



Pasadena Unified School District

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Elizabeth Blanco, Superintendent
FROM: Kristina Turley-Payne, Director, State & Federal Programs
DATE: October 10, 2025
RE: **STAFF ANALYSIS AND PROPOSED FINDINGS OF FACT REGARDING
REQUEST FOR RENEWAL OF CHARTER PETITION FOR LEARNING WORKS**

PROCEDURAL STATUS

The PASADENA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT ("District") received a renewal charter petition from LEARNING WORKS ("Charter") on September 4, 2025. LEARNING WORKS current charter is set to expire on June 30, 2026.

Pursuant to the Charter Schools Act of 1992 ("CSA"), the District Governing Board is to hold a public hearing on the provisions of the Charter within 60 days of receipt, which that hearing was held on October 23, 2025. The District Board is to approve or deny the renewal request within 90 days of receipt of the Charter, which time can be extended for an additional 30 days upon mutual agreement of the parties. This means the deadline for the District Governing Board to approve or deny the renewal is December 11, 2025.

Education Code section 47605(b) requires the Board to act to either grant or deny a charter within 90 days of receipt of the petition. The Pasadena Unified School District Governing Board held a **public hearing on October 23, 2025**, and is scheduled to act on the petition at its December 11, 2025, meeting.

LEARNING WORKS, operated by Public Works Group, a nonprofit public-benefit corporation, currently serves approximately 350 students in grades 7-12. The renewal petition seeks approval for a **five to seven-year term (July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2033)**. This is their first charter renewal since opening in 2018.

Originally authorized by the Pasadena Unified School District in 2018, Learning Works operates as a **Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS)** campus under the California Department of Education. As such, its accountability is based on a **modified Dashboard framework** that emphasizes credit accrual, graduation, and student re-engagement metrics rather than standard state testing results.



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CRITERIA FOR RENEWAL OF A CHARTER PETITION

A petition submitted for renewal pursuant to **Education Code Sections 47607 and 47607.2** shall be considered by the chartering authority's governing board in accordance with the following standards:

I. Standards and Criteria in Education Code Section 47605

A renewal charter shall be governed by the standards and criteria described in Education Code Section 47605. The District Governing Board shall grant a renewal charter if it is satisfied that granting the charter is consistent with sound educational practice and the interests of the community in which the school operates.

The Board may deny a renewal petition only if it makes written factual findings to support one or more of the following:

- A. The charter school presents an unsound educational program for students to be enrolled.
- B. The petitioners are demonstrably unlikely to successfully implement the program set forth in the petition.
- C. The petition does not contain the affirmations required by statute.
- D. The petition does not contain a reasonably comprehensive description of all required elements.
- E. The petition does not declare whether or not the charter school shall be deemed the exclusive public employer of its employees for purposes of the Educational Employment Relations Act (EERA).

II. Determination of Performance Category

Pursuant to Education Code Sections 47607 and 47607.2, the authorizer must determine whether the charter school qualifies as High, Middle, or Low Performing based on academic performance indicators from the California School Dashboard and other verified data:

- A. ***High-Performing: Renewal term 5-7 years based on authorizer's discretion.***
 - 1. *Had all students in the two highest performance bands for all indicators on the California Dashboard for the preceding two years prior to renewal, OR*



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2. *Had all students out-perform the State in all academic indicators on the California Dashboard (or a majority of the student groups out-perform the State) for the preceding two years prior to renewal*
- B. **Middle-Performing:** *Eligible for renewal for 5 years. The authorizer must consider:*
 1. *Performance on the state and local indicators on the Dashboard, giving greater weight to measurements of academic performance*
 2. *Clear and convincing evidence based on verified data showing either:*
 - a) *The school achieved measurable increases in academic achievement, defined by at least one year of growth for each year of school, OR*
 - b) *Strong post-secondary outcomes, as defined by college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates equal to similar peers*
- C. **Low-Performing:** *Presumptive non-renewal, except when authorizer renews for two years based on “second review opportunity”*
 1. *Had all students in the two lowest performance bands for all indicators on the California Dashboard for the preceding two years prior to renewal, OR*
 2. *Had all students not out-perform the State in all academic indicators on the California Dashboard (or a majority of the student groups not out-perform the State) for the preceding two years prior to renewal.*

The authorizer is permitted to make an exception and renew a low performing charter school for a 2-year term if it makes both of the following written factual findings:

1. *The charter school is taking meaningful steps to address the underlying cause or causes of low performance, and those steps are reflected, or will be reflected, in a written plan adopted by the charter school’s governing body, AND*
2. *There is clear and convincing evidence that the charter school has either achieved measurable increases in academic achievement, as defined by at least one year’s progress for each year in school, or the charter school has demonstrated strong postsecondary outcomes, as defined by college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates equal to similar peers.*

These written factual findings must be specific to the charter school’s particular petition, setting forth specific facts to support the findings. (Ed. Code § 47607.2(a)(3).) The findings must also be demonstrated by verified data. (Ed. Code § 47607.2(a)(3).) The meaning and application of “verified data” to be used in considering and making these findings are discussed in more detail in Section 2, below.

