# SCHOOL REPLICATION APPLICATION

*Submitted by:*

## South Carolina for Online Education, Inc., Lowcountry Connections Academy

*Submitted to:*

## Charter Institute at Erskine

## October 30, 2020

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# Executive Summary

## Mission

The mission of Lowcountry Connections Academy (LCCA) is to help students maximize their potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program, supported by teachers and Learning Coaches.

## Educational Need for Lowcountry Connections Academy and Anticipated Student Population

South Carolina Connections Academy (SCCA) opened in 2008 under the sponsorship of the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD) and has been the leading virtual public charter school in the state for many years. SCCA recently applied and was approved to transfer authorizers and now partners with the Charter Institute at Erskine ("the Institute"). SCCA is a pioneering virtual public charter school whose mission is to ensure learning for all: to provide personalized education for students to master the knowledge and problem solving skills needed to achieve their college and career goals. In partnership with parents and families, SCCA reaches students for whom this innovative virtual approach provides the best pathway to school success. The school's belief is that all students can thrive through a standards-aligned, individualized learning program that combines the best in virtual education with unique technology-based teacher productivity tools and very real connections among students, family, teachers, and the community.

As a school replication model, LCCA will build off the success of SCCA and offer an innovative virtual public charter school, meet all statutory requirements, and address family demand within South Carolina to serve students where a full-time online education is the best educational fit for their unique needs. SCCA and LCCA will complement each other, providing the same core educational model with proven results while offering their own regional identity and school culture.

There is strong demand and educational need from families in South Carolina who desire a full-time virtual school using Connections Education LLC dba Pearson Online & Blended Learning's (referred to in this application as OBL) Connections Academy school model. LCCA's Charter Committee was formed by SCCA board members who saw a demonstrated need to increase the opportunities for South Carolina students to experience a Connections Academy education through the formation of LCCA while maintaining reasonable growth at SCCA. Given the impact and disruption of COVID-19 on South Carolina families, LCCA will provide students the ability to attend a high quality virtual school that will not be interrupted by the pandemic while also giving families the flexibility as their family circumstances may shift. Through its partnership with OBL as its Educational Services Provider (ESP), LCCA is dedicated to providing an exceptional, full-time virtual option to children of all backgrounds.

Students whose instructional needs will be effectively met by LCCA include students whose families seek direct involvement in their education; students who are medically homebound due to illness or disability; exceptional students who are far ahead of or far behind their peers in school; students pursuing artistic or athletic careers; students who require a flexible school schedule; students in group homes or institutions; students who have been bullied; and students at risk of academic failure, who may particularly benefit from intensive, personalized instruction. It is also to be anticipated that in light of COVID-19, students and families may be interested in additional virtual school options.

## Education Plan and School Design

Students will benefit from a top-quality, South Carolina State Department of Education (SCDE)-approved curriculum that meets all South Carolina Standards. South Carolina-credentialed teachers who are highly trained in online learning will be a key part of the program. Teachers will be in regular contact with students via OBL's closed-system email, telephone, LiveLesson® sessions, discussion boards, message boards, and other channels. Teachers instruct, motivate, monitor and evaluate student progress, personalize the curriculum, intervene as needed to ensure student success, lead field trips, and clarify the curriculum for the students.

## School Culture

More than just online courses, LCCA will provide a full-time school experience with a virtual learning community that connects students, teachers, and families through unique technology tools as well as face-to-face interaction when it is safe to resume these activities. LCCA is a whole-school experience for its students with academic, behavioral, emotional, and career support. Students will participate in clubs, activities, and electives to complete the full-school experience. Students will participate in enriching in-person community activities and field trips to round out the comprehensive learning experience. LCCA is aware that restrictions on face-to-face interactions may be in place due to COVID-19 and will follow state and local guidelines until these restrictions are lifted.

## Applicant Team's Capacity to Successfully Open and Operate LCCA

The Charter Committee[1], the applicant team, intends to transition to the Governing Board upon approval of the virtual public charter school application and is described in detail in the Governing Board section of this application. Once approved, the Board will be capable of overseeing the comprehensive learning experiences to all its students as a virtual public charter school. The Board will operate as a non-profit entity. The Board will have real and substantial authority over educational decisions, the operations of the school, and teaching staff. Similar to SCCA, the Charter Committee and Board members are parents, educators, and business and community leaders who are committed to opening an innovative virtual public charter school for students in grades K-12 in South Carolina. Current Charter Committee members have unique skills and expertise in education, technology, outreach, and finance. These qualifications will help ensure the success of LCCA and the effective representation of key stakeholders.

## Partnership with a Virtual Provider

The members of the Charter Committee are dedicated to providing a quality educational option for students across South Carolina. In order to do so, we need to leverage the experience, expertise, and lessons learned of a qualified, proven partner and build off of the successful partnership formed at SCCA.

The Charter Committee has chosen to partner with OBL because of its dedication to providing high quality professional educational services to children of all backgrounds and, more specifically, at SCCA. The Charter Committee will benefit from OBL's 19 years of experience being a high-quality ESP. OBL can leverage its significant resources to the benefit of the school. This partnership, along with the collegial

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[1] According to South Carolina Code of Laws Section 59-40-60, the Charter Committee will be the Charter Committee, Applicant Group, and, eventually, the initial Governing Board. This application will refer to the group as Charter Committee. https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t59c040.php

relationship with SCCA, will drive both schools to set new standards of excellence in the virtual school arena and will positively impact student learning.

The Charter Committee has chosen OBL for the benefit of a smooth school start up, quality academic materials for students, and national best practices and guidance along with the existing positive relationship experienced at SCCA. With the support of OBL, SCCA and Connections Academies across the nation have proven acceptance of students to highly regarded colleges and universities, strong independent governing boards who make decisions about the school, and passionate testimonials from families about their successful experiences. OBL will be a critical partner in achieving the school's mission, with strong oversight by the Charter Committee and eventual Governing Board, to empower children with knowledge, skills, and character traits to be successful in their education through an engaging, personalized learning experience at the full-time virtual school.

# 1. Evidence of Need, Demand, and Community Support

## A. A description of your target student population. This should address size, grades, composition, and academic needs.

As stated in our mission, LCCA will serve Tri-County area students as well as students across the state that are eligible to enroll under South Carolina law including students who are underserved or not being served within the larger community. LCCA will serve general education students, students with special needs, at-risk students, gifted students, and English language learners.

Through this unique opportunity, LCCA is dedicated to providing a high quality, full-time virtual public school option to children of all backgrounds. LCCA will be tailor-made for a diverse array of students who benefit from a quality alternative to the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom.

LCCA will serve students in grades K-12 with an anticipated enrollment size of 1,500 students in Year One. LCCA anticipates serving families and students who are seeking a better fit for their academic needs, including:

- Children in rural communities who lack access to challenging classes and Advanced Placement® (AP)/Honors courses within their current existing public school options;

- Students whose families seek direct involvement in their education;

- Students who are medically homebound due to illness or disability;

- Students who are immunocompromised and are concerned about health conditions outside of the home environment;

- Exceptional students who are far ahead of or far behind their peers in school;

- Students pursuing artistic or athletic careers or career development opportunities requiring a flexible schedule;

- Students who require a flexible school schedule;

- Students with special needs;

- Students who have been bullied;

- Students at risk of academic failure, who may particularly benefit from intensive, personalized instruction and intervention;

- Students who desire a comprehensive, robust full-time virtual school experience; and

- Students who, due to fear and anxiety caused by COVID-19, require a safe, healthy environment in which to learn.

LCCA will partner with OBL's Connections Academy model. The top 10 reasons why families choose to enroll at a Connections Academy, including SCCA, are listed in Figure 1.

*Figure 1. Top 10 Reasons Parents Choose Connections Academy*

# Top 10 Reasons
## Parents Choose Connections Academy

**39**% Want a **FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE**

Want a **SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT** **31**%

**25**% Experienced **BULLYING** in their previous school

Want to avoid or remove **NEGATIVE PEER PRESSURE** **21**%

**19**% Have children who expressed interest in **ONLINE SCHOOL**

Want more **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT** in their child's education **19**%

**16**% Have a child who was **STRUGGLING ACADEMICALLY**

Want more **HELP AND ATTENTION** from teachers **15**%

**11**% Live in an area where online learning **would be a better fit**

Have a child with **HEALTH CONCERNS** **11**%

**B. Provide evidence that an adequate number of parents or guardians with students eligible to attend the proposed school pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. 59-40-50 support the formation of the charter school and justify the projected per pupil allocation in the application budget. You must include a table indicating interest documented by grade level or non-graded education groupings for the first year of operation.**

Interest in a virtual public charter school has been captured and provided by grade level. It is important to keep in mind that COVID-19 has resulted in increased interest in virtual schools and the leads captured for LCCA reflect this uptick. While LCCA does not expect all leads to apply or enroll, the numbers justify the formation of a replication school. Table 1 shows the general leads captured in South Carolina since January 1, 2017. Leads captured are per grade level; it is possible that some families have more than one child and indicate interest in more than one grade but nonetheless, the demand remains substantial.

*Table 1. Leads Captured by Grade Level*

| Grade Level | Number of Leads Captured |
|---|---|
| Kindergarten | 3,012 |
| 1st Grade | 1,488 |
| 2nd Grade | 1,374 |
| 3rd Grade | 1,439 |
| 4th Grade | 1,557 |
| 5th Grade | 1,788 |
| 6th Grade | 2,760 |
| 7th Grade | 3,157 |
| 8th Grade | 3,240 |
| 9th Grade | 3,742 |
| 10th Grade | 3,573 |
| 11th Grade | 2,913 |
| 12th Grade | 2,524 |
| Multiple Grades Selected | 17,146 |
| Not Specified/General Interest | 15,979 |
| **Total Leads Captured** | **65,962** |

The leads captured across the state of South Carolina have also been compiled by county and presented in a heat map, shown below as Figure 2. This map illustrates that interest in a virtual public charter school is state- wide.

*Figure 2. Leads Captured by County across South Carolina*
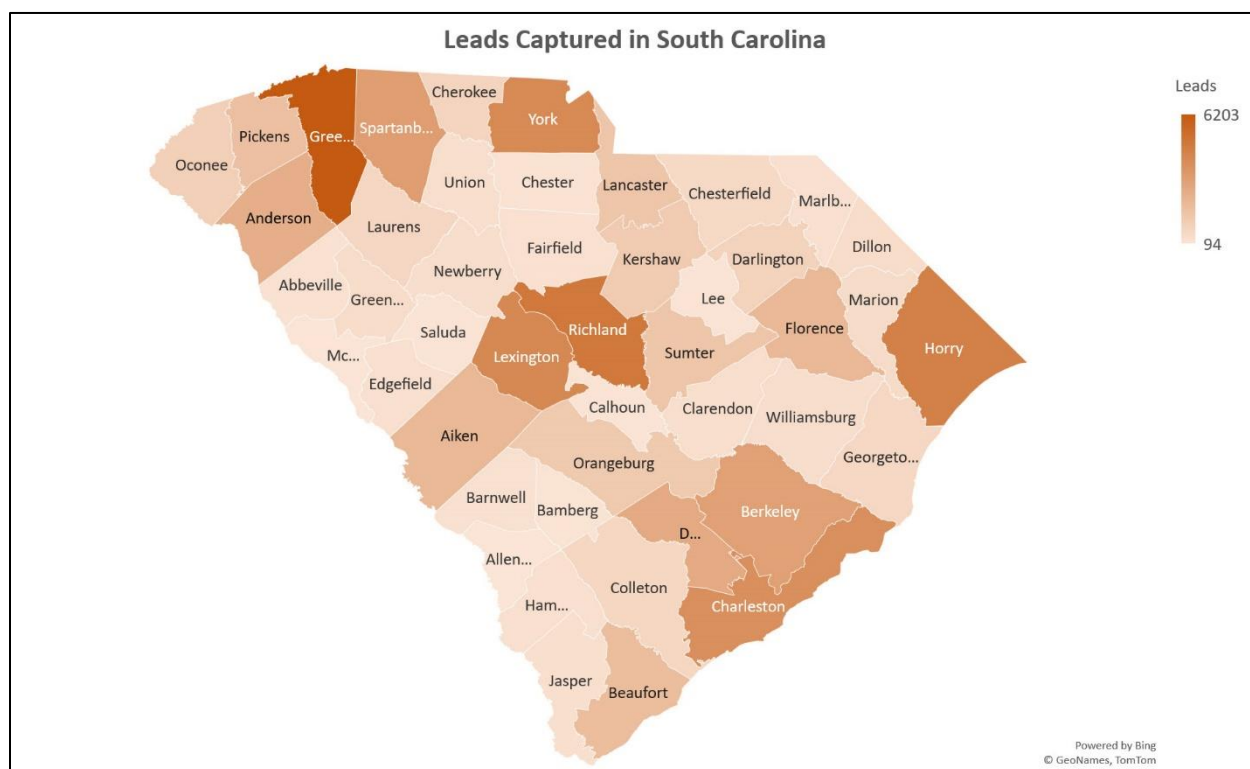


In addition to these leads, there are a number of students who submitted an enrollment application to SCCA leading up to the beginning of the 2020-21 school year. Applications for enrollment at SCCA were much higher than initially anticipated, likely due to COVID-19 and the resulting interest in virtual education opportunities. Unfortunately, many families began the application process but were unable to enroll due to SCCA's necessary enrollment limits to maintain responsible growth. These students were placed on a waitlist. Table 2 lists the numbers of students, by grade level, who were on the waitlist as of August 21, 2020. Many of these students will have the opportunity to attend LCCA, which will have the same core educational model as SCCA, if approved by the Institute.

*Table 2. Waitlisted Students at SCCA by Grade Level*

| Grade Level | Number of Students on Waitlist |
|---|---|
| Kindergarten | 269 |
| 1st Grade | 233 |
| 2nd Grade | 217 |
| 3rd Grade | 265 |
| 4th Grade | 266 |
| 5th Grade | 255 |
| 6th Grade | 270 |
| 7th Grade | 230 |

| Grade Level | Number of Students on Waitlist |
|---|---|
| 8th Grade | 216 |
| 9th Grade | 165 |
| 10th Grade | 121 |
| 11th Grade | 41 |
| 12th Grade | 5 |
| **Total** | **2,553** |

Nearly 17% of students on the waitlist, or approximately 434 students, reside in the Tri-County area. These students would benefit from having a full-time virtual public charter school in their area, and these statistics validate LCCA's interest in establishing a facility location in this region.

At the time of printing this application, there are 109 members in LCCA's Facebook group. Additionally, 102 families have submitted interest forms with 100 percent of them indicating they are interested in attending LCCA once it is approved as a virtual public charter school.

LCCA will follow all regulations pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 59-40-50, especially regarding admitting all children eligible to attend. Enrollment at LCCA will be open to any eligible public-school student in South Carolina. The school will not discriminate in its admissions policies or practices based on geography, intellectual or athletic ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, status as a student with a disability, test scores, etc.

**C. Explain the plan for student recruitment and marketing that will provide equal access to interested students and families. Include specifics such as the types of marketing that will be used, partners who will be engaged, and the number of families who will be reached. Describe how the plan will reach a diverse group of families.**

LCCA will utilize multiple marketing channels to attract a number of families and a sufficient pool of eligible students to meet its enrollment targets, including diverse ethnicities as well as special needs students throughout South Carolina. The marketing mix will include tactics such as national advertising, online advertising, public relations, and other paid media activities covering all geographies as well as reaching out to students and families in the state. Marketing and outreach strategy and tactics may shift throughout the year to maximize the school's awareness. LCCA intends to attract demographics that are reflective of South Carolina.

Outreach includes broad reach media channels covering diverse geographies in South Carolina, as well as localized tactics.

**Website:** LCCA will maintain a website that contains information about the school, its approach, curriculum, diverse school community, and answers to some of our most frequently asked questions. The website will also include enrollment information and procedures, information sessions schedules, and other useful tools for prospective students and their families.

**National advertising:** For maximum impact in reaching interested families, a creative approach will provide national cable television advertising, which will cover every major market in South Carolina that positions Connections Academy schools as the quality virtual public school options in the state.

**Digital media**: LCCA will be linked to leading Internet search engines with local reference capability to help South Carolina families looking for a virtual school option to find this high-quality school. In addition, LCCA will benefit from Facebook, Twitter, and other social media campaigns.

**Media outreach:** LCCA will make use of paid media, broadcast announcements, and on the Internet. LCCA will also leverage non-paid/earned media, primarily to shape public opinion, raise awareness of the school and share family/school news.

**Direct mail:** LCCA will execute direct mail campaigns announcing the school to families with students throughout South Carolina. In a typical mailing, a postcard is sent out encouraging parents to visit the website and/or contact the call center.  LCCA may also use e-mail to supplement or replace its physical mail campaign.

**Information sessions:** During the application process, LCCA hosted online information sessions to help generate awareness and support for the school. Assuming LCCA's application is approved, LCCA will then host multiple in-person (as allowed by state health guidelines) and/or online information sessions to assure that families from a variety of communities are able to attend. Online information sessions allow families to attend the session from home via their computers. LCCA educates families about the school and provides information, including its curriculum, teaching methods, technology resources and testing requirements.

**Referrals/word of mouth:** As LCCA grows, it anticipates that an increasing number of families who come to the school enroll due to positive feedback received from their friends, community members, traditional school leaders and family.

**Telephone/e-mail information service**: LCCA will launch and maintain a toll-free information line and an e-mail information service to answer parents' questions prior to and during the enrollment process.

**D. Discuss the type(s) of outreach that has been conducted thus far to make the student population and their families aware of the proposed charter school and the outcomes of this outreach.**

In Spring 2020, COVID-19 resulted in wide-scale elimination of social gatherings. The Charter Committee is committed to conducting safe outreach opportunities for LCCA until it is safe to resume in-person activities.

A Facebook group has been initiated for LCCA to provide a space for interested families to gather, share information, and discuss the proposed school: https://www.facebook.com/groups/LowcountryConnectionsAcademy/.

SCCA students and families who are currently on the school's waitlist have been invited to join this group for up-to-date information on LCCA. The Charter Committee, with assistance from OBL, hosted scheduled, online information sessions to provide additional details, answer questions, and interact with families throughout the year leading up to the application submission. These events were held at different times to accommodate the schedules and availability of potential families and students.

Information sessions were hosted at the following dates and times:

- Wednesday, September 9, 2020, at 12:30pm EDT;

- Monday, September 14, 2020, at 9:30am EDT;

- Wednesday, September 16, 2020, at 12pm EDT;

- Monday, September 21, 2020, at 12pm EDT;

- Tuesday, September 22, 2020, at 4pm EDT;

- Wednesday, September 30, 2020, at 9:30am EDT;

- Monday, October 5, 2020, at 4pm EDT;

- Wednesday, October 7, 2020, at 12pm EDT;

- Monday, October 19, 2020, at 12pm EDT; and

- Tuesday, October 27, 2020, at 9:30am EDT.

## E. Provide information on community members, parents, and leaders who publicly support the replication and their role in the development or planning.

SCCA is fortunate to have had enriching educational experiences with organizations across the state including the EdVenture Museum and the Coastal Discovery Museum. These organizations have been supportive of SCCA and have expressed their support for the formation of LCCA as well.

While engaging with families at events, the Charter Committee witnessed strong interest in virtual schooling expressed by parents and students throughout South Carolina. In addition, the Committee has received several letters of support from businesses and organizations across the state, including the Coastal Discovery Museum, EdVenture Children's Museum, and the Public Charter School Alliance of South Carolina, and several local area delegates, including Representative Bennett, Representative Davis, and Representative Erickson. Copies of these letters are included in Appendix I.

