Rising School (TRS) will complete by August 2014 in order to open the school. The action steps are sorted chronologically in a viable-and-adequate timeline.