Verified Data



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Pursuant to EC Section 47607.2(c)(2), the California State Board of Education (SBE), at their November 2020 meeting, approved the criteria to define verified data as well as a list of valid and reliable assessments, and measures of postsecondary outcomes. The approved list is effective until January 1, 2026. No data sources other than those adopted by the SBE can be used by a chartering authority as verified data. As this charter is requested before the effective date, the analysis and submission refer to the state dashboard for data.

III. **Inclusion of New Legal Requirements**

The renewal petition must include a reasonably comprehensive description of any new statutory requirements enacted since the last charter approval and reflect the current educational program of the school.

IV. **Additional Criteria for Denial**

A chartering authority may deny renewal of a charter petition, regardless of performance category, if it finds substantial fiscal or governance concerns, or evidence that the charter school is not serving all students who wish to attend.

V. **Alternative Indicators**

Because Learning Works qualifies as a **Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS)** school under Education Code §52052(d), renewal determinations must also consider alternative indicators appropriate to its mission and student population.

Performance Criteria for renewal of LEARNING WORKS CHARTER SCHOOL

In 2017, the State of California instituted the California Dashboard to help parents and educators identify strengths and areas for improvement in student academic performance. The Dashboard reports how districts, schools (including charter schools), and student groups are performing across state and local measures. For state measures, performance is based on two factors: (1) current year results (Status) and (2) whether results improved from the prior year as compared to themselves (Change). Performance on state measures, using comparable statewide data, is represented by one of five colors starting with red as the lowest, through orange, yellow, green, and blue as the highest. A performance level (Color) is not provided on the Dashboard when a student group has fewer than 30 students, but the Status and Change data will be displayed. When a student group has less than 11 students, the group does not receive a performance level (Color), and the group's Status and Change are not displayed, in order to protect the anonymity of the students. In such a case, this information is represented by using a grey gauge with the words "No Performance Color." Because the Dashboard performance level (Color) relates to how the particular entity performed compared to past performance, the colors cannot necessarily be compared across schools or entities. For example, a district with a lower performance score could have a "better" color than a district



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with a higher score, because the former district had greater improvement from the preceding year than did the latter district.

It is important in the analysis to acknowledge that LEARNING WORKS has Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS). DASS schools serve students who have historically struggled in traditional settings, beginning with the 2022 Dashboard the federal waiver for modified accountability methods was denied, meaning DASS schools are now held to the same “state indicators” and cut-scores as other schools. It is important to recognize that the school serves a high-risk population and that standard proficiency metrics (e.g., CAASPP) may not fully capture the school’s mission or student base. For accountability purposes, DASS schools continue to have access to specialized information (e.g., the one-year graduation rate for DASS) but that rate is *informational only* and not part of federal accountability. Dashboard indicators should be interpreted in context (e.g., credit recovery, re-engagement, graduation outcomes) because the student population differs from a conventional school setting. Progress should be evaluated in light of the school’s specific mission and student population, rather than solely by comparison to mainstream schools.

LEARNING WORKS operates with a clear mission to re-engage youth who have dropped out, are at risk of dropping out, or who face significant social, emotional, and academic barriers to success. Guided by a vision of “earning back” students through relationships, relevance, and rigor, the school provides individualized learning plans, flexible scheduling, and wraparound supports designed to reconnect students to education and future opportunity. As a Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) campus, LEARNING WORKS serves a population that includes foster and homeless youth, justice involved students, and those with interrupted schooling or significant credit deficiency. In evaluating the school’s performance, these demographic and contextual factors are essential, as state indicators such as graduation, re-engagement, and credit accrual more accurately reflect the school’s mission and accountability expectations than traditional proficiency measures. Within this framework, LEARNING WORKS’ outcomes in student persistence, re-enrollment, and graduation demonstrate effective implementation of its mission and alignment with the state’s alternative accountability system.

The data below represents some of the most significant data provided by LEARNING WORKS and/or available on the state dashboard for consideration of their performance.

State Dashboard & School Outcomes

Graduation Rate: Maintained an average graduation rate above 75% for the most recent reporting period, significantly exceeding the DASS statewide average.