As detailed in this application, LCCA anticipates serving families and students who are seeking a better fit for their educational needs. For these families and countless others, virtual school is an option that provides a unique learning environment that can eliminate the physical and social barriers that prevent students from learning. Parents and students demand greater flexibility and a quality option for their educational experience. Similar to SCCA, LCCA intends to provide such an option.

## F. Discuss specifically what has been done to assess and build parent and community demand for the additional school(s).

As shown earlier in Table 1, families of over 65,000 students across South Carolina have expressed interest in a statewide virtual public charter school that follows the Connections Academy model. Ongoing marketing efforts will continue to build parent and community interest.

Additionally, many families who expressed interest in SCCA and, due to enrollment limitations, were assigned to SCCA's waitlist (shown previously in Table 2). These families have been contacted via email, with SCCA's permission, and invited to join the LCCA Facebook group to stay up-to-date with information on the school's formation. To date, the LCCA Facebook group has 109 members, growing steadily, and 102 families have submitted interest forms.

In addition to the online information sessions LCCA has already held, the Charter Committee, supported by OBL, will continue to engage with families with events and outreach leading up to the opening of

enrollment in early 2021. The school has received several letters of community support from educational and business organizations, as well as public officials, as outlined in Appendix I, throughout South Carolina.

## G. Explain the plan to engage parents and the community in the life of the school (above and beyond governance opportunities).

### Parent Involvement

At LCCA, parents can be deeply involved with the school and their students' education. As such, communication with parents and Learning Coaches (a parent, family member, or qualified adult designated by the parent and/or guardian who is able to have direct involvement in the student's learning) will be frequent and purposeful throughout the school year. Teachers will communicate students' formative and summative progress to Learning Coaches. Communication will serve three main objectives: 1) to help the teacher monitor the student's progress, 2) to keep parents "in the loop" with current school happenings and their child's performance, and 3) to help the school grow and improve from parent feedback.

The school will regularly distribute information through school newsletters, the platform home page, and "Must Read" e-mail messages to ensure parents are informed. Communication will continually make students and best practices stronger and more effective. All communication between teachers and parents or students will be documented in the log section of the platform, which allows for detailed tracking of interactions as well as seamless support for students and their families from multiple individuals. The school will send a newsletter to parents as well. *Learning Coach Link*, a communication provided through Learning Coach Support, is also sent monthly to Learning Coaches and guardians via e-mail message. In addition, the school will use its website to communicate relevant, up-to-date information to parents, students, and the community.

Families are key components of supporting the mission of LCCA. Through formal and informal channels from field trips to surveys, families will have an avenue to provide feedback and input. This ensures that the school is on a cycle of continuous school improvement and that all stakeholders are valued. Families may participate in LCCA in many ways, including:

- **Parent Representation and Input on the Board**: The Charter Committee, and later the Governing Board, will encourage parent(s) to serve on the school board and communicate opportunities during each election cycle. The LCCA Board members will be appointed with staggered terms and, to meet state law requirements, at least 50% of the Board will be elected every two years. Parents will have the opportunity to vote for Board members in these elections.

- **Public Comment:** Parents may make public comments at board meetings.

- **Closed Facebook Groups:** Families can join a closed Facebook Group in their region in order to plan events among themselves, get advice from other families and generally create comradery among the parents.

- **Club ORANGE:** Parents can also join Club ORANGE, an exciting club that will bring together parents who reach out to their local communities to spread the word about LCCA and provide support and encouragement to new and prospective students and parents.

- **Field Trips:** Parents attend and participate in field trips with their student and may also suggest potential field trip locations to school administrators.

- **Learning Coach Support:** Learning Coaches, most often a parent, are provided ongoing support and opportunities to interact with other Learning Coaches during synchronous online sessions. Successful onboarding and continued support contribute the success of the Learning Coach and student. Programs provided by Learning Coach Support are designed to make this process easier and give Learning Coaches the skills and resources needed to better support their students. Resources include onboarding tools, informational webinar-style sessions, Learning Coach Central a website designed specifically for Learning Coaches, as well as ongoing parent support, including a parent orientation.

*Parent Support*

Parents, or other parent-designated caring adults, will serve as Learning Coaches and play an active role in the learning process, providing input, and communicating regularly with teachers. LCCA will promote the significant role of parents by providing a wide array of resources for parents and multiple avenues for communication.

As part of the Connections Academy program, the Learning Coach Support team offers both assistance and reassurance by providing extensive information about online education. The team helps families prepare for a successful school year through such resources as the Learning Coach Success Series sessions, the Learning Coach Central website, a monthly newsletter, and an online orientation.

- **Learning Coach Success Series**: To prepare for their new role as Learning Coach and the school year, new Learning Coaches can get started by participating in an onboarding series of live, webinar-style sessions. New Learning Coaches will especially benefit from the Foundations for Success track. This series helps families plan, organize, and gain confidence as they prepare for their first days of school. Sessions include Getting Ready for the First Day, First Days: What to Expect, Beyond the First Days, and Exploring Math or Language Arts/English Curriculum. Online sessions are designed to not only support new Learning Coaches through our program, but also provide strategies for all Learning Coaches to work with and support their students. The Frameworks for Success track includes topics such as online clubs and activities, motivation, learning principles, college and career, and the exceptional learner.

- **Learning Coach Central**: This site, developed specifically for Learning Coaches, provides multiple resource documents, tutorials, video Quick Clips, and helpful links that support Learning Coaches in their role as they provide instructional support to their student.

- **Learning Coach Link:** This online monthly communication will be sent to Learning Coaches with articles on instructional best practices, platform updates, tips and strategies, and information about upcoming Learning Coach Success Series sessions.

- **Learning Coach Orientation**: The online orientation has been designed to familiarize Learning Coaches with the important role they play in supporting their student as a learner. The course explains how the program works and demonstrates how to use the platform.

Learning Coaches have varying levels of skill and previous involvement in their child's education. The Learning Coach Support team and LCCA provide support to Learning Coaches to ensure they are an effective educational partner. During the enrollment process, Learning Coaches will be provided the handbooks for LCCA which clearly outline the role of the parent, as well as the expectations of the Learning Coach.

*Community Support*

The support of community organizations will be essential to the success of LCCA. The Charter Committee has prioritized creating and sustaining partnerships with organizations that complement the school's mission. The Charter Committee has actively solicited feedback from the community. The school will continue to take full advantage of valuable community partnerships to ensure that the school reflects the needs and wishes of the wider South Carolina community.

The school will actively seek out community organizations to partner with and provide real connections among students and the community. Local delegates and community leaders were notified of LCCA's replication application (see Appendix R for a complete listing of individuals contacted and copies of the read receipts). Community organizations were contacted to discuss the formation of LCCA and find opportunities to work together (please refer to Appendix I for letters of support). Following approval of the charter application, the Board will continue to seek out community organizations to partner with and provide real connections among students and the community.

**H. Describe any partnerships the school will have with community organizations, businesses, or other educational institutions. Specify the nature, purpose, terms, and scope of services, including any fee-based or in-kind commitments from these partners.**

The support of community organizations will be essential to the success of LCCA. The Charter Committee has prioritized creating and sustaining partnerships with organizations that complement the school's mission.

During summer and into the fall, the Charter Committee has engaged with businesses and education organizations to identify partners who support the expansion of education options in South Carolina. The team will continue to focus on entities who could potentially partner with the school and serve as an educational resource, as well as those whose missions and initiatives support families.

These partnerships will be for the purpose of educational experiences and enrichment opportunities for LCCA students. The Charter Committee does not anticipate requiring any formal contracts or fees charged for these partnerships.

# 2. Educational Model and Serving Special Populations

**A. A description of the current trends and key findings in the academic performance of the school. This should address measures of academic achievement, student and school growth, measures of postsecondary and workforce readiness, indicators of early literacy, as well as measures of student engagement such as discipline, attendance, and satisfaction. This should identify any performance challenges or gaps, and how they were addressed.**

The trends and findings for SCCA are provided below. LCCA expects to have similar performance and trend data.

*Academic Achievement and Student Growth*

SCCA has consistently met or exceeded the state on English Language Arts state assessments across all grade-levels. SCCA is 81% of the state average in math if a student is enrolled all four years.

*Figure 3. SCCA State Test Score Performance Trends*
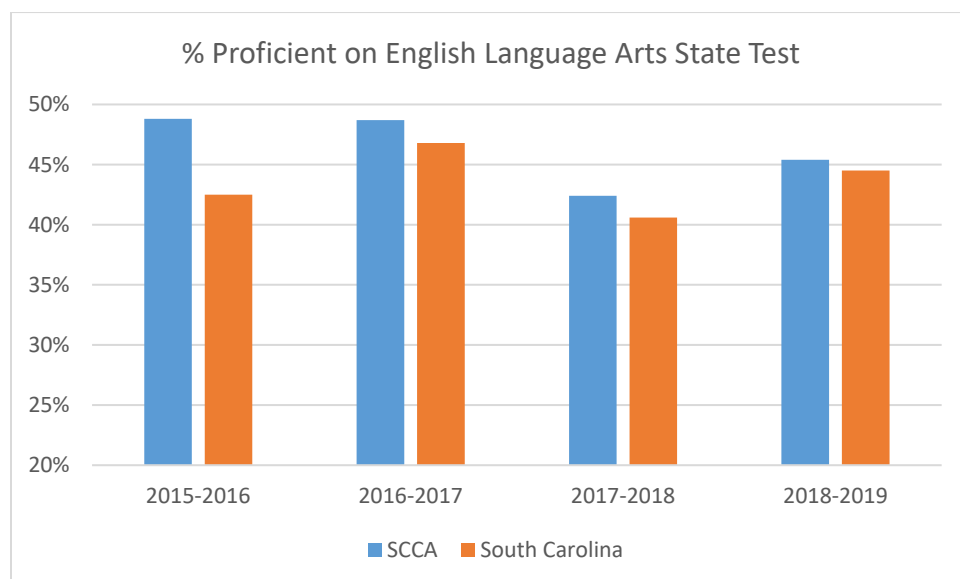


Equally important is understanding how students perform when they enroll with SCCA beyond the first year. The comparisons can be expressed as, "what percent of the SC statewide performance did SCCA students achieve?" A percentage of 100 means that SCCA students performed equal to the state, while a percentage greater than 100 indicates that SCCA Connections Academy schools outperformed other schools in the state. With consecutive years of enrollment, the gap between the state and SCCA closes significantly in math, and SCCA far exceeds the state in reading and science after four years (see Figure 4).

*Figure 4. SCCA State Test Score Performance Trends*



Consecutive Years Enrolled: SCCA % Proficient on State Test Compared to State Performance
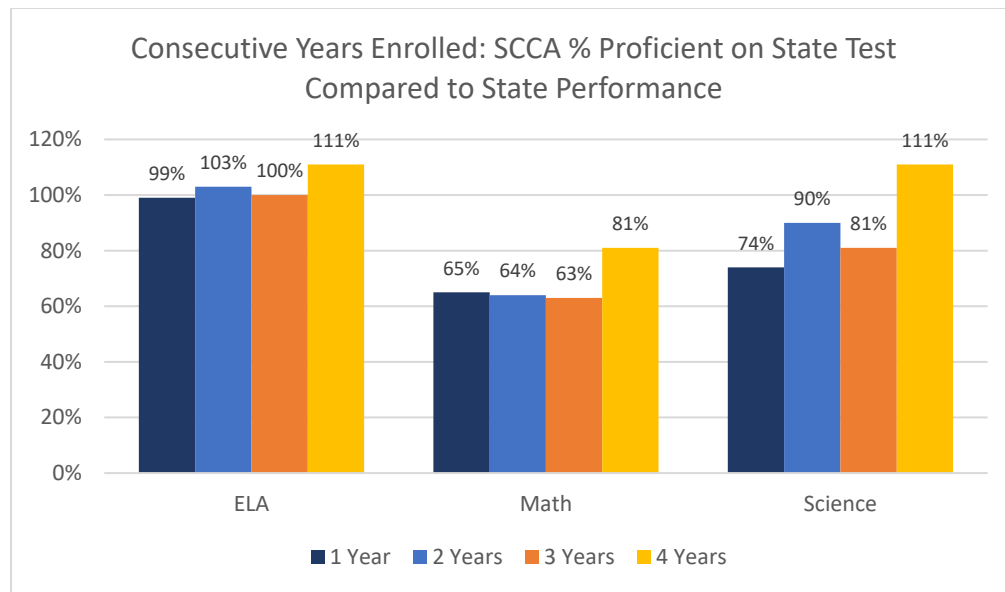
Each year, the OBL Partner School Leadership Team (PSLT) coordinates with the School Leader and SCCA Board to create a School Improvement Plan (SIP) to address any issues or challenges that the school has identified. The SIP is comprised of Action Plans used to identify the priority concerns, create a hypothesis on why the challenge is occurring, and set goals to meet those challenges. The school sets measurable objectives, delineates the task, assigns responsible parties for completing the action step, sets a time frame for meeting the goal/measuring progress, provides resources that will be needed to successfully complete the actions, and provides a metric for evaluating success. This goal setting, monitoring, and measuring process puts the focus on continuing school improvement.

SCCA consistently looks for strategies to mark improvement in student learning and academic achievement, and uses many different data points to provide direction for the school. For instance, data will include parent satisfaction, state testing, formative testing, attendance, retention, and graduation rate, among others, to detail the growth and accountability of SCCA.

### Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness

SCCA relies on a variety of metrics to track students' readiness for postsecondary and workforce success including graduation rate, SAT/ACT, as well as measures of Social and Emotional Learning and 21st Century Learning Skills. In 2018-2019 (the most recent year with available data), SCCA graduation rate was 73%. While the graduation rate at SCCA is lower than the 81% for SC overall, SCCA has improved by over ten percentage points in comparison to prior years.

*Figure 5. SCCA Graduation Rate Trends*
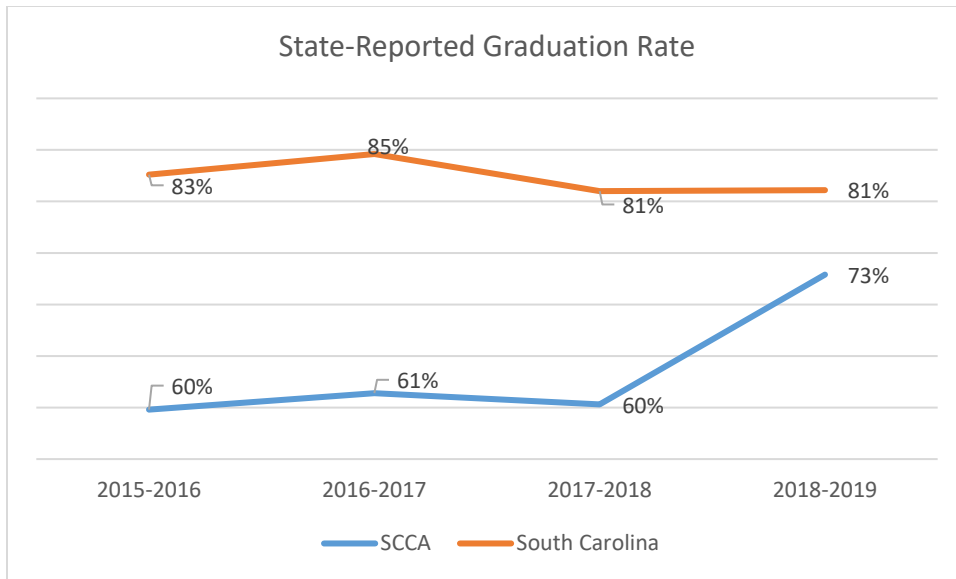


SCCA students' average ACT English performance exceeded the ACT college readiness benchmark (19.6 vs. 18), while average ACT Reading performance met the benchmark. On the SAT, SCCA students exceeded the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (EBRW) benchmark for college readiness (525.4 vs. 521). SCCA students reported mid to high-levels of postsecondary and workforce readiness as assessed by self-reported measures at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Students who had attended beyond the first year and in higher grades rated themselves highest on these measures.

*Figure 6. SCCA Self-Reported Social & Emotional Learning Skills*
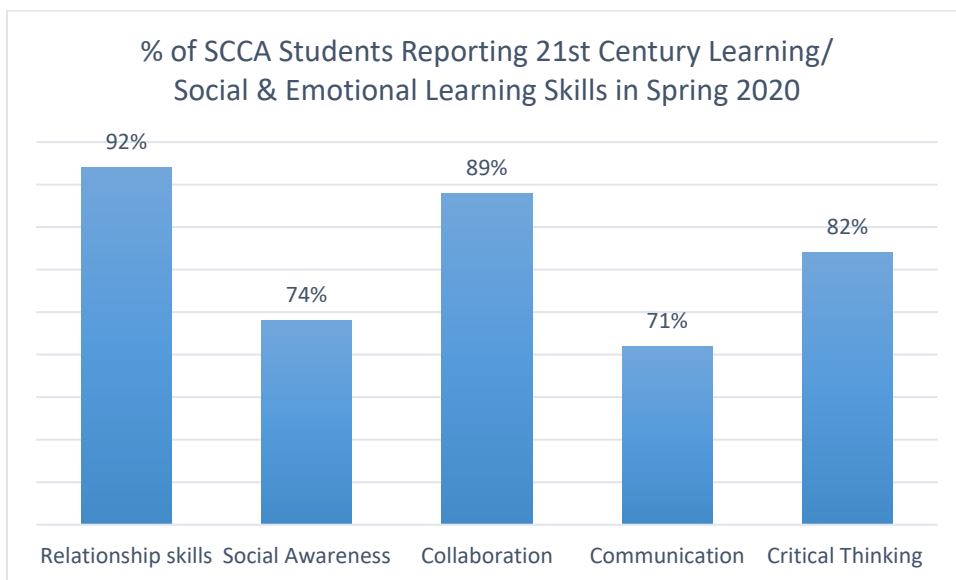


### Early Literacy

Reading will be a primary focus for LCCA. The school will implement research-based curriculum and

strategies for students who are reading at, above, or below grade level. Students reading or writing below grade level will receive additional support through increased frequency of targeted LiveLesson sessions and Connections' multitiered instructional support program. Teachers use formative assessment data to determine a student's greatest area of need. A variety of supplemental instructional support programs are available to support student learning in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and writing. Teachers regularly monitor student performance in these programs and make adjustments as needed based on Connections guidelines for implementing multitiered instruction.

### Student Engagement

Student engagement is tracked at SCCA through affective, behavioral and cognitive components of engagement (note that measures of discipline and attendance are less applicable to an online setting). Affective engagement is measured by an annual student satisfaction survey, and in 2019-2020, 91% of SCCA students reported satisfaction with their school. The behavioral component of engagement is assessed by tracking the percentage of students who are staying on track in their courses. In 2019-2020, 97% were on track in their courses at week 15 (out of 18 weeks in a semester). Finally, cognitive engagement is assessed using two key social and emotional learning skills -- self-management and self-awareness – that have been found to be important to success in online learning environments.

Students expressed higher levels of these skills at higher grade-levels and with more years of enrollment at SCCA. Social and Emotional Learning data will be collected each fall and spring moving forward and will enable us to track year over year gains and intervene as appropriate.

### Discipline

While a positive school culture is critical to the success of a virtual school, suspension rates do not adequately reflect that success given their low incidence in the virtual school setting. Students are suspended for many reasons, but some suspensions can be attributed to students struggling with the school environment. A virtual school environment may be the best prevention for future suspensions. In 2018-19, three Connections Academy schools actively reported suspensions for 1% of the student population (of 10,756 students enrolled) as part of state reporting requirements.

### Attendance

Absences are tracked daily for SCCA. Attendance rate is demonstrated in Figure 7 below. As with other data points throughout this application, data from 2019-20 is not provided because of its variable nature as a result of COVID-19.

