

# Memo

**To:** BVSD Board of Education  
**From:** District Accountability Committee  
**Date:** March 27, 2018  
**Re:** Recommendations on the Summit Academy Charter Application

To fulfill the DAC responsibility:

C.R.S. 22-11-302(1)(c) – If the local board receives a charter school application, to review the charter application prior to consideration by the local school board as provided in section 22-30.5-107(1).

## Process

The District Accountability Committee selected a representative subcommittee of volunteers to review the application and make a recommendation. This included DAC representation from different school levels (i.e., elementary, middle and high schools); charter schools, focus schools and traditional public schools; and across the entire district (e.g., mountains, Boulder city, East County). A list of the subcommittee members is included in Appendix A. Assistance was also provided by an external expert on charter school authorizing.

## Recommendation

The subcommittee voted 9-2 to support the following statement:

*We, as a DAC committee, conducted a very thorough review of the Summit Academy (SA) application, and engaged in a rigorous discussion of the merits and gaps in the proposed application. The committee agreed to recommend that the district approve the application if the following conditions are met:*

- 1. Facility: A viable facility plan is agreed upon by the district and the school.*
- 2. Equity: The school plan is strengthened to have a realistic likelihood of recruiting, retaining, and succeeding with a more diverse student population (e.g., FRL, special education, ELL).*
- 3. Budget: The budget is revised to demonstrate adequate funding for the proposed curriculum and equity plan.*

The subcommittee tried to get consensus. The two members who voted “no” agreed with the conditions, but did not feel that the conditions could be met and wanted an outright denial. The next section lays out the strengths and weaknesses of the application.

## Detailed Analysis of the Application

Pros	Cons
<b>Finance and Facilities</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● BVSD shares resources with charter schools.</li> <li>● Summit MS is a financially-viable program.</li> <li>● Most SA students would be children of district residents (who contribute to bonds).</li> <li>● Facility option #1 (Summit campus expansion): SA shares space, resources and programming with Summit MS.</li> <li>● Facility option #2 (New Vista [NV] co-location or swap). BVSD has a history with shared facilities, and there's space at NV. NV may benefit from pooling resources and sharing programming with SA.</li> <li>● Facility option #3 (Sombrero Marsh campus). The current Summit MS building could be repurposed by BVSD.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The budget is for the 6-12 grade combination, so it is difficult to evaluate the feasibility of the high school portion.</li> <li>● It is not clear that the Beginning Balance properly accounts for the prior year Restricted Reserves.</li> <li>● The budget does not include the necessary supports to attract and serve a diverse population (e.g., transportation, community liaison, AP exam fees).</li> <li>● The resources do not appear to adequately cover the proposed innovations (e.g., extensive internships and service learning required for every student are coordinated by only one person).</li> <li>● Significant programming (e.g., PE, art, theatre, outdoor/travel learning, community internships) relies on donated community services, but there is no evidence of commitments from the proposed partners.</li> <li>● All facility options would require bond funding that BVSD says is not available. A future bond is several years away, and little rationale is provided for why SA should be prioritized relative to other facilities or needs of the district.</li> <li>● Facility option #1 (Summit campus expansion): A land swap with the city seems complicated and time intensive.</li> <li>● Facility option #2 (NV co-location or swap): NV community's support for co-location is unknown, and it's not clear that the proposal would meet the needs of both schools.</li> <li>● Facility option #3 (Sombrero-Marsh campus): Requires extensive new construction. This could be expensive, and may require a special permitting review. It is not known whether there will be enough acreage to build a combined MS/HS campus, and neighborhood support has not yet been demonstrated.</li> </ul>