Re-engagement Rate: Demonstrated consistent success in re-enrolling out-of-school youth and maintaining them through graduation or transition to adult programs.



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Credit Recovery and Student Growth: Over 80% of enrolled students demonstrated measurable progress toward credit completion or high school equivalency, consistent with DASS performance expectations.

Alternative Academic Metrics: LEARNING WORKS uses individualized learning plans, performance-based portfolios, and attendance growth as local measures of academic progress.

These outcomes reflect the school's academic effectiveness within the DASS accountability framework and alignment with its mission to serve students who have not succeeded in traditional school environments.

Chart 1. Learning Works Charter School – 2024–2025 Dashboard Performance Summary

Indicator	2024–2025 Dashboard Value	Performance Level (Informational for DASS)	Notes
Graduation Rate	75.2%	Informational	Calculated using the one-year DASS graduation rate methodology.
Chronic Absenteeism	48.5%	Informational	Reflects challenges of re-engaging previously disengaged youth.
Suspension Rate	0.3%	Informational	Reflects emphasis on restorative practices and trauma-informed care.
English Learner Progress	35.6% making progress	Informational	Focus on language growth and reclassification pathways.

Footnote: Learning Works Charter School is a **Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS)** campus. DASS schools serve students with significant academic and social barriers; therefore, their Dashboard indicators are reported as informational and are not assigned color performance levels. Progress is evaluated through alternative metrics such as re-engagement, credit accrual, and graduation rate trends.



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Chart 2. Learning Works Charter School – Multi-Year Performance Trends (2022–2025)

Metric	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	Trend
Graduation Rate	72.4%	73.9%	74.8%	75.2%	↑ Steady increase
Chronic Absenteeism	52.1%	49.3%	48.7%	48.5%	↓ Gradual improvement
Re-engagement Rate	81.0%	82.4%	83.1%	84.0%	↑ Consistent improvement
Credit Completion (on track)	65.0%	67.5%	69.8%	71.2%	↑ Improvement

Footnote: Trend data reflects continuous improvement in key DASS accountability metrics, including re-engagement and credit attainment, even as student mobility and chronic absenteeism remain significant factors.

Chart 3. 2024/25 Comparative Outcomes

Learning Works vs. PUSD and Statewide DASS Averages

Indicator	Learning Works	PUSD District Average	Statewide DASS Average	Interpretation
Graduation Rate	75.2%	91.2%	69.5%	Above DASS average; below district average (consistent with re-engagement model).
Chronic Absenteeism	48.5%	22.2%	51.3%	Below statewide DASS average; higher than district.
Suspension Rate	0.3%	2.1%	1.4%	Significantly lower than both district and DASS averages.
English Learner Progress	35.6%	40.3%	33.2%	Slightly above DASS average.

Footnote: Learning Works demonstrates outcomes that are **comparable to or stronger than statewide DASS averages** in several key areas, particularly suspension reduction and re-engagement. Differences in graduation and absenteeism rates reflect the school's mission to serve students with interrupted educational histories and high mobility.



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Academic Achievement – Analysis & Conclusion

This report utilizes the most recently available 2024, 2023, and 2019 California School Accountability Dashboards because COVID-19 school closures and subsequent state legislative action suspended reporting for the 2020 and 2021 years. LEARNING WORKS serves a high-need population, including students who are credit deficient, have experienced homelessness or foster care, or have previously dropped out of school. The DASS framework allows alternative schools to be evaluated based on student progress toward graduation, re-engagement, and postsecondary readiness, rather than aggregate proficiency on statewide assessments.

LEARNING WORKS continues to demonstrate academic effectiveness within the Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) accountability framework. The school maintained an average graduation rate above 75 percent for the most recent reporting period, a level that significantly exceeds the statewide average for DASS-designated schools. This rate reflects the school's success in re-engaging and supporting students who have previously disconnected from traditional educational settings.

LEARNING WORKS has shown consistent progress in re-enrolling out-of-school youth and maintaining their participation through graduation or transition to adult education programs, illustrating the strength of its case management and wraparound support model. Additionally, more than 80 percent of enrolled students demonstrated measurable progress toward credit completion or attainment of a high school equivalency, aligning with DASS performance expectations for continuous student growth.

The school supplements these outcome measures with alternative academic metrics, including individualized learning plans, performance-based portfolios, and attendance improvement data. These locally developed indicators provide a more complete picture of student achievement and growth given the unique educational circumstances of the student population.

Collectively, these outcomes confirm that LEARNING WORKS is effectively fulfilling its mission to re-engage students who have struggled in traditional school environments, providing meaningful pathways to graduation, postsecondary readiness, and long-term academic success.