*Figure 7. Attendance Rate for SCCA*
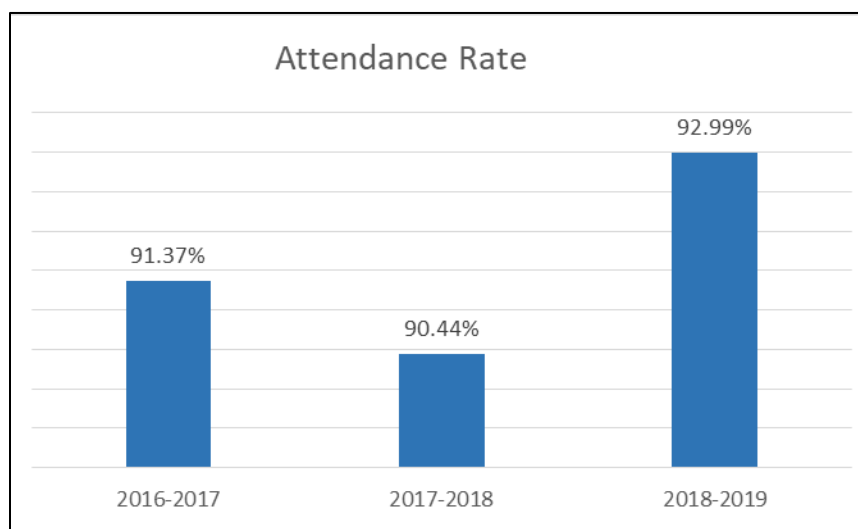


## Parent and Student Satisfaction

Parents and students evaluated SCCA on a number of criteria, including student progress, teacher support, quality of curriculum, and overall satisfaction of the students' learning experience. Parents rated SCCA highly for helping students succeed.

- 96.2% of parents agree that the curriculum is high quality.

- 97.3% of parents agree their children are satisfied with the program.

- 93.9% of parents are satisfied with the variety of learning activities.

- 80% of parents would highly recommend Connections Academy to other families.

Student satisfaction also mirrors parent satisfaction.

- 94% of students like South Carolina Connections Academy (Kindergarten – 5th grade).

- 92% of students are satisfied with the South Carolina Connections Academy program (6th – 12th grade).

- 91% of students agree that the curriculum is high quality (6th – 12th grade).

- 88% agree that SCCA is preparing them well for the future (6th – 12th grade).

## Mobility

Connections Academy schools, including SCCA and LCCA, serve highly mobile students with complex needs known to impact student performance. These students' needs include, among others, health concerns, bullying and safety, looking to be challenged, trying to catch up, and flexible scheduling. These characteristics create a unique student population that differs from traditional brick-and-mortar schools. As a result, schools experience frequent turnover both during the year and from year to year as many students and families choose a virtual school program to serve a unique need for a particular period of time. Students who transfer into Connections Academy schools, commonly enrolling after the school year has begun, require an adjustment period to get back on track with their peers and become familiar with the new learning platform.

OBL conducted an efficacy study in 2018 (report released in 2019) that considered student performance across its Connections Academy schools. From this study, Figure 8, as shown below, illustrates student mobility and compares students enrolled in Connections Academy schools and students enrolled in traditional brick-and-mortar schools. The same efficacy study found that, when mobility is taken into consideration, student cohorts from Connections Academy schools perform at or better than students who attend traditional brick-and-mortar or other virtual schools, as shown in Figure 9.

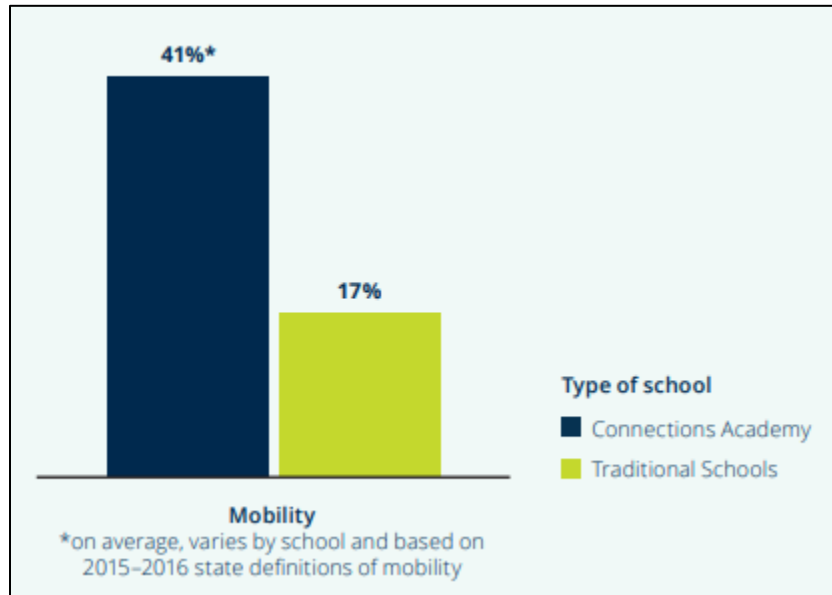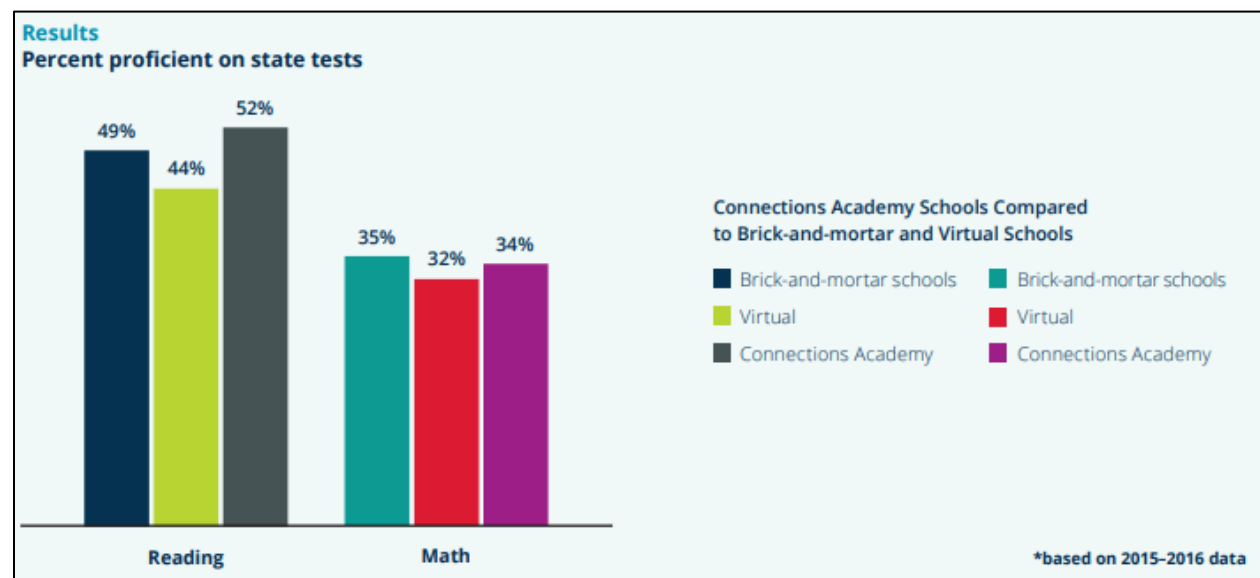*Figure 8. Student Mobility in Connections Academy Schools*



*Figure 9. Student Cohort Performance*



## Academic Accountability

Research has demonstrated that student mobility is associated with lower school engagement, poorer

grades in reading and particularly in math, and a higher risk of dropping out. Moreover, growth metrics that play a key role in state accountability systems are known to be adversely affected by students who transition between schools. Given the significance of mobility in the Connections Academy student population, it is imperative that students receive appropriate support and resources that help remediate the negative impact on their success.

## B. A description of any features in school curriculum, instruction, professional development, and educational structure that are distinct or differ from both the current school(s) being replicated and the area/comparable schools which students might otherwise attend.

According to the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), there are six charter schools in the Tri-County area, all of which are located in Charleston County. There are three statewide virtual public charter schools that serve grades K-12, including SCCA, but none have facilities located in the Tri-County area. Families in the Tri-County area have shown an interest in having a virtual public charter school (see Figure 2 on page four). COVID-19 has driven interest in virtual school across the country, including South Carolina, as illustrated by the number of students SCCA currently has on its waitlist (see Table 2 on page four). LCCA will provide a unique option for students as the only K-12, statewide virtual public charter school with a facility located in the Tri-County area.

LCCA will use OBL's Connections curriculum, instruction, professional development, and education program elements. The following descriptions of OBL unique core model elements explain how the needs of the students and families will be met through the school's offerings. Additionally, OBL is committed to continual improvement. Accordingly, OBL routinely updates its systems and techniques to incorporate best practices and lessons learned. As a result and in comparison to other virtual schools, SCCA has been a leader in providing a high quality virtual education and with the same core educational model, LCCA will follow a similar program.

The services LCCA will provide to all of its students support attainment of state-adopted standards. The curriculum proposed by LCCA will be approved by the South Carolina Department of Education. To ensure the curriculum consistently addresses standards, OBL continually assesses course effectiveness and uses the information gathered as the basis for improvement. Evaluation methods include analyzing student performance results on course assessments, exit exams, and state testing; feedback from students, teachers, and parents on courses; user response and p-values to analyze assessment validity; and standards alignment, graduation requirements, and state and district requirements. Courses are tested against state standards for rigor, depth, and breadth, and are subject to continuous improvement based on state assessment outcomes, user feedback, and standards alignment. OBL courses are developed with clarity and consistency in mind. Every unit begins with a list of unit objectives and every lesson begins with a list of lesson objectives.

The teachers and staff at LCCA will bring their own unique backgrounds and experiences to the school. Their fresh perspective will contribute to the style with which they share curriculum and instruction with their students. Their different backgrounds will give them a unique approach to their professional development and how they implement content into their roles. Additionally, students and their families will have their own unique characteristics and needs. While the core educational model will be similar to SCCA, the culture that develops at LCCA will be distinct from the existing culture at SCCA and will enhance and influence the virtual school experience of all involved.

*Supporting all Learners*

LCCA will provide student support services to address the various needs of students at different levels. LCCA will support students in the general education program as well as in the special education program. LCCA will support students who are exceeding or struggling academically. LCCA will support students who are at-risk, English Learners, and also Gifted & Talented students through a multitiered system of supports.

LCCA anticipates that the student body will include a significant portion of students who are far ahead or far behind their peers in school. In an online environment, students working below or above grade level are shielded from the negative social attention that struggling and gifted students often face in a brick-and-mortar environment. Instead, students will be able to concentrate on intensive learning. LCCA will serve students who need a more personalized approach to learning.

LCCA also anticipates serving students in rural communities, who need access to a rigorous, full-time, high-quality school with certified teachers. Through technology, LCCA can offer a wide variety of high-quality classes to students who are currently limited in their coursework by their geography.

Online schools are a good fit for students who have unique scheduling demands due to their desire to accelerate their education, or combine work, internships, and other personal pursuits with their schooling. Students may also be in search of an opportunity to learn in a manner more conducive to their learning preference outside of the traditional classroom.

*Key Facets of Instructional Model*

An individualized and supported educational program facilitates the development of self-direction and personal responsibility among its students. In these ways, LCCA will develop students who are self-motivated, competent, and lifelong learners. LCCA will implement the Connections instructional model which incorporates key facets such as 1) the Learning Triad (teachers, Learning Coaches, and curriculum); 2) Counselors; and 3) Student Motivation.

1. **The Learning Triad:** OBL's Connections instructional model relies on the support of a) highly qualified teachers, b) supportive Learning Coaches, and c) a high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum. The Learning Triad, illustrated in Figure 10, consists of these three elements. Each student will have a staff of experts, including South Carolina-certified teachers, working together to leverage the school's myriad resources - technological, instructional, and interpersonal - for success. Learning Coaches are also encouraged to, and typically serve as, an integral part of the student's learning team.

*Figure 10. Learning Triad*



# OUR LEARNING TRIAD

**TEACHERS**
personalize lessons, evaluate student progress, provide feedback and assistance, and encourage students. Periodically, teachers facilitate real-time virtual sessions to provide targeted support based on student learning.

**CURRICULUM**
delivers engaging, interactive content; multimedia tools; and superb resources. It also provides teachers with continuous information on student progress.

**connexus**
is the technology that makes online learning possible. Students and Learning Coaches use the platform to connect with teachers, curriculum, and a wide range of resources.

**LEARNING COACHES**
typically support and motivate students and monitor schedules. Parents/Learning Coaches are also encouraged to communicate and collaborate with teachers.

**STUDENTS**
explore, create, and learn from home, accessing curriculum and resources via the internet. Students can contact teachers for assistance by WebMail or phone.
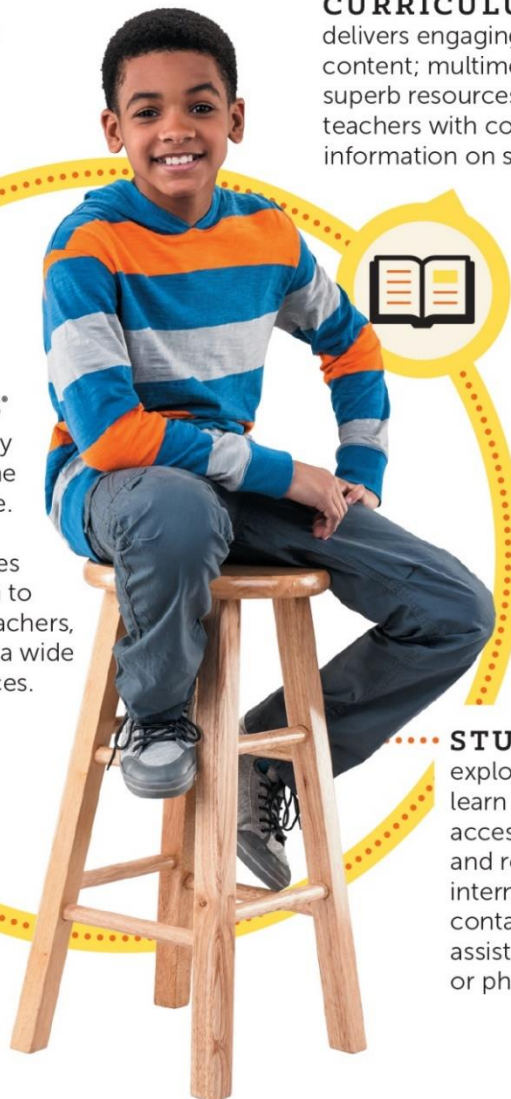
a. **Highly Qualified Teachers -** Student learning benefits from committed educators and involved parents who provide total support. Each student will have certified South Carolina teachers, as appropriate, specially trained in teaching in an online environment, the Connections Academy curriculum, and specific instructional methods. In each of the elementary grade levels or high school core subjects, students will be taught by a certified teacher with expertise in a particular grade level, grade band, or content area. Teachers will work closely with each student on a one-on-one basis using innovative technology tools. The teacher will be responsible for teaching, evaluating assignments and work products, providing instructional assistance, assigning and scoring assessment activities, and providing feedback on the student's performance. Based on a student's demonstrated mastery of the material, teachers will add, expand, or replace assignments; they will also grade students in

each subject for the Grade Book, and make promotion or retention decisions. Depending on the needs of the learner, teacher direct contact via telephone, LiveLesson session, and/or e-mail with the student and Learning Coach may be as frequent as several times a day, and at minimum twice per week. Teachers view the student's attendance, participation, and performance on a daily basis via the teacher's home page. Teachers will not wait to be contacted; they will be proactive participants in their students' learning plans. Teachers in virtual schools often comment that they understand their students better in the virtual environment than in a traditional classroom since they work with students one-on-one.

b. **Supportive Learning Coaches -** Each student will have a Learning Coach who is encouraged to work in person with the student. Typically, a Learning Coach helps keep students motivated and on track and regularly communicates with the students' Oregon-certified teachers. At the high school level, the Learning Coach is less involved with daily instruction but is encouraged to continue serving as an important supervisory role for the student.

c. **A high quality, standards-aligned curriculum -** LCCA plans to offer the Connections Academy curriculum. The curriculum is aligned to the South Carolina Learning Standards. The developmentally-appropriate curriculum increases its integration of technology as students advance through the grades.

2. **Counselors***:* Students in middle school and high school will be assigned a counselor who provides an extra layer of monitoring for the whole student. This educator will review past records and performance for each student and closely track their overall academic progress. Teachers will work directly with students via the phone, e-mail, and LiveLesson sessions. Student academic progress will be tracked on a daily basis via online discussions, quizzes, tests, science labs, and portfolio items to ascertain mastery of the material.

3. **Student Motivation**: Teachers are trained to apply three engagement strategies to their instruction to create a motivational online learning environment: 1) making instruction fun and engaging, 2) providing a safe way to respond, and 3) helping students succeed.

*Instructional Approach Methodology*

- **Collaboration Among Students***:* Using Adobe Connect LiveLesson sessions, teachers will group students in break-out rooms to allow collaboration. Teachers "visit" each room to observe student collaboration, redirect, etc. This audio/video web conferencing tool allows teachers the flexibility to group students, conduct small group instruction, utilize a whiteboard for illustration, and allows students to work together in a collaborative space. Additionally, for each section of students that a teacher teaches in a course, the teacher will create a section message board. On the section message board, teachers will assign additional collaboration opportunities or have students work together in the virtual space to share information, post documents, and respond to one another. Students are graded on both the content of the projects and their participation in collaborative activities.

- **Curriculum-Based Assessments***:* Teachers use curriculum-based assessments (CBAs), via telephone conversation or in one-on-one LiveLesson sessions, as a quick and effective way to gather information on students' understanding of concepts. Diagnostic curriculum-based assessments (DCBA) pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in student mastery of concepts. Verification curriculum-based assessments (VCBA) gauge authentic student learning of concepts previously graded as successfully completed with scores of B or higher.

- **Education Management System (EMS):** The proprietary EMS will be the platform for organizing and supporting the school's entire educational environment. This web-based platform and software will deliver assignments and track activities (whether conducted virtually or offline) while monitoring the completion of individual lessons as well as mastery of discrete skills and knowledge, all under the watchful eye of administrators, teachers, and Learning Coaches. The EMS operates within a secure, robust technology infrastructure protecting data from loss and intrusion while maintaining a safe environment. Students, teachers, administrators, and Learning Coaches access the EMS to organize, document, and interact, ensuring an unprecedented level of time-on-task documentation. The EMS is continually updated and improved upon for the success of schools and families. All new releases and updates of the EMS are automatically provided without interruption to users.

- **Interactive Reviews:** Interactive reviews are additional practice opportunities embedded in the curriculum and serve to give students targeted feedback on concepts and skills.

- **Intervention Indicators:** Intervention Indicators are displayed on the teacher home page in the EMS to facilitate teachers' ability to identify which of their students may be in need of an instructional intervention. These indicators are data-driven codes and are the first step of multitiered instruction. These indicators facilitate teachers' abilities to ensure that all students learn at high levels of achievement. These codes are used to identify academically at-risk students, determine and implement appropriate instructional interventions, and monitor the effectiveness of interventions. The intervention indicators are triggered if a student does not perform well on formative assessments or if a previous year's test scores show academic need.

- **Learning Coach:** A parent, extended family member, or similarly qualified adult designated by the parent/guardian will work in person with the student as a Learning Coach under the guidance of the credentialed teacher. The Learning Coach and student interact with the teacher via telephone, e-mail message, LiveLesson sessions, and in-person meetings. The school provides a unique login and ongoing training, support, and resources to help the Learning Coach carry out this important role.

- **LiveLesson® Session:** A real-time, interactive web conferencing tool, LiveLesson sessions allow teachers to work synchronously and directly with students using voice-over IP, chat, electronic whiteboard, and shared web surfing based on Adobe® Connect™.