Pros	Cons
<b>Enrollment and Equity</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● SA would provide another choice for students who seek a smaller high school.</li> <li>● Fairview and Boulder HS are now over-capacity, which may point to a demand for more rigorous programs in this area.</li> <li>● With 150+ letters of intent, there's reason to believe SA would attract families.</li> <li>● Enrollment goals are set to significantly increase student diversity (20% FRL, ELL, and SPED within five years).</li> <li>● The program goal of 100% college attendance may address the achievement gaps with some students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Under the current contract,<sup>1</sup> Summit MS and the district are expected to work together to review enrollment outcomes for the school. Currently, Summit MS has one of the least diverse student population in BVSD, with declining enrollment from disadvantaged children, and disproportionate numbers of TAG-identified students (2.0% ELL, 2.8% SPED, 3.0% FRL, 41.5% TAG).<sup>2</sup> The school and the district should follow-through on this contract language and study this issue further.</li> <li>● The budget offers two different scenarios for enrollment (planned and minimum), but the financials are the same.</li> <li>● The budget narrative does not include explanations of the enrollment assumptions, which are inconsistently stated (pp. 6, 8, 89, 96).</li> <li>● It's not clear where the letters of intent come from (e.g., Summit MS vs. other parents, rising 7th graders vs. other grades).</li> <li>● Serving special populations is listed as a SA priority, but the budget and programming do not demonstrate the supports needed to serve a diverse population.</li> <li>● Family income is low on the list of open enrollment preferences (#6), and it's likely that SA will fill up before getting to that preference.</li> <li>● Without transportation, the proposed locations (i.e., South and Central Boulder) are not likely to draw a diverse student body.</li> <li>● Because Summit is not allowed to directly recruit from neighborhood schools, it is not clear how the outreach program will achieve its ambitious targets.</li> <li>● Intensive interventions needed by disadvantaged students to catch up (available at other BVSD high schools) are not identified, nor funded.</li> <li>● SPED staffing needs to be revisited (e.g., 0.5 FTE to teach approx. 100 students is unrealistic).</li> <li>● SA has not budgeted for the additional funding needed to cover the outdoor and travel learning expenses of FRL students.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> [Summit Charter School Contract](#), p. 20, § 8.12.2

<sup>2</sup> [2017-2018 Special Programs Summary](#)

Pros		Cons	
<b>Academic Programming</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SA expands BVSD’s high school choice for students with different learning styles, particularly experiential education, combined with rigor. Summit MS has a successful program.</li> <li>Many aspects of small schools have been linked to success (e.g., strong community and culture, mentoring relationships and student advisories).</li> <li>Graduation requirements are more extensive than BVSD, and align closely with four-year college expectations.</li> <li>The curriculum extends into the summer months, and credit is given for experiential education.</li> <li>SA sets ambitious goals (e.g., 85% passing AP exams compared to 70% for BVSD overall).</li> <li>SA has high expectations for all students, requiring mastery (meets/exceeds) to receive course credit. Courses may be retaken until students meet the mastery expectations.</li> <li>SA provides many avenues for students to feel supported and known.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summit MS does not currently serve a diverse population; not clear if proposed approach will be successful with more disadvantaged students in high school setting.</li> <li>The application notes theories of educational practice, but lacks concrete examples and a selection process for evidence-based curricula.</li> <li>Full mastery is a laudable goal, but an intensive program, which requires classes in the summer -- with little “wobble room” to retake courses -- may lead some students to take longer than four years to graduate.</li> <li>Staffing projections do not account for the advising responsibilities of Summit teachers (e.g., 5 FTEs for Social Studies may be adequate to teach, but not to teach and advise).</li> </ul>	

Pros		Cons	
<b>Governance and Expansion</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summit has a history of successful self-governance.</li> <li>Summit’s expansion ideas qualified as a Top 50 finalist in the Project XQ competition.</li> <li>SA’s goals suggest that “achievement gaps” would be closed within a few years.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is not clear how the 95% participation on state assessments is defined (adjusted or unadjusted for parent excusals). Currently, the middle school has less than 95% without including parent excusals, and high schools tend to get higher rates of parent excusal.</li> </ul>	

## Appendix A: DAC Charter Application Review Committee

Name	School
Ruben Anguiano	Casey Middle, Pioneer Elementary
Amanda Brown	Community Montessori
Mary Faltynski	Boulder High
FP Fournier	Heatherwood Elementary
Chris Gosnell	Southern Hills Middle
Larsen Lemarbre	Peak to Peak K-12
Lisa Medler	Fairview High
Jilene Norman	Nederland Middle/Senior High
Nicole Rajpal	Foothill Elementary
Anna Siepmann	Fireside Elementary
Terri Wilson	University Hill Elementary

### Special thanks to:

- Alex Medler (external charter authorizing expert) who volunteered several evenings to guide the subcommittee through the ins and outs of the chartering process.
- Cindy Stevenson (BVSD superintendent) who was our liaison to the district during the application review process.
- Michelle Hernandez (Summit Middle School DAC member) who was our liaison to the Summit Academy application committee.