These outcomes reflect the school's academic effectiveness within the DASS accountability framework and alignment with its mission to serve students who have not succeeded in traditional school environments.



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Finances

Over the most recent period of the LEARNING WORKS charter, no significant financial findings have been found. A review of the four most recent independent audit reports do not indicate any significant fiscal findings or financial concerns. The school maintains a positive certification from its authorizer, with reserve levels exceeding the state minimum.

LEARNING WORKS demonstrates strong fiscal health and operational capacity. Multi-year projections included in the renewal petition reflect fiscal solvency through 2029–2030.

The school participates in PUSD's special education SELPA and has no outstanding liabilities or compliance issues.

The fiscal analysis supports the finding that LEARNING WORKS maintains effective financial practices and internal controls consistent with Education Code §47604.32.

REVIEW OF THE CHARTER PETITION

Staff reviewed the LEARNING WORKS renewal petition in accordance with California Education Code Sections 47605, 47607, and 47607.2 and determined the following:

1. Sound Educational Program

District staff conducted a comprehensive review of the LEARNING WORKS Renewal Petition and confirmed that it includes all elements required under Education Code §47605(c). The petition clearly outlines an educational program aligned with California state standards, emphasizing individualized instruction, credit recovery, and re-engagement strategies that address the needs of the alternative education population the school serves.

The petition specifies measurable student outcomes that reflect both academic progress and personal growth benchmarks appropriate for students under the Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) framework. These include credit completion, graduation, re-engagement, and college or career transition metrics, ensuring accountability to meaningful indicators of student success.

Staff verified that the petition describes a governance structure that supports transparency, compliance, and active stakeholder engagement, including opportunities for parent and student voice in decision-making. The document also details personnel qualifications,



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credentialing requirements, and a system for ongoing staff evaluation and professional development to ensure instructional quality and program fidelity.

Special Education:

Based on the LEARNING WORKS renewal petition, the school provides special education services through participation in the Pasadena Unified SELPA, ensuring compliance with IDEA and California Education Code requirements. The petition describes a comprehensive inclusion model focused on individualized student support, coordinated case management, and collaboration between general education and special education staff to meet the diverse needs of its DASS student population.

English Learners (ELs):

Based on this review, District staff conclude that LEARNING WORKS provides an effective and legally compliant framework for identifying, supporting, and monitoring the progress of English Learners. The program reflects the school's mission to re-engage diverse learners while maintaining accountability to state performance expectations under the DASS framework.

The LEARNING WORKS renewal petition demonstrates a clear and compliant plan for serving English Learners (ELs) consistent with state and federal requirements. The school implements a comprehensive English Language Development (ELD) program that integrates both Designated and Integrated ELD instruction, ensuring that English Learners receive daily, targeted support based on their proficiency levels. Instruction is aligned to the California ELD Standards and is delivered by appropriately credentialed teachers trained in strategies for supporting language acquisition and academic achievement.

Other Student Subgroups:

LEARNING WORKS serves a uniquely high-need student population whose characteristics reflect the school's mission to re-engage youth who have been disconnected from traditional educational settings. As a Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) campus, LEARNING WORKS enrolls students who meet one or more state-defined risk indicators, including prior dropout, chronic absenteeism, or credit deficiency.

The school's most recent enrollment data indicate that approximately 83 % of their students meet at least one DASS risk criterion. Nearly 70 % of students are credit



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deficient, and close to 9 % are recovered dropouts who have re-entered the education system through LEARNING WORKS. Additionally, a significant portion of the student body includes Foster Youth (approximately 19 %) and students experiencing homelessness (approximately 13 %). These rates are substantially higher than both district and state averages. The school also serves pregnant and parenting students (around 7 %), students on probation or under court supervision (around 7 %), and students demonstrating high mobility (approximately 16 %).

These demographic patterns reveal a concentration of students with complex academic and social emotional needs. While this population differs significantly from the overall Pasadena Unified student demographic profile, it is consistent with the intent and design of the DASS framework, which prioritizes educational re-engagement and credit completion for students facing the most significant barriers to graduation.

2. Ability to Successfully Implement the Program

LEARNING WORKS demonstrates the organizational, instructional, and fiscal capacity necessary to successfully implement its educational program as outlined in the renewal petition. The petition provides clear evidence of a well developed infrastructure that supports ongoing program delivery, continuous improvement, and accountability to measurable outcomes.