- **Multitiered Instruction:** The school will use a multitiered instruction framework based upon the Response to Intervention (RTI) model that deeply links curriculum, standards, assessments, and interventions that have a direct impact on student mastery and resulting standardized test performance. The RTI model targets essential skills/standards by subject/grade level, uses specified assessments within the curriculum to measure student mastery of these skills and standards, provides tiered interventions for non-mastered skills and standards, and then tracks students' response to the implemented interventions by skill/standard. Through this model every student has access to the resources they need to be successful: Tier I Core Curriculum with Differentiation, Tier II Supplemental Instructional Supports (two to three times per week), and Tier III Supplemental Instructional Supports (four to five times per week). Student Support and IEP teams will meet regularly to develop an intervention plan and strategies for improvement for students who are struggling.

- **Personalized Performance Learning™ (PPL):** This instructional process creates a unique learning experience for each student. During enrollment, academic placement advisors and School Counselors review students' past records and performance to properly place them in the school.

Throughout the year, teachers monitor students' progress and adjust their learning programs to focus on areas where students need to improve and areas in which they can build on their strengths.

- **Progression Plan:** Within the EMS, there is a Progression Plan tool which will assist teachers and administrators to implement the Progression Plan which defines and tracks requirements that must be accomplished to meet a goal. Teachers and counselors use progression plans for students to ensure they are on target for graduation and meeting their college and career goals.

- **Student Performance Reporting**: Reports provide real-time student performance data on assessments. The reports identify the student score and the performance against each item. For some courses, objective level performance data is also provided. Teachers can use this data to determine which students need more help with a particular concept. They may then participate in individual or small group tutoring virtually with these students targeting specific skills.

- **Student Status/Escalation Process:** The school will track and report ongoing student progress based on the objective quantitative data generated by the EMS. Staff members will analyze attendance, participation, performance, assessment submissions, and teacher contact. The student status is displayed on the home page for instant identification of potential problem areas. The Escalation Process goes into effect when students are in statuses other than "On-Track" in order to ensure students continue to gain the full benefits of this educational option and are being educated appropriately through this unique school choice.

- **Synchronous Contact:** In a virtual school setting, synchronous contact is defined as a live interaction occurring in real time between teachers and students which allows for real communication and helps to build a relationship between teachers and students. Teachers will schedule LiveLesson sessions, in addition to other synchronous interaction (e.g., phone calls), for students. Teachers will document all synchronous contact with a student within the student's log in the EMS. LCCA will meet the requirements of a virtual public charter school to maintain synchronous contact with students.

- **Teacher:** The school will employ SC-credentialed teachers, ideally, who are also specially trained in virtual delivery and personalized instruction. Teachers will work from either a school office location and/or work remotely to deliver instruction to a virtual classroom of students and work one-on-one with students through highly interactive, technology-facilitated communication tools and quality timely feedback on assignments. Teachers will maintain a one-on-one relationship with each student.

- **E-mail Messaging:** Students, Learning Coaches, and teachers may only use it to communicate with each other, protecting them from spam, contact from strangers, and other mainstream e-mail issues.

Students learn best in a safe, positive environment in which they are respected, accepted, valued and nurtured as unique individuals and challenged to achieve their full potential. From this, it follows that students learn best when the instruction is tailored to their unique needs and when they are supported by adults who are committed to their success.

### *Professional Development Plans*

The Board, once approved, plans to partner with OBL for instructional services because they have developed a successful and robust professional development program for school leadership and teachers. Professional development training is integrated into all aspects of the Connections program

and aligned with the student curriculum, pedagogy, student information system, data, evaluation systems, and other services. The OBL Professional Learning Catalog and a list of possible training topics that may be offered is provided in Appendix J.

Teachers benefit from ongoing and effective professional growth. The training begins with an initial teacher orientation course and several days of face-to-face pre-service training. Teachers build a strong foundation for teaching in the online environment with student success as a focus. Professional Learning Communities, nationally facilitated professional learning sessions, and weekly teacher updates via *The Scoop* keeps teachers up-to-date and on the road to being experts in online learning. LCCA teachers will also have access to the New Teacher Training Series which helps them to understand the how and why of completing key school year cycle tasks to support student learning and performance.

OBL will provide intensive training to teachers and other school staff prior to and throughout the school year. Training sessions will focus on the "how to" – the basic tools and skills that teachers need to know and understand to teach in an online environment, navigate the platform (e.g., how to access the Grade Book, how to modify a lesson), and complete the tasks associated with the School Year Cycle of activities. Before the start of each school year, all teachers will complete the Teacher Orientation Course: Foundations of Instruction. This course is delivered through the platform, and contains lessons, assessments, and links to online tutorials. This introductory course supports teachers in transitioning from a brick-and-mortar school to an online school and covers curriculum, assessment, personalizing instruction, school year events, grading, communication, and essential tools in the platform to monitor and support student learning. Upon successful completion of these courses and assessments, teachers are ready to begin instruction. Teachers are expected to earn a grade of 80% or higher in this course.

In April 2015, the OBL Professional Development Model was recognized with a silver award for Best Practices for Distance Learning Programming by the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA). This prestigious award recognizes organizations that have designed and delivered outstanding and comprehensive best practices in distance learning programming, including program content and delivery, integration of technology, presentation, and impact on participant learning.

In May 2016, OBL was recognized as a Codie Award finalist for Best Professional Learning Solution for K-20 Faculty and Administrative Staff. This award recognizes the best educational application or service designed to support PK-12 or postsecondary education institutions in the professional development of faculty and administrative staff. In November 2017, the OBL professional learning model won a Tech & Learning Award of Excellence.

Teacher professional development is critically important in ensuring that the staff is optimally effective at teaching in an online environment and addressing the South Carolina Student Standards, in their daily instructional practice. To that end, the school will employ the *National Standards for Quality Online Teaching* published by the Aurora Institute and the OBL *Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning*, as guides for pinpointing necessary teacher skills and professional development requirements.

LCCA will encourage school staff to provide feedback on professional development, including suggestions for additional professional development opportunities that may be school- and/or South Carolina-specific. These opportunities may not be offered or led by OBL but the Board recognizes that this type of organic professional development will enhance both the skills of staff and the experiences of students.

*Professional Learning Activities*

The OBL Professional Learning Catalog focuses on meeting the needs of each teacher as he/she develops areas of focus for each school year through dozens of synchronous and asynchronous activities each month. Professional growth opportunities are designed to increase student achievement, personalize learning for students preparing for college and careers, and increase teaching effectiveness. In addition, OBL supports specific professional development needs as determined by the Principal and in alignment with school goals.

Teaching in an online environment offers flexibility and allows for a greater level of professional learning throughout the school year. Although designated professional development days have a specific focus, additional professional learning support is available on a daily basis. Teachers have multiple opportunities for seeking assistance and support with instructional strategies for engaging students and families, making decisions based on data, and completing school year cycle tasks in a timely and efficient manner. LCCA will receive multiple levels of support from OBL, which includes a team of specialists dedicated to meeting the needs of each individual teacher and the school.

The professional learning catalog has a variety of synchronous and asynchronous sessions that focus on the following:

- Implementing specific research-based instructional strategies;

- Using effective teaching practices and communication skills for an online environment;

- Utilizing the state and national standards to inform instruction;

- Using technology to engage students in collaborative learning activities;

- Using data to guide instruction;

- Making connections with students, building a community of learners;

- Helping empower students to take ownership of their learning;

- The importance of thinking critically and working collaboratively; and

- The learning sciences—deliberate practice, meaningful feedback, student engagement and motivation, multi-tiered intervention, and the role of mastery and transfer.

OBL believes that professional learning should be:

- **Intensive** – Participants identify the purpose of educational practices and examine how they can be implemented in the online environment. Participants collaboratively discuss strategies that can be implemented with students.

- **Ongoing** – New instructional strategies and the latest learning science research are connected to topics presented and discussed in prior sessions to demonstrate how specific educational practices form the "big picture" of effective instruction. Further discussion and exploration at the school level strengthens these connections.

- **Connected to Practice** – Following each session, participants apply what they have learned to their professional practice. They integrate precise, targeted strategies into their planning and instruction, and reflect on the outcomes through the Teacher ePortfolio data view, a virtual portfolio which allows them to document their attendance and upload resources related to their

professional learning.

## Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

As a continuation of synchronous and asynchronous online professional development opportunities, teachers will be expected to continue the conversation within their vertical and horizontal Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). LCCA will implement school-based PLCs allowing for true application of new strategies and resources as teachers strive to personalize instruction and make data-driven decisions. Professional development opportunities use evaluation surveys and collaborative tools to elicit teacher and administrator feedback. Audits, evaluations, and site-visits will be used to gauge the effectiveness of the training and to ensure initiatives are implemented with high fidelity.

LCCA will also have the opportunity to work together with SCCA on professional development opportunities. There will be an inherent relationship between the two schools due to the nature of school replication, and both SCCA and LCCA may find it mutually beneficial to collaborate and share ideas and suggestions for professional development.

## Additional Professional Learning Resources

During the school year, ongoing professional development opportunities will also be offered based on teacher feedback, and other needs as identified by the School Leader and leadership team at LCCA. In addition, these resources will be available to all school staff to support their professional learning.

- **The School Interactive Program Handbook**: The Program Handbook is a resource for teachers and school personnel to use all year. It contains policies, procedures, and "how to" components that aid the teachers on a day-to-day basis. These "how to" components will also have accompanying on-line tutorial segments that visually demonstrate each process.

- **Teacher Central:** Teacher Central is a website that is easy to navigate and serves as a one-stop shop for teachers and staff to find guidance on instructional practices, professional learning, and training resources. Each section contains links to resources to support teacher effectiveness, best practices, and tools designed to personalize the learning experience for students. The sections featured are:
    - **School Year Cycle:** annual required tasks and milestones;
    - **Multitiered Instructional Support:** universal screening tools, Supplemental Instructional Support Programs (SISPs), Response to Intervention (RtI), Student Support Teams (SSTs), and Intervention Indicators;
    - **Platform Tools:** "How-to" support for common features such as Message Boards, E-mail, Data Views, Log, Demo accounts, home pages, etc.;
    - **LiveLesson Sessions**: resources to support online meeting areas that are used to engage students with real-time instruction through secure access in the platform;
    - **Enrollment, Placement & Withdrawal:** processes and procedures to support a student's life cycle of enrollment, intent to return, academic placement, and withdrawal documents;
    - **Data & Reports:** tracking of ongoing tasks and overall student progress;
    - **Professional Learning & Collaboration:** comprehensive, professional learning initiatives, Teacher Collaboration Program (TCP), and professional resources in education;

- - - **Curriculum & Course Support:** course lists, state standards alignments, rubrics, novel lists, instructional tools and websites, and the Instructional Support Database;

    - **Policies & Best Practices:** support and guidance on requirements, student contacts, academic integrity policies, and recommended instructional practices to personalize student learning;

    - **Family Engagement:** links to Student Experience, Learning Coach Central, and other resources; and

    - **Exceptional Student Services:** resources to support IEP, 504, EL, and Gifted learners.

  - **Instructional Support Database:** The Instructional Support database provides teachers with resources that provide students with additional practice with the skills and standards covered in the curriculum. These resources can be used with students at any intervention level when skill deficiencies become evident in English Language Arts/Reading, Math, Science, and Social Studies.

  - **The Scoop:** All teachers will receive a weekly electronic newsletter that highlights improvements to the curriculum and platform, teacher tasks associated with the School Year Cycle, new procedures, shared tips, and community-building activities. Teachers will also follow pertinent school news and announcements through weekly issues from Connection Academy.

## Additional Training for Special Education Teachers

Training is provided throughout the year for special education teachers. OBL will provide extensive training for the entire school leadership team regarding the identification of students suspected of having a disability and types of services available for all students with disabilities including how to implement the Child Find practices in the online environment.

**C. A description of any plans for serving special populations that are distinct from the current school(s). These should address serving students with an IEP or 504 plan, students who may be gifted or talented, students who may be English Learners, and students who may have social-emotional or other health needs. This should span plans for staffing, identification, testing and progress monitoring, as well as transition.**

Special populations students have highly individualized needs and unique educational plans developed to meet their needs; therefore, LCCA's anticipated special populations students will be unique from SCCA's special populations students. These distinct characteristics of each individual student will distinguish them from other schools and create a unique culture specific to LCCA. LCCA is committed to meeting the needs of all special populations students.

### *Personalized Learning*

Students learn best when instruction matches their interests, needs, and goals. Through the placement process, pre-, mid-, and post-test assessments, and continuous progress monitoring, students in schools supported by OBL are provided with curriculum materials and instructional resources appropriate to their academic needs.

Every student deserves an instructional program that maximizes his or her potential. This is the purpose of the Personalized Performance Learning (PPL) process — an academic road map for each student that provides data to differentiate instruction in a unique, tailored way. Personalizing a student's program will be an ongoing process.

Students, Learning Coaches, and teachers will meet throughout the year to review progress, modify the student's program, and adjust goals as needed. Examples of differentiation include small group sessions, one-on-one instruction, intervention and extension activities, manipulatives, virtual labs and/or graphic organizers, as well as supplemental instructional support programs.

The Personalized Performance Learning process includes:

- **Placement and Course Selection.** Starting at the time of placement and course assignment, information given during the enrollment process will be used to select courses based on a K-12 student's individual learning needs.

- **Review of Student Background and Interests.** Teachers will meet with parents/guardians and/or Learning Coaches as well as students to discuss student strengths, interests, learning styles, and previous school performance during Welcome Calls.

- **Regular Communication.** At the start of school, Learning Coaches and teachers will establish a regular communication schedule, at least once every two weeks with students. Teachers review progress daily and communicate with students and Learning Coaches (as appropriate) frequently. Students will be encouraged to contact their teachers as often as they wish or find necessary.

- **Performance Testing.** In grades K-9, students will take the i-Ready test at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. The i-Ready test identifies areas of strength and need in the student's learning profile and measures student growth during the school year to help formulate learning goals and monitor student progress.

- **Setting Goals.** Goal setting will be based on all of the information gathered in the initial process and some initial student work samples. Teachers and students work together to set goals and to accomplish these during the school year. Learning Coaches participate in goal setting discussions as well.

- **Schedule Modifications and Electives.** Once the school year gets started, teachers will help personalize the learning schedule. For students in grades K-8, teachers will inquire about the student's daily routines and make adjustments to the student's online learning schedule. They will also add an elective course when students are ready to handle the additional challenge. Students in grades 9-12 will have a six-week add/drop period that can be used to adjust their schedule, as needed.

- **Differentiated Leveled Courses**. Teachers or Academic Placement Advisors may recommend placement into an essential, foundations, honors, or Advanced Placement® (AP) course. These courses provide students with scaffolded and/or enriched course content to meet their academic needs.

### Response to Intervention

LCCA will utilize a multi-tiered intervention approach, in alignment with LCCA's Response to Intervention (RtI) framework, which ensures individual students receive the support they need. Data is used throughout the school year to implement, for all students, a RtI model.

Students who may not be successful in the standard program with differentiation, as needed, or Tier I, receive additional support via the supplemental and alternative instructional programs in Tier II and Tier III (described below in detail). Students' responses to interventions are monitored, and adjustments to

the type and intensity of support are made as needed.

This process is facilitated by data from OBL's platform to help identify students' instructional needs that may require intervention. A teacher's Home Page shows an icon for each student indicating that interventions are needed and have been identified and provided. The teacher can use his or her professional judgment to override these indicators and log the decision and rationale within the platform. Also, LCCA will have a Student Support Team (SST) and an on-going process of identifying student intervention needs; assigning those instructional and behavioral interventions; tracking their success; and escalating, if necessary, from Tier I to Tier II to ultimately Tier III. If the student does not respond to Tier III interventions, and/or is suspected of having a Specific Learning Disability, then the student may require special education interventions.

The platform provides teachers with data and reports to implement a multitiered instruction model in English Language Arts and/or Math so that every student has access to the resources they need to be successful: Tier I Core Curriculum with Differentiation, Tier II Supplemental Instructional Supports, and Tier III Supplemental Instructional Supports with increased frequency and intensity. The process of identifying student intervention needs, assigning interventions, tracking their success, and communicating with parents, is ongoing. All efforts are made to meet each student's needs within the general education program.

### Approach to Implementing Tiered Instruction and Intervention
### Tier I

Tier I is the first level of a multitiered approach to a system of instructional and behavioral supports. Tier I includes OBL's research-based core reading and math curriculum aligned with the South Carolina standards. In addition to core coursework, the core curriculum includes teachers' use of differentiated instruction that meets the needs of all students throughout the school year. All students have access to the core curriculum; work through their lessons; engage with interactive content such as videos, virtual labs, and manipulatives; and demonstrate their understanding through formative assessments such as quizzes, curriculum-based assessments (CBAs), portfolios, quick checks, and unit tests. Teachers use a variety of instructional resources and strategies to enhance and extend learning through differentiated and personalized instruction. These instructional tools also allow teachers to fill in skill gaps and extend learning while providing additional evaluative data on student achievement.

Differentiation involves thoughtful planning for the following: instructional design used to deliver content to students; lesson content used to support and extend concepts and skills; instructional practice used to provide targeted instruction and actively engage students; assessment used to evaluate student learning; and instructional activities to meet the needs of individual and small groups of students. When Tier I differentiation strategies fail to produce adequate progress, Tier II intervention is considered.

### Tier II

Areas where students struggle at the Tier I level and require Tier II support may include reading fluency, reading comprehension, math fluency, math computation and reasoning, and behavior. Tier II usually begins after a general education teacher has attempted a variety of instructional supports and differentiation strategies over a four-week time frame and has documentation showing that the student is not yet responding successfully with strong performance in the identified area of weakness.

Tier II instructional support can use many of the same instructional strategies and/or research-based programs that are used for differentiation as part of Tier I; however, it is the increase in the frequency and intensity of their use that defines the intervention as Tier II. Tier II intervention is explicit, systematic, and targeted to the greatest area of student learning needs. Frequent and formal logged progress monitoring noting student performance in the platform is a critical part of the implementation of this tier. Teachers may elect to assign students a supplemental instructional support program as part of Tier II intervention. These programs provide students with additional instruction and practice in the foundational skills needed to be successful with grade level work. Supplemental programs provide teachers with reports for progress monitoring that can be uploaded to the platform to ensure all student performance data is in one place. OBL recommends that Tier II instructional support is provided a minimum of three times a week for 20–30 minutes per session. Teachers use the student's log to document student performance and response to the instructional intervention every two weeks.

### Tier III

Tier III includes the most intensive and frequent level of instructional support and is the next step in the multi-tiered approach for students who have not been successful in the core curriculum that includes differentiation activities and Tier II supplemental interventions. Tier III interventions are facilitated and monitored by the general education teacher who increases the occurrence of synchronous direct instruction through the use of LiveLesson sessions as well as implements other instructional strategies and research-based programs that are explicit, systematic, and targeted to specific student learning needs.

OBL recommends that students participating in the Tier III level of intervention receive targeted instruction for four to five days a week in order to focus more intensively on skill deficits and areas of concern. Through Tier III interventions, students may be assigned a personalized course of study that allows for increased learning time in their areas of academic need. Teachers use the student's log to document student performance and response to the instructional intervention every week.

### *Supporting Students during Interventions*

The job of LCCA is to provide support to Learning Coaches to ensure they are an effective educational partner, especially for those students identified in need of extra support. During the enrollment process, Learning Coaches will be given the handbooks for LCCA which clearly outline the role of the parent, as well as the expectations of the Learning Coach.

