VISTA
COLLEGE
PREPARATORY

September 30, 2015

Johanna Medina, Director of School Quality
Arizona State Board for Charter Schools
1616 West Adams Street, Suite 170
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Re: Vista College Prep – Letter of Intent

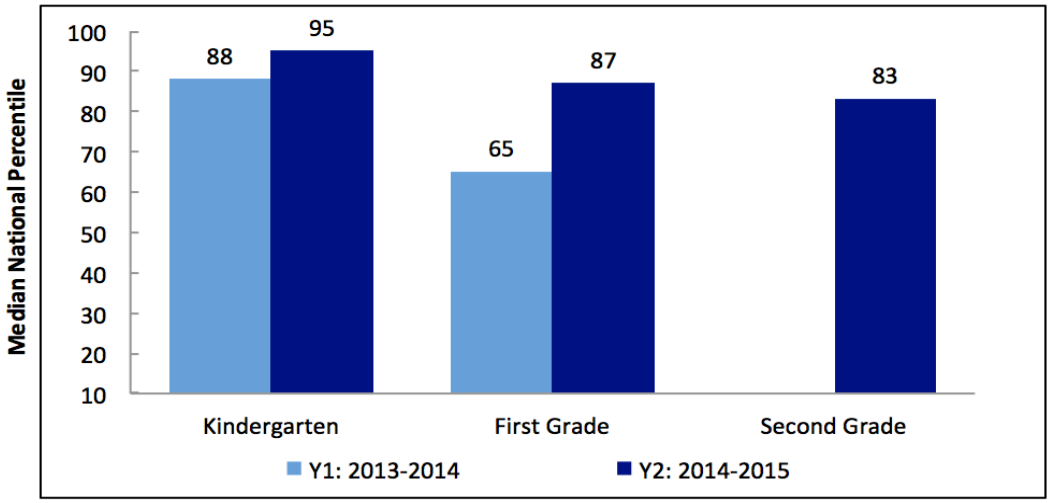
Dear Ms. Medina:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a Letter of Intent as Vista College Prep ("Vista") seeks to replicate the success of our K-5 elementary school. Most importantly, we seek to replicate the success that we have had with our slow growth model by starting just with kindergarten and first grade. Over the last two years we have fulfilled our promise of strategically adding a grade each year while closing the academic achievement gap for our students. This Letter is our request for the State Board to allow us to submit a New School Site Notification Request to add a second campus in the coming 2016/2017 school year.

Rationale for Expanding

Vista is expanding because our scholars have proven that demographics do not determine destiny and stakeholders are asking for our school to serve their communities. With an incredible team of board members, staff, teachers, parents, and community supporters, Vista scholars continue to show what is possible in urban education. Vista teachers are highly focused on data and assessment. This past year Vista scholars achieved an average of 1.4 years of literacy growth as measured by the STEP assessment. In the last two years, our scholars have achieved three years of literacy growth! In addition, Vista scholars dramatically exceeded the national median on the nationally normed TerraNova assessment (and beat all of our scores from last year!).

End of Year K-2 TerraNova Results (Median of Reading and Math Scores)



Just as we approached our initial charter application, we are looking to grow strategically and thoughtfully. Thanks to the support of the Arizona Community Foundation, we recently received a planning grant to directly support the strategic planning of a strong and sustainable growth model for our school. This grant will support us in creating a growth plan that is sustainable with Arizona's low student funding. The grant includes working with local consultants, Jay Kaprosy and Mac Woods to perform the financial and legal feasibility analysis as well as Julie Jackson and Juliana Worrell (leaders of Uncommon Charter Schools) to support the programmatic analysis of our model.

We are incredibly excited to begin this process and even more excited to have already identified the talent to lead our two schools. As we prepare for the 2016-2017 school year, our plan is to have our current school operating as K-4, and open a new school site serving K-1. We have identified the two individuals who we would like to lead these schools and both are serving as instructional leaders this current school year. We view this grooming process as some of our most critical work as we firmly believe the success of our school is a direct result of the leadership in the building.

Scope of the Expansion

This expansion request is limited to adding one school site to Vista's current charter; no concurrent expansion request is being submitted for State Board approval. Vista is confident in adding a second campus in the 2016/2017 school year, and, with the help of the ACF Grant discussed above, is actively exploring what is necessary to grow to multiple high-impact campuses over the next several years. With the State Board's approval of this Letter, Vista would immediately submit a New School Site Notification Request as well as any other amendments or notifications necessary to properly add a second campus with additional students to its charter, including an Enrollment Cap Notification Request.

Timeframe

With the State Board's approval, Vista intends to grow this second campus in the same way it did its current campus, by starting with kindergarten and first grade in 2016/2017 and growing out to serving K-5 by adding one grade in each successive year. Therefore, in the 2016/2017 school year, Vista would be operating a K-4 campus at our original campus and a K-1 at the second campus.

When we opened the original campus, student enrollment was a huge challenge; however, we achieved nearly all of our enrollment targets our second year. While our strong enrollment numbers were influenced somewhat by iterative strategies and thought on behalf of our team (a lot of reflections on what we could have done differently or better after our first year), it was primarily a result of word of mouth from

our parents. Vista ended the second year with 119 students enrolled. Please see below for a breakdown:

Kindergarten – 38 students (cap = 36)
First Grade – 41 students (cap = 42)
Second Grade – 40 students (cap = 42)

This year we have a waitlist for grades 1-3, and are nearly fully enrolled for kindergarten. Over 68% of our new students were referrals from current families. While we are excited about the progress that we have made since our first year, we will never take this success lightly. We still attend every community event in our area, continue canvassing our local neighborhoods, and will always provide transportation.