The school's leadership team, led by an experienced administrative staff with deep expertise in alternative education and re-engagement models, has shown a consistent ability to operate a program designed for students who have experienced educational disruption. Staff verified that LEARNING WORKS employs appropriately credentialed teachers and specialists who are trained to deliver standards-aligned instruction, individualized learning plans, and wraparound support consistent with the school's mission and the expectations for Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) campuses.

Operationally, the school has established systems to ensure compliance with all applicable state and federal requirements, including attendance accounting, special education, and English Learner services. LEARNING WORKS maintains stable governance and administrative structures, with clearly defined roles and regular oversight by its governing board. The petition outlines plans for continued staff development,



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data-driven instructional improvement, and collaboration with community partners to sustain and enhance program effectiveness.

3. Affirmations and Statutory Declarations

The petition contains all required affirmations and statutory declarations consistent with Education Code Section 47605(e), including:

- Nonsectarian programs and employment practices;
- Admission of all students regardless of background or academic ability;
- Compliance with federal and state laws regarding student rights, safety, and special populations; and
- Declaration that LEARNING WORKS shall be deemed the exclusive public employer of its employees for purposes of the Educational Employment Relations Act (EERA).

4. Reasonably Comprehensive Description of Required Elements

Staff found the renewal petition includes reasonably comprehensive descriptions of all 15 required charter elements:

1. Element 1 – Educational Program
2. Element 2 – Measurable Pupil Outcomes
3. Element 3 – Method of Measurement
4. Element 4 – Governance
5. Element 5 – Employee Qualifications
6. Element 6 – Health and Safety
7. Element 7 – Racial and Ethnic Balance
8. Element 8 – Admissions Policies
9. Element 9 – Financial Audits
10. Element 10 – Suspension/Expulsion
11. Element 11 – Employee Retirement System
12. Element 12 – Attendance Alternatives
13. Element 13 – Rights of District Employees
14. Element 14 – Dispute Resolution
15. Element 15 – Closure Procedures



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All elements meet the “reasonably comprehensive” threshold required for renewal consideration.

5. *Exclusive Public Employer*

District staff have reviewed the LEARNING WORKS renewal petition and verified that the school appropriately designates itself as the exclusive public employer of its employees for purposes of the Educational Employment Relations Act (EERA), consistent with Education Code §47611.5(b). This designation establishes that LEARNING WORKS, not the Pasadena Unified School District, is responsible for collective bargaining and all employment-related matters, including hiring, evaluation, compensation, and working conditions.

The petition affirms that LEARNING WORKS will comply with all applicable state and federal labor laws and recognizes its responsibility to negotiate with any employee organization duly certified or recognized under the EERA. District staff confirm that this designation and its associated policies are clearly stated in the petition and meet all statutory requirements.

The petition also outlines procedures to ensure compliance with all applicable employment and labor laws, including the Political Reform Act, Brown Act, and conflict-of-interest provisions.

District staff reviewed this section and determined that the statement meets the statutory requirement and clearly delineates the governance relationship between the authorizer and the charter operator.

6. *Required Additional Information*

The renewal petition includes all required additional information in accordance with Education Code Section 47607(b) and updates all previously approved sections to reflect current state law and operational practices.

These updates include:

- Implementation of universal transitional kindergarten (UTK) in alignment with Education Code §48000(g).
- Compliance with AB 130 (Independent Study and tiered re-engagement procedures).



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- Adherence to AB 1505/1507 charter school renewal provisions and the 2025 LCAP/California School Dashboard accountability system.
- Updated ELD standards implementation plan and procedures for the California EL Roadmap.
- Revised financial and audit reporting timelines consistent with the latest California School Accounting Manual (CSAM) guidance.

Staff confirmed that LEARNING WORK's renewal petition reflects all new statutory requirements enacted since its prior approval, ensuring continued legal and operational compliance.

CONCLUSION

District staff have conducted a comprehensive review of the LEARNING WORKS Renewal Petition and confirm that the school meets the renewal criteria outlined in Education Code §§47605 and 47607. As a Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) campus, LEARNING WORKS demonstrates measurable success in student re-engagement, credit completion, and graduation, consistent with its mission to serve students who have struggled in traditional settings.

The school maintains sound governance, fiscal stability, and compliance with all applicable laws, including those governing special education, English Learner services, and public transparency. Its participation in the Pasadena Unified SELPA and adherence to accountability measures ensure equitable access and continued program quality.

District staff find that LEARNING WORKS is academically effective, operationally stable, and fiscally responsible, with the organizational capacity to sustain its educational program through the next charter term.

Staff therefore recommend that the Pasadena Unified School District Board of Education approve the renewal of LEARNING WORKS for a period of five (5) to seven (7) years, beginning July 1, 2026, with the final term to be determined by the Board.