Students in grades K-8 will be assigned to a homeroom teacher and students in grades 9-12 will be assigned an advisory teacher. (The homeroom teacher is a regular core content teacher and the advisory teacher is a counselor or secondary teacher.) This teacher will work closely with the students and the Learning Coaches to acclimate them to the virtual learning experience. The homeroom/advisory teacher will support Learning Coaches in navigating the platform (e.g., accessing the student's grade book, accessing e-mail messages), answer questions a Learning Coach might have, and send reminders to the Learning Coach to complete their Learning Coach responsibilities – such as taking attendance and marking lessons as complete.

### *Special Education*

LCCA is committed to providing its students with exceptionalities with equal access to its education program and a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). We provide students with access through resources tailored to each student's individual abilities and needs, including assistive technologies and

individualized support. At the time of enrollment, all parents/guardians who indicate their students have special needs are asked to submit a copy of the student's most recent IEP or Section 504 Plan if available in order to provide each student with FAPE. Enrollment is not delayed if the parents cannot provide these documents; the school will obtain these documents from the last school of enrollment. All special education documents are reviewed by the school's Special Education Manager, and if necessary a member of the special education staff contacts the family to discuss specific student needs or to clarify the information. Compliance information, such as annual review and evaluation dates are documented and course placements are recommended for parent approval.

Once the parent/guardian verifies course placement, the school convenes an IEP team or Section 504 meeting to amend the IEP to reflect the provision of FAPE and implementation in the virtual environment.

Throughout the school year, the special education team ensures that teachers have access to the IEPs or Section 504 Plans of the students in their classes. The teachers are made aware of each student's special learning needs and are given guidance on how to make the necessary program accommodations and modifications as described in each student's plan. The school's special education department works closely with the general education teachers to ensure that every student with an IEP is included with their non-disabled peers and has access to the general education curriculum to the maximum extent possible. Students with IEPs that state a need for related services (e.g., speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, etc.) are typically provided such services virtually. If the IEP team determines that virtual services are not appropriate, these services are provided face-to-face in a location proximate to the child. Finally, IEP and Section 504 Plan team meetings are typically held virtually. All meetings occur in compliance with all state and federal laws.

### *Supporting Students with IEPs*

OBL and LCCA school leadership will closely monitor performance of exceptional students using multiple data points. LCCA students with IEPs in tested grade levels will participate in all South Carolina Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (SCPASS) tests as outlined in their IEPs. Additionally, all LCCA students will have benchmark assessments administered three times annually. Regular and systematic progress monitoring will occur and regular progress reporting of IEP goals will be provided to parents by a special education case manager. Teachers/case managers, OBL, and LCCA school leadership will work together to build a program that is appropriately ambitious and is designed to allow all students to demonstrate progress. When necessary, adjustments to individual students' programming will be made to improve students' outcomes.

To support students with IEPs, LCCA will:

- Conduct IEP team meetings, including the parents, for all new students to adopt or amend the incoming IEP to reflect how services will be provided in the virtual environment. Prior Written Notice detailing the decisions of the IEP team will be provided to parents along with their Parental Rights/Procedural Safeguard documentation.

- Hold annual reviews of the IEP, including reviewing progress within the existing IEP, reevaluating whether the student is benefitting from the program and creating new IEP goals. Accommodations include but are not limited to assistive technology and accessibility tools. Program adjustments will be made based on the most recent evaluations and student progress on IEP goals.

- Provide IEP-required services including, but not limited to, speech-language therapy and audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, social work services, and transportation according to the needs of each student. Services are typically successfully provided virtually but may also be provided in-person as determined by the IEP team. OBL will contract with state-credentialed providers across the state and proximate to students' homes for face-to-face related services. Conduct triennial evaluations, or more frequently as appropriate, or, if no new data is needed, conduct a review of the records. Evaluations will be conducted by experienced and qualified examiners in person at a location proximate to each student at a mutually agreeable time.

- Ensure student participation in state-mandated assessments.

- Monitor progress for every student, including frequent and thorough review of student performance, attendance, and participation data as reported to the student, parent, and teacher through their respective home pages.

- Report IEP goal progress regularly to parents at least as frequently as general education progress reporting.

- Carefully log in the platform all conversations, contacts (by phone, e-mail message, LiveLesson session, or other means) and consultation with the student and/or parent as well as general education teachers.

- Track and report the provision of direct/related services, with close scrutiny by the special education staff of any missed appointments or incomplete services.

- Conduct, as required by law, annual reviews and triennial evaluations.

Compliance and academic progress data of students with IEPs at LCCA will be communicated monthly to school leadership. Metrics related to attendance, participation, and performance of students with IEPs will be closely monitored by the South Carolina-based Special Education Manager. Student issues will be escalated to the School Leader and processes will be followed to intervene with students with IEPs who are disengaged or not performing. If necessary, IEP team meetings will be held to make adjustments to these students' IEPs to better address their needs.

Training is provided throughout the year for special education teachers. OBL will provide extensive training for the entire school leadership team regarding the identification of students suspected of having a disability and types of services available for all students with disabilities including how to implement the Child Find practices in the virtual environment.

### Section 504 Eligible Students

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a statute designed to prohibit discrimination and to assure that students with disabilities have educational opportunities and benefits equal to those of non-disabled students. An eligible student under Section 504 is a student who (a) has, (b) has a record of having, or (c) is regarded as having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity such as learning, self-care, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, and performing manual tasks. Section 504 plans are typically written for students who are not receiving services under IDEA but who require accommodations and modification to their instructional program. Section 504 plans may also be written for students who need modified instructional materials or assistive technology due to their disability. Preexisting 504 plans will remain in place for new students, will be potentially revised for the virtual environment, and will be updated periodically. LCCA staff will

identify 504-eligible students and will complete a Section 504 plan for each identified eligible student. LCCA students with Section 504 plans in tested grade levels will participate in all SCPASS assessments as outlined in their Section 504 plans.

The LCCA Section 504 coordinator will work closely with the general education teachers to ensure that every student receives accommodations and modifications services according to his/her Section 504 Plan to access and progress in the general education curriculum in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Section 504 plans will be reviewed regularly to ensure accuracy and that student needs are met. If a student with a Section 504 plan does not make progress in the general education curriculum, the school will conduct an evaluation to consider eligibility for special education services.

### Gifted Students

Gifted and high achieving students will thrive at LCCA. Through the placement process, these learners will be provided the most appropriate curriculum, pacing, and teaching approaches from day one. Furthermore, teachers will work closely with Learning Coaches to ensure a steady flow of enrichment activities for students working above grade level. Students will further benefit from the advantages of virtual gifted education as they will be able to work significantly above grade level without fear of ostracism or other negative social repercussions that gifted students sometimes face in more traditional school settings.

LCCA will implement the robust gifted program for students in grades K-8 and the Honors and Advanced Placement® (AP) program for high school students. The gifted program will provide gifted students the opportunities and challenges they need to be successful while learning at their own pace. Students are identified as gifted through formal evaluation in the areas of intellectual ability, subject matter aptitude/ achievement, creativity/divergent thinking, and problem solving/critical thinking.  The gifted program will incorporate the same educational standards as the standard offering but will also include enrichment activities which will expand upon lesson topics and promote higher-level thinking and understanding. Gifted learners will be grouped together and given opportunities for group interaction through LiveLesson sessions.

The high school program will further offer a rigorous college preparatory curriculum that will provide opportunities for students to enroll in Honors and AP courses. Honors courses will offer advanced students opportunities to participate in extension projects, investigations, and activities that require integrated skills application and order thinking. Placement in these courses will be carefully considered and included alongside continuing gifted supports.

Course selection will be made in close consultation with students and their parents. Through these supports, gifted students across the K-12 spectrum at LCCA will be supported academically and emotionally, and they will be provided the resources and supports needed for the realization of their exceptional potentials.

### English Learners (EL)

LCCA will follow state procedures and will use required criteria and procedures to identify English Learners (ELs). LCCA designate a highly-qualified EL Lead Teacher, who will work with content teachers, Learning Coaches, and students to ensure material is adapted and accessible for all English Learners. The EL Lead Teacher will maintain student files, consult with Learning Coaches, provide direct instruction to EL students via LiveLesson sessions and telephone calls, conduct progress monitoring throughout the school year, create and implement targeted interventions based on the data from progress monitoring,

monitor exited EL students for academic progress using state-specific criteria for two years, and comply with state and federal law pertaining to EL students.

In hiring teaching staff, consideration will be given to selecting a TESOL-certified leader/teacher; EL roles and responsibilities will be distributed to those staff with proper certification. Staff will have access to OBL EL experts who will support the school and its efforts to identify and serve EL students. LCCA will follow the South Carolina state procedures to identify EL students, and the school will administer the ACCESS assessment.

- Identify

  Incoming parents or guardians will complete the Home Language Survey as part of the enrollment process. To identify ELs, incoming families will complete a Home Language Survey (HLS) which will be retained in the student's record. If the HLS indicates any responses other than English, the student will be considered as an EL student until further assessments are completed. The student's records will be reviewed to determine the need for possible further language testing to identify the specific level of English proficiency. If none of the student's records indicate former language testing, a trained test administrator will administer the screener assessment and the results determine whether the student will or will not be identified as an EL student.

  LCCA will notify parents/guardians of the initial screening results and program placement decisions within 30 days of the beginning of the school year or within two weeks if the student enrolls during the school year. LCCA will provide these parent notifications both in English and in the parent's native language, to the extent feasible.

- Provide

  Once identified as an EL, a student will receive support based on English proficiency via LiveLesson® sessions by a certified EL teacher. Instruction will be aligned to standards based on scientific research for English acquisition in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The EL Lead Teacher will use the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) framework to design lessons for students and will participate in monthly professional development sessions to increase their knowledge of practice and implementation of this instructional model. EL teachers will work with content teachers to ensure that grade level content is accessible for EL students and the development of academic language skills are promoted in content classes. EL students at LCCA will fully participate in the core curriculum and will be provided with additional supplementary instructional support software and progress monitoring throughout the school year. In addition, all teachers will consult with Learning Coaches to guide instructional support and will modify content lessons and/or assessments as needed.

- Monitor

  When a student demonstrates English proficiency, a school-based team consisting of the EL Lead Teacher, student's content teachers, and the parent/guardian will decide whether the student continues to require EL instruction.

  They will use the English language proficiency scores, class performance, academic grades, and teacher recommendations to determine the student's language classification. If the team determines that the student is English proficient and can successfully perform in classes without

significant language support, he or she will be reclassified and moved to the monitoring stage. LCCA will monitor EL students for academic progress using state-specific criteria for two years after exiting the program.

## *Social-Emotional Learning*

LCCA will provide a robust school counseling program to serve all students, and it will be delivered by a certified school counselor(s). The school counseling program at LCCA will be evaluated annually to identify the changing needs of the school and its students, adjusting the counseling program to meet those specific needs. The counseling program at LCCA will offer individual, group, and class counseling, as needed, and will focus on academic development, personal and social growth, and college and career readiness activities through a variety of communication tools (LiveLesson sessions, phone calls, message boards, newsletters, and face-to-face events that will take place throughout the state). The counseling team will work to engage students and support both their academic and emotional growth.

Connections Academy schools will begin rolling out courses and content specific to social-emotional learning in the Spring 2021 semester. LCCA will provide these courses as they become available.

## *Staffing Plan for Special Education*

Table 3, shown below, shows LCCA's anticipated staffing plan for special education program with a student-teacher ratio of 35:1.

*Table 3. Staffing Plan for Special Education*

|  | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Anticipated # of Students with Disabilities** | 185 | 277 | 369 | 461 | 554 |
| **Special Education Teachers** | 5 | 8 | 11 | 13 | 16 |

## *Special Education Administration*

LCCA will contract with OBL, through the Statement of Agreement (SOA, contract), to oversee all aspects of educational service delivery for students with special education needs. OBL will ensure that the school operates in compliance with all state and federal regulations. Data will be collected, stored, and updated in a manner that meets all compliance expectations.

OBL will ensure that the school is providing appropriate programs in the least restrictive environment for all students with special needs. This will include assisting the school with managing the IEP and 504 process, maintaining student data, communicating with parents, locating and contracting with service providers and evaluators, and ensuring that the school operates in compliance with special education law and procedures at all times. The school will manage the implementation of services that fall under special populations, including students' IEPs, Section 504 plans, gifted program, and EL.

*Special Education Teachers*

Special Education teachers will teach students and manage instructional programs for students with learning differences. They will consult regularly with Learning Coaches and students to ensure that students successfully complete their instructional program. Special education teachers will participate in all steps of the IEP process. The school's special education team will work closely with all teachers as well as district/state professionals to ensure that the school's special education program is successful and operating in compliance with federal, state, and sponsor district regulations. The Special Education teachers will utilize technology to deliver online instruction and teach students. Special Education teachers at LCCA will meet the following criteria:

- Degree in Special Education or related Education Field;

- Valid Special Education credential in South Carolina;

- Strong technology skills;

- Excellent communication skills, oral and written; and

- Ability to work well in fast paced environment.

## D. A description of any plans for assessment or progress monitoring that are distinct from the current school(s). These should address diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, processes for data-driven decision-making, and identified resources (technology, personnel, staff development).

The assessments and progress monitoring that will be done at LCCA will closely resemble the assessments done at SCCA. However, the teachers and staff at LCCA will bring their own unique backgrounds and experiences to the school. Their perspective will contribute to the style with which they share curriculum and instruction with their students. Their different backgrounds will give them a unique approach to their professional development and how they implement content into their roles. Additionally, students and their families will have their own unique characteristics and needs. The culture that develops at LCCA will be distinct from the existing culture at SCCA and will enhance and influence the virtual school experience of all involved. Though each school will be unique in its school culture, staff and students, we expect both schools to maintain a positive and healthy school culture and program, focused on the core Connections Academy model.

*Assessments*

LCCA will adhere to the same accountability measures, administer the same SCPASS assessments, and follow the same proficiency measures as all virtual public charter schools in South Carolina, in addition to using its own internal assessment tools. LCCA's various assessments will combine with top-quality curriculum and instruction to improve student achievement and maintain a high level of accountability. LCCA will use assessments that are aligned with the curriculum, performance goals, and state standards.

The OBL Assessment Design team defines assessment "tools" as any resource that supports the content or design of an assessment. Such tools may include assessment resources that accompany the text used in a course (e.g., benchmark and other progress-monitoring assessments, unit tests, and topic test banks) and any assessments delivered via software. All assessment tools go through a multi-step evaluation prior to approval for course use. Tools are first evaluated by the Assessment Design team to determine their quality and appropriateness in regard to the following criteria: alignment with course content and standards; age appropriateness; reading ability; cognitive rigor (questions are measured

against Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge); best practices for item creation (e.g., clarity, relevance, and plausibility of item and distractors); accessibility; and compatibility with the platform assessment engine (ease of implementation).

LCCA's assessment efforts will begin with a thorough academic placement process during enrollment and progress review. This includes online placements tests where indicated, which help to customize the student's academic program. LCCA will also utilize ongoing online and offline assessments to measure student progress on the curriculum and a technology-based assessment tool to review student progress over the school year.

The primary assessments may include the following; however, specific assessments may change as the school progresses through the term of its charter:

- **Placement Tests:** During enrollment in the program, each new student will take part in a placement process that includes review of previous school records and assessment results, review with parents, and use of placement tests as needed to help evaluate the appropriate set of courses for the student. OBL's Academic Placement Advisors and the school's counselors will then determine a grade-level and/or course placement in consultation with parents/guardians.

- **Interim Assessments:** LCCA will utilize a variety of interim assessments selected for their appropriateness for each grade level. These assessments will align with state standards as well as the curriculum. Acadience Reading K-6 is used for reading readiness. i-Ready assessments for both math and reading are used for grades K-9.

  o **Acadience Reading K-6:** Acadience Reading K-6 (Acadience Reading), used with English Language Arts Grades K-1, is produced by Dynamic Measurement Group. It includes standardized, individually-administered measures of early literacy designed to monitor the development of pre-reading and early reading skills. Acadience Reading includes essential early literacy domains determined by the National Reading Panel (2000) and National Research Council (1998). Acadience Reading goals and cut scores are research-based, criterion-referenced scores with strong evidence of reliability and validity. Benchmark levels in Acadience Reading are based on the Composite Score which combines multiple Acadience Reading scores and provides the best overall estimate of the student's early literacy skills and/or reading proficiency. As the logic and procedures used to establish benchmark goals are consistent across grades and times of year, the percent of students at or above benchmark can be compared across fall and spring assessments. Results will be available to teachers through the platform as students complete the assessment. Teachers have access to student's overall scores, scores within content areas, and information based on the student's overall score that highlights the extent to which a student is at-risk for struggling academically.

  o **i-Ready Assessments:** i-Ready assessments, produced by Curriculum Associates, LLC, provide diagnostic components for grades K-9 that show how much growth is needed to reach grade-level expectations. The data generated from these assessments can be used to prioritize student needs using data to understand deficits, set goals, and track growth. i-Ready Assessments measure student progress and are used to periodically evaluate progress made by students in key content domains. For grades 2-8, standards mastery is tracked in grades 2-8 and provides insight into mastery of grade-level standards.

- **Ongoing Formative Assessments:** Students engage in formative assessments that tap into all levels of student learning such as scored daily assignments, daily checks for understanding which require students to apply and integrate new skills in a thoughtful manner, and regular online quizzes and tests to measure understanding of newly presented material.

- **Unit Assessments and Offline and Online Portfolio Assignments**: Throughout each logical unit of study, students will be required to complete a series of offline and online assessments. Offline assessments may include written compositions, science lab reports, short-answer questions, essays, book responses, and a variety of work samples. These assessments require direct teacher evaluation. Online assessments include quick checks, quizzes, online practices, and unit tests. While the quick checks and quizzes may be brief and frequent, the more comprehensive unit tests occur at the end of an entire unit. Many online assessments provide students and families with immediate objective feedback while offline assessments provide valuable reflection, feedback, and expertise from credentialed teachers. Student progress reports and grades include a combination of online and offline assessments.

- **Curriculum-Based Assessments:** LCCA will use curriculum-based assessments (CBAs) as a quick and effective way to gather additional information on students' understanding of concepts through telephone conversation. Diagnostic curriculum-based assessments (DCBA) pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in student mastery of concepts. Verification curriculum-based assessments (VCBA) authenticate student learning of concepts previously graded as completed with scores of B or higher.

- **Baseline Achievement Data:** Whenever possible, standardized test results will be integrated into an incoming student's basic information in the platform. Likewise, results for the SCPASS and other state required assessments that students take while enrolled at LCCA, which are proctored face-to-face at a physical location, are included in the platform along with internal pre-, mid-, and post-test data. This data will be used to track student progress from year to year and within the year and to inform course placement and instructional needs.

- **State-Mandated Assessments:** LCCA will be dedicated to meeting and exceeding all of South Carolina's grade level requirements. LCCA students will participate in the SCPASS and all other assessments depending upon grade level, or course enrollment, as required by law.

LCCA will set up in-person, proctored locations throughout the state based on the geographic locations of the student population. While the teaching/learning center, which we plan to locate in the Tri-County area, may be enlisted as a testing site, most testing will occur at other locations. Testing sites may include locations such as hotel conference rooms, public library meeting rooms, local schools if available, private tutoring and learning centers, and local colleges. Test sites will be easy for families to find, will be safe and secure, and ideally will provide free parking. Geographic population maps will be created to identify areas where testing sites are needed based on student population. Sites will be reviewed annually to adjust for an increase in student population. Students will be assigned to a testing center. If a family has transportation issues and is not able to make it to a testing site, LCCA will work with the family to make accommodations and may help with travel (via public transport).

OBL will provide state testing support. OBL currently provides services to 32 virtual and blended public schools. OBL's State Testing Services includes OBL maintaining and distributing a National State Testing Best Practices Manual to help facilitate the testing process. In addition, OBL will support LCCA with the creation of a State Test Plan each school year. The test plan will address the tests, testing schedule, testing sites, student registration, test security, site security, and Special Education accommodations.