Vista College Prep Capacity

As demonstrated in the "Rationale for Expanding" section above, our students are excelling academically as compared against students nationally. We only submit this Letter because, until this year we have served only grades not tested by the State of Arizona. Because we had no state assessment data, we had a "No Rating" on our academic dashboards and are therefore ineligible to directly submit the New School Site Notification Request; however, we are thrilled that the State Board looks beyond state assessment data when considering expansion requests and are eager to demonstrate the success of our students.

This has been an exciting past year for our team. Here are some highlights:

- ***Student Achievement Results:***
  - On average, 86% of students met or exceeded their literacy growth goal for the 2014-2015 school year.
  - This past year Vista College Prep scholars achieved an average of 1.4 years of literacy growth as measured by the STEP assessment. In the last two years, our scholars have achieved three years of literacy growth!
  - Vista College Prep scholars dramatically exceeded the national median on the nationally normed TerraNova assessment.
- ***Charter Schools Development Corporation Loan:*** One of our biggest milestones in year 2 was closing on a $1.5 million loan from Charter Schools Development Corporation. This loan was used to purchase our school building, purchase a vacant parcel of land just south of our school building, and complete an extensive renovation to expand our building from six classrooms to nine. This was an exciting moment for our entire school community, especially our parents who are thrilled that we are staying in our same location. We recently finished the renovation on time and on budget, with contingency reserves remaining.

- **100% Staff Retention**: We are proud to have retained 100% of our staff and teachers for the second year in a row. This is very atypical for start-up schools and again we can attribute this success to the strong organizational culture and our ability to provide incredible support to our teachers.
- ***School Visits:*** Based on our academic success we have been fortunate to host several groups to tour our classrooms and observe our teachers and scholars in action.
    - Governor Doug Ducey – Governor Ducey attended Vista College Prep's ribbon cutting ceremony and toured the school in August 2015 in conjunction with his "Back to School" initiative.
    - Building Excellent Schools – The Fellowship program that I participated in brought their future leaders who will be opening schools across the country to visit for two full days. This is the first time the Fellowship has visited Arizona during their annual yearlong visits of high-performing schools across the country.
    - 'A for Arizona' Schools of Excellence Tour – We were one of four schools featured on a tour for over 50 business, community and school leaders
    - Numerous local schools and school leaders
    - Additionally, this summer, we hosted several Fellows from Building Excellent Schools and other local school leaders who observed our summer professional development.
- ***Parent Community:*** Vista College Prep has engaged an incredible parent community – we have averaged over 95% parent participation at every parent-teacher conference this past year.
- ***New Board Member:*** We just brought on a new board member, growing our board to nine individuals. This individual brings extensive marketing experience as well as a new professional network for our school. We are thrilled that he has joined our team.
- ***Financial Support***:
    - $200,000 – Louis Calder Foundation
    - $43,000 – Arizona Department of Education Math mini-grant
    - Planning Grant – Arizona Community Foundation
- ***Uncommon Schools Visit:*** This past year, we have had three members of the North Star/Uncommon Schools leadership team visit Vista College Prep, including Julie Jackson and Juliana Worrell. The purpose of the visit was to perform a school audit with a focus on literacy instruction. Additionally, we brought another member of their staff out to our school to provide content-specific support around Reading Mastery.
- ***Professional Development:*** By the end of this past year, every member of Vista College Prep's instructional team had the opportunity to attend an Uncommon training or visit North Star to benchmark how we performed in comparison. This continues to be a huge focus for our school—we constantly want to reflect on our performance and get better.

The respected Annie E. Casey Foundation recently studied the quality of education in many states, including Arizona. The foundation concluded that the future of our State depends in many ways on the successful education of Arizona's Latino children. The report, described in the *Arizona Republic*, stated: "Latino children in Arizona, already the largest share of school-age children in the state, are doing significantly worse on a score of key indicators of success such as high-school graduation rates and college diplomas when compared with Latinos in other states."

There are several groups working to ensure that Arizona tries to meet this need by opening more quality schools in the next five years. In just our first year of operation, the Arizona Charter Schools Association named Vista College Prep as a model for these new schools. We are proving that all students can achieve if they have access to a quality education. Additionally, the press has featured Vista College Prep's impact on student achievement:

- *"Arizona Hopes New Charter Schools Can Lift Urban Areas" [New York Times, 1/16/14]* http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/17/education/arizona-expanding-its-charter-school-efforts-to-urban-areas.html
- *"Phoenix Charter School Raises the Educational Bar"* [*Channel 12 News*, 1/21/14] http://www.azcentral.com/video/3088270761001
- *"Charter Schools Work to Boost Literacy Rates"* [*Channel 3 News*, 1/25/14] http://www.azfamily.com/story/28376759/charter-schools-work-to-boost-literacy-rates

Every day we are driven by what is possible. We know that other schools across the country are achieving phenomenal results every single day. And we certainly know that it is possible in Phoenix and in the Central City South community for all students to be successful as long as they have access to a quality education.

We are determined to deliver on that promise and we hope you will consider this request for expansion as we continue to work toward becoming one of the highest performing schools in the State of Arizona. Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions at 602-625-7893 or jmeyerson@vistacollegeprep.org.

Thank you,

Julia Meyerson
Executive Director
Vista College Preparatory, Inc.