The State Test Plan will also include a strategy to create an awareness and communication campaign for LCCA families, track student registration, participation, and make-up testing, all to help ensure that the 95% testing requirement is met. Higher tiers of support are offered during the first school year, including weekly training meetings for the State Test Coordinator.

All staff members serving as test proctors will be trained on the specific state rules and requirements for testing. This training will be conducted synchronously by the school's Testing Coordinator with staff members at least two to three weeks before testing commences. Each staff member will acknowledge that they have been trained and understand the importance of maintaining test security.

Tests and related materials will be kept secure at the school site or an approved designated location. Paper and pencil tests, when transported to students throughout the state, will be moved in locked cases (like a locked suitcase or other secure device). The OBL State Testing Team will support LCCA with online testing requirements and opportunities. Staff members will be trained on test security throughout the testing process. Results of these annual assessments will be reported to the Governing Board, Charter Institute, and the SCDE as well as communicated directly to parents when required by South Carolina law.

### School Assessment Policies

Responsibility for monitoring, evaluating, adjusting, and adhering to the school's assessment policies and practices follows a traditional model. Teachers have primary responsibility for administering assessments and providing feedback to administrators. The School Leader oversees the assessment program and works with the school leadership team as well as education specialists in evaluating and making recommendations for changes. OBL further oversees the assessment component and makes recommendations to the School Leader and the Board. The Board has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the school is fulfilling the expectations and obligations under charter school law, the charter, and approved school policy.

### Using Assessment and Performance Data to Evaluate and Inform Instruction

Whenever possible, state standardized test results will be integrated into an incoming student's basic information in the platform. Likewise, results for state standardized tests that students will take while enrolled at LCCA are included in the platform, along with internal pre-, mid-, and post-test data. This data is used to track student progress from year to year and within the year, and to inform the course placement and instructional needs of students.

Formative assessments provide educators with critical information about student progress and can be used to adjust the teacher's approach and the pace of instruction throughout the year. Formative assessments are often used as tools for uncovering opportunities for instructional intervention because they give teachers information about where additional practice and support may be needed. Research has shown that timely and specific feedback from formative assessments can enable teachers to make a significant impact on student learning. In *Formative Assessment in Seven Good Moves* posted to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) website, Brent Duckor stated, "The research is clear: What teachers do in their classrooms matters. But which practices really make a difference?" John Hattie (2012) conducted an extensive meta-analysis, looking at 800 meta-analyses that focused on locating a specific student achievement outcome and identifying an influence on that outcome. Formative assessment topped his list of the most influential practices that improve student

outcomes.[2]

Teachers will review assessment data as a regular part of their daily routine. They will review unit tests and align CBA questions accordingly and they will review student progress on the benchmark assessments and student membership in various subgroups. During this review, teachers will note which students, in which subject areas, need additional assistance to achieve mastery. In addition, teachers will identify what a student must know to move forward in a course in order to be successful in the next course in the sequence. The instructional methodology depends on teachers monitoring data sets that indicate if a student is or is not learning. These data sets guide teachers towards identifying a student's specific skill set that needs remediation. The tools within the platform, such as the Student Performance Reporting for students in grades K–8, are helpful in showing alignment between assessments and the curriculum. With support from the administrative team, teachers will use that data to determine the difference between a whole group reiteration and a small group remediation. The school will also uses this data to help determine additional instructional sessions. Students may be asked to participate in required tutoring sessions and/or supplemental programs to help build their foundation skills. Students who are excelling have the opportunity to participate in small group LiveLesson.

### Tracking Progress

The powerful Grade Book, embedded in the platform, will enable students and parents to track progress on a daily basis, and to see up-to-the-minute information on grades, assessments, and overall lesson completion. Learning Coaches, teachers, and students will have access to a Grade Book that tracks all results and serves as the basis of changes in the student's learning plan. Teachers provide descriptive feedback beyond the simple right/wrong grading of many traditional assessment vehicles. LCCA will also use a variety of advanced data visualization tools that provide students, parents, teachers, school administrators, institutional education partners, regulators, and researchers with views of how students are performing**.**

### Managing and Interpreting Data

Teachers will access the Student Performance Reports which provide real-time student performance data on assessments. The reports identify the student score and the performance against each item. For some courses, objective level performance data is also provided. Teachers can use this data to determine which students need more help with a particular concept. They may then participate in individual or small group tutoring virtually with these students targeting specific skills.

At both the section and individual student levels, the Student Performance Reports can be generated displaying the essential skills and standards for a course and exactly where in the curriculum each are assessed. The Student Performance Reports will provide real-time student performance on each of the essential skills and standards based upon individual assessment items which measure standards-based objectives that students should master by the end of that grade level. Data can be used to identify students who have mastered or not mastered specific objectives. Teachers can run this report as frequently as they need to see exactly how students are progressing with regard to each of the skills and standards for that subject and grade. This method enhances the multi-tiered instruction model; identifies essential skills and standards by subject/grade level; identifies where these essential skills and standards are assessed; adheres to the RTI model; provides access to and analysis of real-time data to

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[2] Dukor, Brent. "Formative Assessment in Seven Good Moves". Educational Leadership, Mar 2014. Available (paywall) at: <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar14/vol71/num06/Formative-Assessment-in-Seven-Good-Moves.aspx>

determine mastery/proficiency; incorporates data-driven decisions throughout instruction; identifies the need for tiered interventions for non-mastered/proficient skills and standards; and identifies students' response to the implemented interventions.

**E. Outline goals that will provide evidence that the school is advancing its mission and meeting the purpose of S.C. Code Ann 59-40-20. Goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic of the school's mission, and time-bound.**

LCCA's goals have been designed to advance its mission and address the purposes of S.C. Code Ann 59-40-20. For example, the school will attract a diverse set of learners, many of whom have struggled to find an educational setting that adequately meets their needs. The school will seek to improve student learning and utilize a variety of teaching methods. LCCA will provide increased learning opportunities for students, will strive to assist South Carolina in reaching academic excellence, and create a more flexible and innovative way of educating children. The goals below will measure the efficacy of LCCA meeting these purposes.

LCCA has defined the following goals to support its mission of helping its students maximize their academic potential:

- State Test Scores: All official published state test proficiency rates for the school will be 70% of the state average. The calculation is a ratio of the school's result to the state average for each tested subject-grade level so results can be roughly compared across states. A value of 100% indicates the school is equivalent to the state average. Note:  A weighted average is computed based on the number of tests taken by students at the school and officially counted. If no official pass rate and number of students' tests counted is available for a subject-grade level test, one will be computed using data loaded into the EMS.

- Test Score Growth (Note: This goal will start in the second year of the school): The school will show a year-over-year increase in the state test score ratio calculated in the previous goal.

- Grades K-8 & High School Successful Course Completion: 80% of completed courses in Mathematics, English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies will result in a passing grade or credit.

- High School Cohorts (all 4 current) % on-track: The school will have a combined high school cohort anticipated graduation rate of 60%. As a virtual public school, LCCA anticipates a higher rate of student mobility than traditional schools and has adjusted the target cohort graduation rate accordingly.

- Post-Secondary Plans: 90% of graduates will identify a Post-Graduation Plan and 75% of graduates indicate they plan to enroll in a two- or four-year college and are accepted.

- Parent Satisfaction: School will have an average of 87% positive responses on the 21 Parent Satisfaction Survey questions that are most directly affected by schools.

- Student Retention: The school will have a 77% "during school year" (DSY) retention rate, meaning that 77% of students who engage in the program will stay enrolled until the end of the school year. The measure will be calculated by subtracting one minus the DSY withdrawal rate as reported in the June 30 Monthly School Report (MSR) created for the school.

These goals have taken into consideration the current performance of SCCA as well as the performance of other schools who operate the Connections Academy model. For LCCA's goals to be realistic and

attainable, the Charter Committee has taken into consideration that the school will need time to mature and reach the performance level of SCCA. As a new school, the Charter Committee acknowledges the metrics of LCCA will not immediately mirror the strength of other schools, which tend to improve over time. For example:

- SCCA currently averages 82% of the state average on state test scores but SCCA has operated for more than 10 years.

- Connections Academy schools report 85% of students successfully complete courses in mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies, but, as a new school, LCCA will likely trend lower in the short-term.

## F. Virtual charter schools only: A description of how the replication school will satisfy the requirement defined in Section IV(E)(1) of SC SBE Regulation 43-601 that requires 25% of virtual instruction in core content areas will be real-time.

LCCA plans to meet the 25% real time core academic instructional opportunities requirement through a variety of means. Opportunities will include LiveLesson sessions, Curriculum-Based Assessments (CBA), Time to Talk, Office Hours, Field Trips, Clubs & Activities and Offline Assigned Work.

### LiveLesson Sessions

Regular LiveLesson® sessions will enable students and teachers to work together at the same time in a virtual classroom, as demonstrated below in Figure 11. Using LiveLesson sessions, teachers will group students to allow collaboration in break-out rooms that allow teachers to observe student collaboration, redirect, etc. This audio/video web conferencing tool allows teachers to utilize digital learning tools for concept elaboration and allows students to work together in a collaborative space. Message boards will be created and used by teachers to assign additional collaboration opportunities or have students work together in the online space to share information, post documents, and respond to one another.

*Figure 11. Screenshot of LiveLesson Example*

Synchronous instruction will allow students to interact with peers and teachers. Students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge, ask questions, and build relationships with both peers and teachers. Teachers will be able to engage in discussion or problem solving, focus class time on specific skills, and build personal relationships with students.

### Curriculum-Based Assessments

Curriculum-Based Assessment (CBA) —Synchronous, or real-time, communications between the student and the teacher will be used to gather formative information on students' understanding of concepts. Students are required to participate in a minimum of eight CBAs per year but teachers often administer many more. Teachers conduct two types of CBAs: verified curriculum-based assessment (VCBA) and diagnostic curriculum-based assessment (DCBA).

- VCBAs are used to confirm student comprehension of concepts previously assessed and graded as successfully completed with scores of B or higher.

  VCBAs are informal phone conversations or individual LiveLesson sessions with the student in which the teacher asks a variety of questions about recently completed assignments to verify that the student has done the work independently and that the student has grasped the key components of the lesson(s). The content to be covered is not specified ahead of time, other than being part of "recently completed assignments" such as a reading passage or solving a set of mathematics problems.

- DCBAs are used to identify specific skill or concept issues students are having, develop strategies for remediation, and determine future instructional support that may be necessary to help underperforming students achieve success. These contacts occur during the regularly scheduled phone calls and are targeted toward students who receive a C or lower on an assessment or have an overall GPA of less than B.

### Office Hours

Teachers are also available during regular business hours to interact with students.

### Field Trips

Field trips will provide students with additional opportunities to socialize with their peers and are designed to help both students and Learning Coaches connect to their school and to each other. Students may go on trips to museums, farms, science centers, cultural centers, and unique experiential learning opportunities throughout South Carolina in guidance with local health regulations.

### Clubs and Activities

Included as an integral part of the academic program provided by Connections Academy schools, students are also offered access to a large variety of nationally facilitated virtual clubs and special events (e.g., virtual talent show, virtual art exhibition, contests, and other Pop Up Events). National clubs are academically-focused and teacher facilitated. In addition, an online yearbook allows each student, in participating schools, to create a personal page including photos, videos, responses to poll questions, and autographs collected from friends.

Clubs & Activities offered include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Art Club
- Arts and Crafts
- Author's Corner
- Brainteasers Club
- Career Club
- Chess Clubs: Introduction and Advanced

- College Planning Club
- Debate Club
- Gaming and Technology
- Leadership Club
- Math Club
- The *Monitor*: Student Blog

- Pop Up Events
- Robotics Club
- Science Sleuths: Weird Science
- Science Sleuths: Wild Weather

In addition to national Clubs & Activities, LCCA will produce monthly newsletters that celebrate student and school successes, showcase student work, provide tips from teachers, and highlight upcoming events.

### Offline Assigned Work

Students may perform schoolwork on their own time, including reviewing course materials offline and completing assignments. Some students thrive with one-on-one attention while others crave the space to work through problems independently at their own pace. Offering a combination of the two learning approaches allows virtual schools to create a more personalized learning experience that supports different learning styles.

Through asynchronous instruction and materials, students are provided the flexibility to:

- Learn at their own pace, place, and peak times, unconstrained by others' schedules;
- Work at their own level, moving as quickly or slowly through course materials as needed;
- Review difficult materials as often as needed; and
- Explore resources that may be unavailable in the traditional classroom.

**G. Schools operating under another sponsor: Academic data must be supplied in the format of access to raw files or reports printed directly from the testing or state platform. This should include state assessment files and interim testing files (such as NWEA MAP).**

SCCA currently operates under the sponsorship of the Institute. When SCCA moved to the Institute from the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD), the school's necessary data was transferred to the Institute and is also available to the Institute on state-supported sites. SCCA is also happy to provide specific information to the Institute upon request.

# 3. Organizational Plan and Operations

**A. A description of the existing school's management structure and how that will change with the addition of the new school. This should specify key members of the current school leading and/or supporting the replication, outline their roles, powers, and duties, and describe the plan for transition from planning through opening.**

The existing management structure at SCCA will not change with the addition of LCCA. While the two schools will enjoy a collegial spirit to support one another, the two schools will operate independently with their own distinct staff and school culture. SCCA staff, including the School Leader and other administrative staff, are supportive of replicating the SCCA model at LCCA; however, these individuals will not be asked to split time between the two schools once LCCA is open.

While the SCCA staff is supportive of the LCCA replication application, none of the current SCCA staff will be required to actively provide support during the application process. Once the LCCA School Leader is identified, the Charter Committee would encourage the current SCCA School Leader to serve as an informal mentor to help ensure LCCA creates a similar positive and successful school culture and learning environment.

## *Charter Committee*

The Charter Committee is currently comprised of four veteran members of the South Carolina Connections Academy Board, all with expertise in non-profit governance, virtual education, policy development, and fiscal oversight. Following charter approval and the Committee's transition to a governing board, additional members will be recruited to provide expertise and community perspective. Both the Charter Committee and Governing Board of LCCA have a Board President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary. While the LCCA Charter Committee members serve on both governing boards, the level of engagement and support to each school will remain constant and equal.

Each of these individuals will play a role in the development of LCCA. Full resumes for each member of the Charter Committee are provided in Appendix K. The Charter Committee members include:

- Dr. Kizzi Gibson, Committee Chair and President;
- Adam Hall, Vice President;
- Gary Prince, Treasurer; and
- Ashley Newton, Secretary.

## *Transition from Charter Committee to Governing Board*

The current Charter Committee intends to transition to the Governing Board upon approval of the virtual public charter school application through the establishment of school operations. Sustaining the continuity of the vision of the Charter Committee requires careful scrutiny of prospective Board members' commitment to the school's mission as well as continually educating Board members as to the scope of their legal responsibilities such as duty of loyalty, obedience, and faithfulness to the school's mission. To that end, the Board will hold regular retreats centered on effective Board development and best practices in governance and will work to recruit additional competent Board members that will also complement the eventual Board election process.

## B. A description of any features in governance philosophy, structure, processes for board recruitment, appointment, election, or training that are distinct from the current school(s).

The Charter Committee, and later the Lowcountry Connections Academy Board, will follow independent, non-profit board governance best practices and use the school's Mission Statement as a guideline in setting policy and overall decision making for the school. The Board will adopt policies of self-governance in matters of ethics, conflicts of interest, attendance and engagement, fiscal controls, and other general governance and meeting management procedures. The Board's processes will also include, but not be limited to, maintaining accurate records of all meetings, ensuring compliance with all Open Meetings Law requirements, overseeing compensation packages and setting school policies, and encouraging diverse representation among both the Board and students and families.

LCCA will encourage continuing education and professional development both for school employees and board members. Both school-based and OBL-offered professional development programs and training opportunities for school staff will be reviewed annually, as will development opportunities in educational leadership and sound non-profit governance for board members, with a budget included to allow board participation in opportunities that will best support the school.

### *Governance Overview*

The Charter Committee intends to continue serving as the Governing Board upon approval of the virtual public charter school application. The Charter Committee is aware of and plans to hold elections for these positions as they transition from a Charter Committee to a Governing Board. The Charter Committee is incorporated as an independent, public, non-profit corporation and is not a subsidiary of another entity, or in any way connected with, or under the control of another entity. The Charter Committee will be a good and effective steward of public money and provide independent governance of the school's administrators.

The Charter Committee members are parents, educators, and business and community leaders who are committed to bringing an innovative virtual public charter school for students in grades K-12 to South Carolina. Charter Committee members have unique skills and expertise in virtual education, technology, internal controls, personnel management and assessment, and financial analysis. These qualifications, among others, will help ensure the success of the school and the effective representation of key stakeholders.

### *Roles and Responsibilities of the Board*

The roles and responsibilities of the Board include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Protect the legal interests of the charter school and adhere to all applicable laws
- Establish a framework for and annually approve the school budget
- Practice financial management strategies
- Act as fiduciary of the school
- Authorize major expenditures, substantial program changes, etc.

- Manage liabilities wisely
- Advocate good external relations with the community, school districts, media, neighbors, parents, and students
- Hire contractors, negotiate service agreements, and hold contractors accountable for performance under such agreements
- Review and renew the contract with the

- Elect/appoint the officers of the corporation and determine their terms
- Ensure that the charter is achieving its vision and mission
- Oversee services and activities of the virtual education service provider
- Set Board and school policy
- Provide academic program oversight and approval
- Govern the operations of the school but leave daily operations to the School Leader
- Exercise sound legal and ethical practices and policies
- Evaluate providers of services
- Negotiate and enter into a charter with the Charter Institute at Erskine

- virtual education service provider
- Comply with state and federal reporting requirements
- Practice strategic planning
- Ensure adequate resources and manage them effectively
- Assess the organization's performance including monitoring achievement of accountability framework
- Attend all state and authorizer mandated training that is relevant to effective leadership, as well as periodic best practice governance training and development opportunities.
- Approve real estate transactions

### Board Member Terms

The Charter Committee is currently comprised of four members. The bylaws permit at least seven members, as legally required, enabling the LCCA Board to add additional parent and community members once the charter contract begins. Recruitment for additional members will continue following the approval of a charter and an election will be held in the second operational school year.

Directors will be appointed with staggered terms and, to meet state law requirements, at least 50% of the Board will be elected every two years, starting in the second year of operation. In the event of an increase in the number of Board members, the LCCA Board will seek the Institute's approval of terms that will keep equally staggered terms to the fullest extent possible. A member appointed to fill an unexpired term shall be appointed for the remainder of that term. There is currently no limit to the number of terms a member can serve on the LCCA Board, and any term limits for the Board or Officers of the Board will be determined by the governing board of directors.

### Recruiting Board Members

Additional members will be recruited as necessary to form a diverse and well-balanced Board. Any member of the greater South Carolina community may seek appointment to the Board with the exception of employees of LCCA and OBL, any person who has been convicted of a felony, or any person who is unable to successfully pass the Board approved background check clearance process.

In the event a vacancy occurs on the LCCA Board from any cause, including an increase in the number of members, the Governing Board may appoint a member to fill the vacancy through the unexpired term of the vacating Board member until another election is held.

*Training and Professional Development for Board Members*

LCCA Board members will attend any state or authorizer-required governance trainings, including an orientation program which will be provided by the South Carolina State Charter School Alliance, to ensure that they have ongoing knowledge about governance, oversight requirements, department rules, policies, and procedures. In addition, the Board may allocate funds to participate in training opportunities providing ongoing Board development in non-profit board governance, virtual education program oversight, and strategic planning, among other topics beneficial to sound charter school board governance.

Additional training may also be conducted by a reputable third party vendor to ensure smooth operations and effective Board practices. Other trainings may include Effective Board Governance of Public Charter Schools online training module series, which is provided by OBL, as well as specific training provided in person, virtually, and in print. Training topics may include charter school basics, responsibilities, conflict of interest, effective meeting management, quality Board leadership and policy development. In addition, Board members will have the opportunity to participate in various regional and national conferences to network with other charter board members and further their development as effective board members.

## C. A copy of the proposed organizational chart for the current and replication school(s), and a description of how the chart fulfills the needs of the school and plans for future growth.

LCCA anticipates organizing its staff in a similar model as SCCA. Generally, the School Leader will oversee principals and managers/directors of particular services, including administrative, accountability, special education, and counseling, and administrative. The SCCA organizational structure adjusts slightly each year as it adapts to meet the needs of its students. LCCA will also be flexible in its organizational structure and will adjust as it grows to meet the needs of its students and families.

A copy of the current organizational chart for SCCA and a proposed organizational chart for LCCA are included in Appendix L.

## D. A description of staffing and/or services that the schools will share. This should clarify cost structuring, reporting, accountability, and employee practices across entities.

At the onset, there are no plans for SCCA to share any staffing or services with LCCA. The two schools will operate independently and maintain separate operations, including but not limited to cost structures, reporting, accountability, and employee practices, though both will follow the core Connections Academy model.

## E. A plan for allocating sufficient resources towards a successful replication without disadvantaging the existing school(s).

LCCA will operate as an independent, standalone, full-service virtual school. As such, it will not utilize any resources from SCCA. If anything, both schools will benefit as they can share best practices and support one another as South Carolina based virtual charter schools, both utilizing the Connections Academy model.

**F. A copy of the bylaws, the Articles of Incorporation, and the signed Certificate of Incorporation.**

Appendix M includes a copy of the bylaws, the Articles of Incorporation, and the signed Certificate of Incorporation for LCCA.

**G. A copy of the current charter and contract, including amendments, for the school(s) being replicated.**

Due to the size of these documents, a copy of SCCA's current charter and contract have been included as Appendix N.

**H. A copy of any sponsor, state, or external performance reviews of the school(s) for the past 3 years, including information on any citations for noncompliance, breach of contract, nonrenewal or revocation.**

Any sponsor, state, or external performance reviews of the school for the past three years are included in Appendix O.

**I. A copy of your board policy manual, the most recent school leader evaluation, the most recent evaluation of the school's management company (if applicable), and a copy of the most recent strategic plan.**

The documents identified have been provided in Appendix P, including a copy of the board policy manual, most recent evaluation of OBL, and the most recent school leader evaluation.

# 4. Business Plan

## A. A five-year detailed budget.

A detailed five-year budget has been provided as Appendix Q.

## B. A detailed description of budget assumptions that specifies the financial needs of starting a new school and does not adversely affect students at the current school(s).

The five-year budget included represent best estimates for revenues and costs for LCCA, as of October 2020. It is important to note that this budget and associated assumptions will be revised and adjusted based upon actual needs of students and staff, school enrollment fluctuations, funding rates, school priorities, and revisions. This budget is provided to document the financial viability of the school under reasonably conservative assumptions with a focus on student services.

The year-by-year enrollment estimates are based on the existing demand for the school's program while considering factors for students leaving the school such as relocation, family life changes, and other changes.

The revenues shown assumes Basic Program (EFA) and Proviso funding of approximately $4,387 per unweighted average daily membership (ADM). The budget also includes Add-On, Fringe, Special Education, and Categorical funding sources resulting in total funding per student of approximately $7,592 from State funding sources (no annual increase). Additionally, the school anticipates receiving Federal IDEA and Title II funding which have also been included in the budget.

The assumption for the special education population is calculated at a conservative rate of 12.3% IEP students, along with assumptions with 504 and EL students, which has been used to budget costs associated with operating the special education program.

Staff costs assume a student-to-teacher ratio which has been demonstrated to be highly effective in providing personalized instruction in other virtual schools supported by OBL across the country (one instructional staff per 30 students on average, varying by grade and student population). Annual merit increases have been budgeted at 2%. LCCA will have a School Leader, a Counseling Manager, an Assistant Principal, a Special Education Manager, and several Administrative Assistants in its first year of operation. Throughout the contract term, LCCA will continue to invest resources in its administrative team to ensure adequate oversight and focus on student services and achievement.

The Governing Board will continue to evaluate student needs and make adjustments as the term of this charter contract commences and continues.

OBL will charge bundled fees for the products and services provided to the school. These fees have been allocated in the budget and include annual licensing costs for the use of the EMS, the educational management system which serves as the foundation for the virtual school. The EMS is a combination of a learning management system, student information system, and communication tool which enhances all aspects of the virtual school from enrollment, curriculum, human resources, teaching/learning, to evaluation.

OBL products also include the provision of tangible and intangible instructional materials. These materials include the lesson content, lesson plans, text, video, instructional games, supplementary

resources, other online licensed content, and learning tools.

Student technology will be provided to students on a limited hardship basis (budget assumes 5% of enrolled students will receive technology). LCCA has contracted with OBL to supply its student technology offering which includes the use of loaned computers, repairs, warranty, environmentally friendly-certified disposal, and warehousing/logistics services. The cost includes any losses associated with damage caused by the user that is not collectible from the family due to inability to pay. These costs are not passed on to families. The Governing Board retains the right to revise the current student technology and subsidy offerings at any time and will ensure it complies with relevant statutes.

OBL will provide technical support for teachers and students via a call-in center which provides the necessary software, technical and operational support. The center is staffed with trained members who efficiently assist members of the school that use the program.

The facilities line item in the budget assumes a primary facility location in the Tri-County area. Preliminary research for potential lease locations will begin in November 2020. The Governing Board plans to engage in more detailed evaluations and facility reviews once the charter is approved with a team of experts to assist in finding a suitable location ahead of the start of the 2021-22 school year.

## C. A description of any financial procedures, policies, staffing, structures, or reporting procedures that are distinct from the current school(s).

The financial procedures, policies, staffing, structures, and reporting for LCCA will not be done differently than they are currently done for SCCA. A brief description of services is included here for clarity.

### *Process for Developing Operating Budget*

The development of the annual budget will be an interactive process that will incorporate input from key stakeholders. The Governing Board will use sound budgeting and forecasting policies and procedures to monitor revenue and authorize expenditures according to any restrictions placed on revenue. Working with OBL, the Board Treasurer will coordinate the preparation of an annual operating budget with estimated revenue and expenditures for the upcoming year. The budget model will be informed by a variety of key metrics, such as estimated funded enrollment levels by grade, target staffing ratios by role, etc. Each year, these assumptions will be reviewed and modifications may be made based on the school's performance needs.

The budget for the upcoming school year will be approved by the Governing Board prior to the end of each fiscal year. In the event that large deviations in assumptions occur (ex. significant enrollment or funding expectations), a revised budget will be prepared for the Governing Board's consideration. This budget will then be compared to actual and forecasted results on a monthly basis as described previously.

Approved budgets will be used to monitor the financial activities of the year via monthly financial reports. This will help ensure early identification of any budget variances/trends so that appropriate corrective action can be taken as needed. In addition, OBL will support the Board Treasurer by preparing cash flow analysis, budget projections, and budget revisions for subsequent fiscal years for review.

This process will be enacted every year. Each year will bring new focuses and needs, whether enacting more professional development for teachers or hiring more staff. These needs and focuses will be

brought up and reflected in the budget during the yearly budget review.

Additionally, each year the school will officially engage an independent audit firm, and receive the annual financial audit in a public meeting properly noticed under South Carolina's open meeting laws.

### Accounting Practices

LCCA will use an industry accepted, and widely adopted accounting software and will maintain records in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and is compatible with South Carolina's reporting requirements. The accounting software used will also be required to include strong controls, data integrity and backup, and data security. Through these accounting practices and procedures, LCCA will strive to have no material breaches during the duration of the charter.

The Governing Board will also engage an independent accounting firm to conduct its annual financial audit. Corrective actions will be taken for recommendations to improve internal controls resulting from the audit.

### Maintaining Records

As stated previously, the school will use an industry accepted, and widely adopted accounting software and will maintain records in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) that is compatible with South Carolina's reporting requirements. Support for all transactions entered into the accounting system will be maintained electronically. Evidence of expenditure and other transaction approval will be reviewed and maintained in order to support the appropriateness of activities recorded in the accounting system. Accounting records will be maintained on a secure network with system level access restricted to assigned personnel.

### Internal Financial Controls

LCCA will institute rigorous internal financial controls as follows:

- Segregation of Duties: LCCA will develop and maintain simple check request and purchase order forms to document the authorization of non-payroll expenditures. All proposed expenditures must be approved by the School Leader, who will review the proposed expenditure to determine whether it is consistent with the Governing Board-adopted budget and sign the check request form. All approved check requests and purchase orders will be provided to the Governing Board designee and will be signed by a Governing Board member or a designee of the Governing Board who has been approved as a signatory on the school's checking account to initiate payment. All transactions will be posted in an electronic general ledger.

- Authorization and Processing of Disbursements: To ensure fiscal responsibility and compliance, the Governing Board will meet regularly to review the operations and financial performance of the school. Supporting documentation evidencing appropriate levels of approval for all expenditures will be maintained. The school will not authorize any payment until such approvals have been documented. The Governing Board will establish fiscal policies covering school expenditures. It will also designate specific check signing authority.

- Safeguard Assets: All state, federal, and other monies received by LCCA will be deposited in its accounts within 24 hours or one banking day of receipt per federal and state regulations. LCCA will acquire all federal, state, and local tax and employer identification numbers to establish as a South Carolina public school as required by law.

- Banking Arrangements/Reconciliation: LCCA will maintain its accounts at a federally-insured commercial bank or credit union. Funds will be deposited in non-speculative accounts including federally-insured savings or checking accounts or invested in non-speculative federally-backed instruments. For all funds, the Governing Board must appoint and approve all individuals authorized to sign checks in accordance with these policies. All bank accounts will require multiple signatures on checks or other forms of disbursement. Bank statements from private banking institutions will be sent directly to the school's finance committee, who will submit a copy for reconciliation. This reconciliation will be provided to the committee for review monthly.

- Policies and Procedures: Policies and procedures to safeguard payroll and employee information will be implemented by the Governing Board.

Also, any and all LCCA staff members who deal with financial and administrative matters will be required to adhere to the school's fiscal control policies.

## D. A description of any plans related to retirement, transportation, or food services that are distinct from the current school(s).

These services will not be distinct from SCCA. A brief description of services is included here for clarity.

### Retirement

SCCA does not participate in the South Carolina Teachers Retirement Fund, nor will LCCA.

### Transportation

Similar to SCCA, LCCA is not planning to provide transportation services to students at this time. As a virtual public charter school, LCCA does not anticipate transportation or lack thereof to prevent a child from attending school.  All instruction will take place via virtual classrooms and/or other virtual tools and will note require students to travel for instruction.

For state testing, in particular, if a family has transportation issues and is not able to make it to a testing site, LCCA will work with the family to make accommodations and may help them with travel costs (i.e. via public transport). A similar program has been established at SCCA.

### Food Services

Neither SCCA nor LCCA will provide food services to students at this time.

## E. Discuss the process the school will follow to contract with a certified public accountant to conduct an annual, independent financial audit.

The Governing Board will engage a third-party accounting firm to perform an annual audit which includes a review of internal controls and provides assurance that the financial statements are materially accurate. The auditor will be selected according to the same guidelines applicable to public and/or charter schools in South Carolina. The audit will be conducted in accordance with generally accepted Governmental auditing principles and will meet the specific compliance requirements set forth by South Carolina. LCCA's accounts will be audited annually. OBL will support the preparation of audit work papers for the fiscal year end and work with auditors to complete the audit engagement.

All approved budgets, audits, annual financial reports and other applicable financial data will be made

available for viewing in accordance with the applicable South Carolina transparency requirements. Since these documents will be presented in a public meeting and are public documents they will be made available to parents and the public upon request. Additionally, LCCA will adhere to the submission timelines for financial information specified by the Institute and the state of South Carolina and law will provide any additional information upon request.

### F. Discuss the school's contingency plans for cash flow challenges, a budget shortfall, or lower than expected student enrollment.

The budget has been developed with support from OBL and their experience with virtual school costs. With this knowledge, the enrollment projections are conservative based upon the demand in South Carolina for fulltime virtual education as well as the experience that similar schools have had in other states.

In the event that the school does not reach its enrollment projections, LCCA will have a policy of carefully hiring staff only as enrollment requires. This policy will prevent a large deficit from occurring. The nature of virtual education is the ability to react quickly and the ability to attract high-quality staff from a statewide pool if necessary. This increases flexibility and the ability to make wise financial decisions while ensuring students' academic needs are successfully met.

Additionally, most of the school's expenses are variable instead of fixed. This will ensure that the majority of expenses will flex up or down with enrollment, thus cushioning the impact of lower than expected revenue due to an enrollment shortfall. As an added measure, OBL has pledged to protect LCCA from deficits by offering service credits for each school year as needed. Credits of $104,000 in Year 1 and $61,000 in Year 5 are reflected in the five-year model.

OBL will protect the school from cash flow volatility by awaiting payment of OBL's invoices until the school has the funds available to make payment and by allowing the school to pay in installments. This will ensure that LCCA's positive cash flow is never compromised. Also, as stated, OBL will offer service credits annually, as needed to protect the school against an anticipated deficit. The Governing Board has been assured that OBL remains committed to honoring the service credits during the length of the contract.

### G. Present your facility needs assessment including number of classrooms, bathrooms, and other specified rooms or space needed to implement the proposed program.

The facility will be sized and designed to meet the unique needs of LCCA. A typical office footprint suitable for Connections Academy's average school model can range between 2,000-4,000 square feet. Considerations affecting the specific quantity and design for the following typical space program items will be discussed. Considering the Connections Academy model offers a virtual school solution without a daily student presence on site, facilities are typically located within existing office buildings. Athletic facilities geared to student use (e.g. playgrounds, athletic fields) are not typically a consideration of a virtual school offering.

Over time, LCCA anticipates that its facility will closely mirror that of SCCA. Currently, SCCA occupies 8,952 square feet in its Columbia facility and includes: storage rooms, file storage space, a locked room for test storage, two conference rooms, teacher work area, a collaborative area, a huddle room, four offices (which house five employees), a break room, and a training room. SCCA prioritizes locked storage space for test storage, which is maintained separately from other storage rooms, and utilizes their

facility for onsite student testing and occasional professional development for teachers and staff.

As a new school, LCCA is unlikely to require a large amount of space in its first few years of operation; a smaller student body will require fewer staff and storage space. Additionally, it will be up to LCCA and LCCA's School Leader to decide how to move forward under Covid-19 restrictions, and it is possible that more LCCA staff will work remotely than in a typical first year of a school. These factors may be taken into consideration by LCCA and OBL and may result in an initial, smaller office facility. OBL will work with LCCA to reevaluate facility space requirements and upsize as necessary to meet the needs of LCCA.

## H. Identify prospective facilities and describe how they meet the identified needs. This should include address, location, and proposed lease or purchase agreement (if applicable).

LCCA will be a virtual public charter school and facility size will not be dependent on school enrollment. At the time of this application, a facility in the Tri-County area has not been identified. Initial location requirements have begun and the search for appropriate facilities in and around Charleston is scheduled to begin in November 2020, as illustrated in Table 4 (page 56). Considerations for persons with disabilities and storage of school records will be taken into consideration with each prospective location.

### Accessibility to Staff and Students with Disabilities

The interior of LCCA's office premises will be designed for the school's use, including any space used for academic testing located within the primary facility, and will also satisfy the most current (e.g. 2010 revision) of the Americans with Disabilities Act thereby satisfying all associated legal requirements of the interior office space. The associated plans will be stamped by a licensed architect and built according to all relevant laws and building codes.

OBL's real estate team, in consultation with the LCCA Charter Committee, will search for properties whereby landlords will represent compliance with ADA and agree to put appropriate indemnities shielding LCCA in the lease agreement from litigation related to non-compliance within building common areas. Risk of non-compliance can be mitigated by considering buildings designed to building codes published in 2010 or later. Additionally, when touring properties, OBL will perform a visual inspection of potential buildings and seek to identify if common infractions are visible. If such preliminary findings suggest non-compliance the project team will suggest alternative properties, engaging a specialist to generate a building audit analyzing ADA compliance, and potentially negotiate for the landlord to remediate any non-compliant issues.

### Maintaining School Records

The facility will be designed to house student and school records on site if no storage space is made available for such purpose. Rooms will be designed to be secure, under a physical key or electronic key card access, with actual files to be stored in fire-rated filing cabinets. OBL will review specific file storage needs with LCCA to identify an appropriate bespoke solution.

OBL can act as a pay agent for LCCA relating to property and facility related matters and will maintain electronic records of related rent and services invoices as part of its facility management related service to the school.

## I. The plan and timeline for identifying, selecting, negotiating and renovating (or constructing) the facility. This should address contingency plans.

LCCA has not identified a facility at the time of this application. However, a number of potentially suitable office buildings will be identified for further investigation within the Tri-County area. It is anticipated that an existing office space within these markets could be remodeled. It is difficult to estimate the exact anticipated costs of the interior construction until the facility team performs the appropriate due diligence. When evaluating office spaces, the OBL facilities team seeks to prioritize those locations with existing improvements which can be reused thereby mitigating capital investment for construction.

The office lease will be negotiated by experienced lease negotiators including the services of a senior real estate broker affiliated with a leading national real estate brokerage firm as well as support from a specialist real estate attorney. In addition, input into lease negotiations will be obtained from OBL's facility management and construction projects management resources for those provisions governing property operations and construction of the office space.

With respect to a virtual public charter school use, OBL will strive to obtain lease provisions where the lease term does not extend beyond the contract funding term. Related, a termination right will be requested tied to the existence of the charter funding arrangement thereby mitigating exposure to real estate cost for tenant in the event the charter funding is not extended or is terminated.

OBL will provide LCCA with comprehensive facilities support encompassing site sourcing and selection, lease negotiations, all necessary support and tasks to either directly manage or supervise any necessary construction of office space, and also provide facilities management support once the school opens.

The following is an explanation of the aforementioned resources OBL will make available to LCCA to secure a facility for operations:

- Site Negotiations and Brokerage: A team of commercial leasing transaction managers will evaluate and hire office leasing brokers to identify potentially suitable office space.  This team will drive the site selection process including negotiations to complete any office lease. OBL has a contractual relationships with national real estate brokerage companies to support its portfolio including the search associated with LCCA in South Carolina.

- Construction Management: A full-time project manager available to oversee all construction related initiatives weather self-managed or overseen by the facility landlord.  Tasks include physical site evaluation, oversight of third-party architects and engineers, bidding, evaluating and hiring a general contractor or oversight of the facility landlord if acting as general contractor and managing payments and performance of vendors relating to said services. OBL also will involve its internal information technology team to manage establishment and installation of network circuits and related cabling and/or infrastructure to support the school location.

- Legal Support: A team of dedicated real estate attorneys are available to assist with negotiations relating to office leases, license agreements, construction services agreements and similar documents relating to the initial onboarding of a suitable facility.

- Facility Management: OBL directly employs a team of facility managers to assist with ongoing maintenance of the office facility once opened including landlord communications to resolve

issues. Services also include assistance with procuring and administering the contracts related to utilities, janitorial and office services vendors. LCCA will benefit from a modern work order system and vendor relationships which benefit from the additional scale provided from OBL's global portfolio relationships to achieve enhanced coverage and pricing efficiencies not available to schools on an individual basis. Operational concerns are addressed by a manned help desk, telephone or e-mail communication, staffed 24/7/365.

- Lease Administration: OBL provides lease administration support services including a dedicated team to process and analyze all rent payment requests, processing of landlord notices and oversight of the various critical dates and language associated rights and obligations inherent in a typical office lease between landlord and tenant. OBL has processes in place to ensure LCCA's date driven rights under its lease will be addressed in a timely manner.

A project team will be formed to define specific site requirements for LCCA and to develop a project plan to complete the project prior to school opening day. Understanding that LCCA intends to open for the 2021-22 school year, OBL will begin the process in November 2020. This will position LCCA to move quickly on site selection and lease execution upon approval by the Institute. This process is further outlined in Table 4, shown below, and plans for LCCA facility to be complete in time for Fall 2021.

*Table 4. Facility Selection Activities*

| Month | Milestone | Actions |
|---|---|---|
| 1<br><br>(November 2020) | Criteria Needs | • Formulate project team and site objectives<br>• Define success criteria and financial targets<br>• Engage real estate broker<br>• Create space program |
| 1-4<br><br>(November 2020 – February 2021) | Market Engagement | • Property market search and facility tours<br>• Negotiate terms of office lease<br>• Preliminary architectural plans and pricing<br>• Building evaluation analysis<br>• Financial analysis |
| 3-4<br><br>(January – February 2021) | Site Selection | • Secure all internal & school approvals<br>• Negotiate and execute lease agreement |
| 5-9<br><br>(March – July 2021) | Construction Completion *(room to accelerate schedule if site conditions permit)* | • Procure circuit for IT/network connectivity<br>• Procure general contractor<br>• Finalize design, obtain permits oversee construction works |
| 9 | Facility Set Up | • Procure and install furniture and equipment including network cabling, servers, security systems, sound masking, copiers and mail |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (July 2021) | | machines, etc. |
| 10<br><br>(July - August 2021) | Turnover to School Leader | • Hand over facility to School Leader<br>• Instruct on property management issues including services provided by OBL team including facility and lease administration support |

# Addenda

# EMO Narrative Requirements

# II. 2. Education/Charter Management Contracts

**1. Describe how the partnership between the applicant board and EMO/CMO originated: was the applicant recruited by an EMO/CMO to form a board or did the board conduct a search for an EMO/CMO; what due diligence was conducted (were other management organizations considered and why was the decision made to partner with this particular organization).**

OBL is contracted as the Education Service Provider (ESP) by South Carolina Connections Academy (SCCA), an existing virtual public charter school in South Carolina that continues to grow in enrollment. As an option to accommodate more students without sacrificing quality in services, a need was established for a second Connections Academy model school in South Carolina. A subset of SCCA's current board members desiring additional high quality virtual options for South Carolina students worked with OBL to establish the Charter Committee.

OBL has a proven record of success in collaborating with public virtual schools, consistent strong ratings from parents, proven acceptance of students to highly regarded colleges and universities, positive relationships with strong governing boards, and passionate testimonials from families about their successful experiences. The Charter Committee was also impressed with OBL's fiscal responsibility and experience developing fiscally-responsible and sustainable best practices as evidenced by the decade-long successful partnership at SCCA.

The quality of teachers is also very important to the Charter Committee. In partnering with OBL, high quality South Carolina-certified teachers knowledgeable in their content areas will be attracted to join the team. With their solid knowledge and passion for individualizing instruction, OBL's professional development will provide teachers with the necessary skills and pedagogy to teach online and maximize their skill set. The professional development of teachers in a virtual environment is essential. Teachers never stop learning, so they can continue to excel at teaching. High quality teachers paired with superior professional development opportunities will create a school where students will benefit.

Ultimately, the Charter Committee selected OBL for its solid national reputation working with charter schools, school districts, and state departments of education across the country as well as the successful partnership maintained at SCCA.

**2. Describe the oversight and evaluation methods that the school's governing board will use to oversee the EMO/CMO; include the supervisory responsibilities of the EMO/CMO (if any), including which school employees the EMO/CMO will supervise, how the EMO/CMO will supervise these employees, and how the charter school board will oversee the EMO/CMO's responsibilities.**

*Board's Oversight and Evaluation of the EMO*

OBL will be responsible for implementing the educational program. Therefore, the Charter Committee, and ultimately the Board, will hold OBL accountable for helping LCCA achieve their goals.

The Board will be independent from OBL and has complete legal, fiduciary, and oversight authority of LCCA. The Board will be responsible for the contractual relationship with OBL. The Board will regularly review services received from OBL. OBL will be responsible for reporting to the Board and will be answerable to the Board. Furthermore, the Board may conduct an annual review of OBL. The design, performance criteria, and methodology will be developed by the Board.

While formal evaluations may be conducted, feedback from the Board, the School Leader, and interested parties is expected to be received by OBL on a routine and as needed basis to address the needs of the school and ensure the needs of the students are being met in a timely and thorough manner.

The Board's evaluation of OBL would include a review of OBL in the following areas: Educational Program, Technology, School Support Services, and Board Support Services at a minimum.

### Supervisory Responsibilities of the EMO

The operating structure of LCCA is similar to a traditional educational environment and that of SCCA, with the School Leader implementing the policies and procedures of the LCCA Board while supervising the teaching staff. The School Leader is responsible for the instructional leadership, curriculum implementation, personnel decisions, facilities management, and any special staffing needs. The School Leader manages the teachers ensuring that each student successfully completes his/her instructional program. The School Leader is responsible for the overall school operation working with parents, students, support staff, and certified teachers who "virtually" facilitate a home-based student instructional program. In addition, through a Professional Learning Community (PLC), the School Leader has access to the experience, expertise, and best practices of their colleagues leading schools supported by OBL throughout the nation. Curriculum development is contracted to OBL.

The Board will contract with OBL for educational and operational support, with the approval and oversight of the Board. The Board will maintain ultimate control of the virtual public charter school. The Statement of Agreement details the respective roles of the Board and OBL and the services provided.

### Supervisory Responsibilities of LCCA Employees

The LCCA Board will be the employer of all teaching staff. These employees will participate in the South Carolina state health plan and OBL's retirement plan. Consistent with South Carolina law, the LCCA Board will delegate to OBL the responsibility for employing LCCA's lead school administrator (School Leader) and other administrative staff. These employees will participate in OBL's health plan and retirement plan. We believe this will lead to a more streamlined process and smoother operations under this arrangement.

Under the discretion of LCCA's Board, OBL and the School Leader will recruit, select, and hire appropriately certified instructional staff, as required by federal and state law. OBL will provide human resources services to ensure LCCA is staffed by well-trained and effective online learning professionals. Connections has extensive experience in recruiting, screening, and onboarding staff for high-quality online schools.

The staff will be recruited through a variety of channels, including traditional methods for posting job opportunities, plus networking with educational organizations and special outreach to teachers and administrators who are seeking an alternative environment. In addition, all candidates will undergo thorough screening procedures including background checks, comprehensive reference checks, an optional technology skills assessment, as well as any additional checks as required by state law.

The principles of equal employment opportunity are vital to the school's success and extend to all aspects of employment including recruitment, hiring, assignment, training, compensation, benefits, terminations, educational assistance, social and recreational programs, promotions, and transfers. LCCA will be committed to creating and fostering a work environment free from unlawful discrimination and

harassment and one in which decisions and terms of employment are not based in any way on race, creed, color, religion or religious affiliation, national origin, citizenship, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, marital status, disability, genetic information, or veteran status, or any other category protected by state or federal law.

Continued success in equal employment opportunity depends not only on the commitment and involvement of those directly responsible for staffing the school but also on the dedication of all staff members. All staff are charged with making a personal commitment to practice and enforce the principles of this policy.

Additionally, a supervisor who has a personal or professional relationship with an applicant for employment must disclose this relationship in writing at the outset of the hiring process. In order to maintain objectivity in hiring decisions, it may be necessary for the supervisor to be excused from the interview process.

The Charter Committee acknowledges the recent Charter Institute Management Organization and Required Agreement Provisions Policy. It is the Charter Committee's understanding that as a replication school applicant, LCCA will be grandfathered in from the rules prescribed in this policy, similar to SCCA, and only provisions where LCCA deviates from SCCA will require a waiver. The Charter Committee requests a waiver with regards to the employment of the School Leader and other administrative staff. It is the Charter Committee's hope the Charter Institute will grant the waiver for the duration of the school's existence. If the waiver cannot be granted, the Charter Committee would request an agreeable solution be reached within the final charter contract.

Like its partnership with SCCA, OBL will provide services to and support the Board, and the Board will exclusively manage the relationship and contract with OBL. Services to be offered may include compliance, insurance, research and assessment, state testing, educational program, special education services and oversight, counseling support, professional development and training, financial services, facilities support, outreach, enrollment and academic placement support, and school operations support.

### 3. Provide evidence that the school's governing board is independent from the EMO/CMO and self-governing, including evidence of independent legal representation and arm's-length negotiating.

The Charter Committee, independent from OBL, is a South Carolina non-profit corporation: South Carolina for Online Education, Inc. The Charter Committee is the applicant submitting this charter application and will govern the school and hold the charter. The Charter Committee is self-governing. It is incorporated as an independent, public, non-profit corporation and is not a subsidiary of another entity, or in any way connected with, or under the control of another entity. Once transitioned to a Governing Board, members will be good and effective stewards of public money and provide independent governance of the school's administrators.

The Board and OBL both confirm that the agreement has been negotiated between parties equally sophisticated and knowledgeable in the subject matter dealt with in the agreement.

The Board will have all the powers and duties permitted by law to manage the business, property, and affairs of the school and to adopt policies by which the school will be governed. The Board will be responsible for assuring that the school operates according to its charter and applicable law.

LCCA will be a fully autonomous, fully accountable virtual public charter school. The Board will have the tools and resources necessary to ensure a combination of autonomy and accountability. The Board will oversee the charter and use appropriate access to student performance data (abiding by student data privacy laws and regulations) as well as frequent reporting on school operations and finance to carry out its tasks. The Board will monitor such data closely to ensure that the school is meeting its academic performance goals and remaining operationally effective and fiscally sound. The entire Board will have academic performance as its purview; the Treasurer will serve as first reviewer of fiscal data; and the Board will appoint members to monitor operations issues such as staffing and facilities during both the start-up and implementation phases. The Board will hold its partners and vendors accountable for performance, and will in turn be accountable to the Institute.

## 4. Describe any existing or potential conflicts of interest between the school's governing board, proposed school employees, proposed EMO/CMO, and any affiliated business entities.

The Board has a Conflict of Interest Policy which requires disclosure of conflict, recusal from related action, and relinquishment of Board service in the case of irreconcilable conflict. All Board members have a duty of loyalty and a duty of care toward LCCA. It is the responsibility of all Board members to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of integrity, honesty, and fair dealing to preclude conflict between the interest of LCCA and the personal interests of the Board member. It is the responsibility of the school to conduct all its business and operations impartially in accordance with all laws and in conformity with the highest ethical and professional standards. All hiring and other transactions imposing financial and/or legal obligations on the school and/or OBL will be made with the best interests of the school as the foremost consideration.

The Conflict of Interest Policy is directed not only to Board members and officers, but to all employees who can influence the actions of the school. For example, this would include all persons who make purchasing decisions, all persons who might be described as management personnel, or other employees who have proprietary information concerning the school.

In order to avoid conflicts of interest and the appearance of impropriety, Board members will not participate in open meeting or closed session deliberations or votes relating to the discipline of himself or herself, any relative of the Board member, or any action/transaction between the school and any family member or related entity of the Board member. "Closed Session" shall mean any portion of a Board meeting that is properly closed to the public in accordance with the provisions of the state Open Meetings Act.

Upon discovery of a violation of this Conflict of Interest Policy, the discovering party shall immediately notify the Board President, the School Leader, and all Board members. A special Board meeting will be scheduled to consider the matter. In the event the Board decides that there has been a violation of the conflict of interest rules or other abuse of his or her position at the school, the Board will review and recommend appropriate action. A violation of the Conflict of Interest policy renders any contract entered into in violation of the policy voidable.

## 5. List all subsidiaries or related entities that are affiliated or owned in whole or in part by the EMO/CMO, and identify the nature of those entities' business activities and explain whether the school has or will have any relationship with or receive any services from any of the entities listed in the previous question.

The Board will contract with Connections Education LLC DBA Pearson Online & Blended Learning K-12

USA (OBL), which is registered in South Carolina as Connections Academy, LLC (see Appendix D). The Board and LCCA will not have any legal or contractual relationships with any subsidiaries or other entities or individuals that are affiliated with or owned in whole or in part by OBL.

However, as a replication school, the LCCA Charter Committee, during planning and initial school start-up, is comprised of members who also serve on SCCA's Board. These members have a current, working relationship with OBL.

**6. Describe and provide documentation of any loans, grants, or investments made between the EMO/CMO and the school, including an explanation of how any such loans, grants, or investments may be initiated, repaid, and refused by the school.**

OBL will offer service credits annually, as needed to protect the school against an anticipated deficit. The Charter Committee has been assured that OBL remains committed to honoring the service credits during the length of the contract.

**7. Describe the plan for the operation of the school in the event of termination of the management agreement.**

The Board has the right to terminate its contract with OBL if it does not meet its performance obligations and is unable to cure such deficiency after being given reasonable notice. The contract describes the terms of termination and states that it is the prerogative and discretion of the Board.

**8. If the following are not included in the contract, address each one accordingly in the narrative:**

- **If the school's governing board intends to execute promissory notes or other negotiable instruments, or enter into a lease, lease-purchase agreement, or any other facility or financing relationships with the EMO/CMO, provide evidence that such agreements are separately documented and not part of or incorporated in the school management contract. Any facility or financing agreements must be consistent with the school governing board's authority and practical ability to terminate the management agreement and continue operation of the school.**

- **Describe the respective financial responsibilities of the school's governing board and the EMO/CMO. Who will own property purchased with public funds?  Which operating and capital expenditures will each party be responsible for?  What types of spending decisions can the management organization make without obtaining board approval?  What reports must the EMO/CMO submit to the board on financial performance, and on what schedule? How will the school governing board provide financial oversight?**

These items are included in the contract, as included in Appendix R.

**9. Explain the EMO/CMO's success in serving student populations similar to the target population of the school. Describe the organization's demonstrated academic track record as well as successful management of non-academic school functions (e.g., back-office services, school operations, extracurricular programs).**

OBL is experienced and skilled at serving students in the target population. The population of students benefiting from OBL programs has changed in many ways over the course of the past 18 years, becoming both more diverse and more mainstream as virtual school opportunities reach ever- greater segments of the population. The demographics of students attending virtual schools supported by OBL schools closely track those of the states in which the students live: nationally, OBL data for September 2020 indicates approximately 39% are members of minority groups, 40% qualify for free or reduced-price meals, and 23% of the students attending schools managed by OBL qualify as special population students. As of September 30, 2020, SCCA student demographics include approximately 30% minority, 35% qualify for free or reduced-price meals, and approximately 30% have special education needs, including 504 plans, IEPs, and gifted programs. We anticipate that LCCA's families will be similar to the state average and will include many of modest means, as well as significant numbers of single parent/dual working parent households who find effective and creative ways to participate in this program.

*Three Year Performance for Connections Academy Schools within the Southeast*

State test performance for Connections Academy students within the southeast have consistently been higher than the state in English Language Arts and on par with the state in Science. While performance has lagged behind the state in Math and Social Studies, Connections Academy students are closing the gap. Student performance data across Connections Academy schools in the southeast for 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 is graphically illustrated below in Figure 12. Please note that Covid-19 resulted in no state testing data for the 2019-20 school year.

*Figure 12. Student Performance Data across Subject Areas*
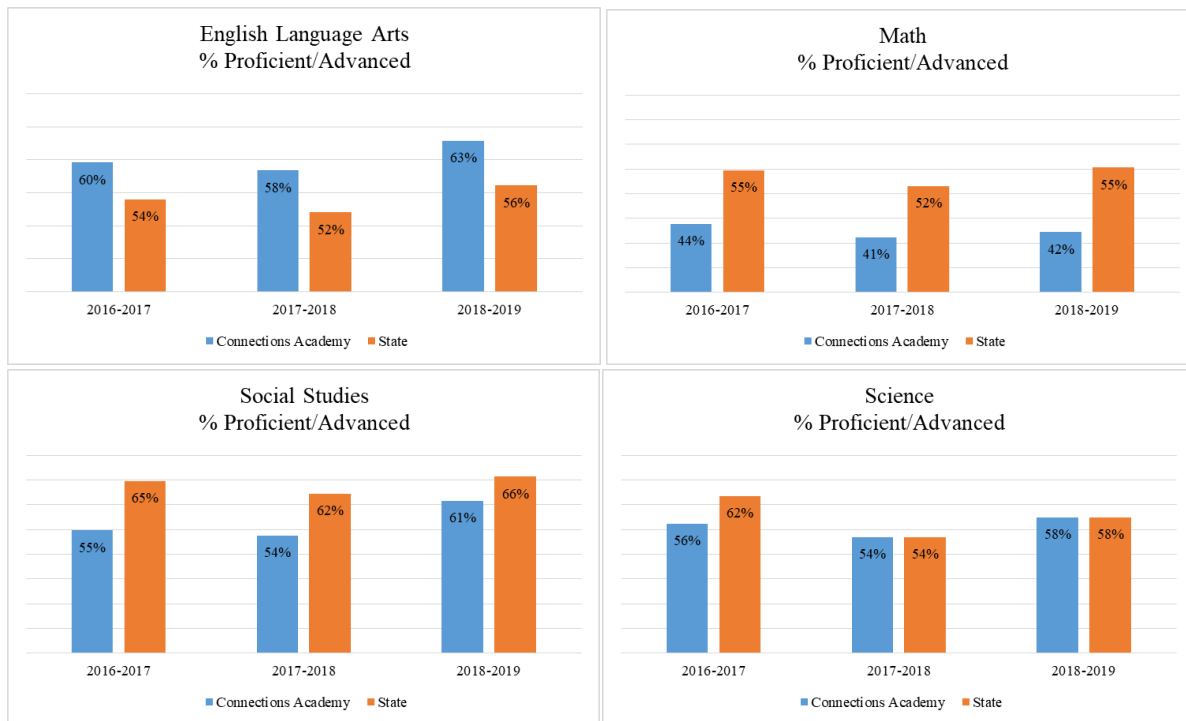


We anticipate that LCCA's families will be similar to the state average and will include many of modest means, as well as significant numbers of single parent/dual working parent households who find effective and creative ways to participate in this program.

While virtual schooling has become a more familiar public-school choice in many communities, families still most often choose virtual school as a solution to a specific educational dilemma facing their child.

### Back Office Operations

LCCA will contract with OBL for business, financial, accounting, and other back office services through the Statement of Agreement (SOA). OBL will provide support to school principals and administrators on paying expenses on behalf of the school, establishing practices for the school, coordinating signing of financial documents, etc.

OBL has experience assisting with the preparation of State-required financial reporting in the format required by South Carolina, ensuring compliance with all external financial deadlines and deliverables set by the Institute, SCDE, and/or other regulatory agencies, and preparing monthly and/or quarterly financial submissions into state reporting systems were applicable.

OBL is proficient with grant accounting and tracking of grant expenses by advising school personnel to ensure grant funds are used in accordance with budget, preparing and initiating draw down requests for grant funding, and entering budget and expense information into state mandated grant systems. OBL will support the school with authorizer and DOE grant audits.

LCCA intends to utilize OBL as its pay agent for fixed expenses such as those related to payroll and the facility. These costs will be invoiced monthly by OBL. Additionally, OBL will assist with managing a LCCA

credit card program by establishing a bank relationship, reviewing applications and issuing new cards, assisting with approval of credit limit increases, managing short term credit card needs at the school, and deactivating cards for terminated employees. Maintenance of expense reporting policies, including managing policies and rules, auditing of all expense reports, and providing monthly reporting to the School Leader of outstanding expense reports, will help this program run successfully.

## School Operations

OBL provides school operations support to Connections Academy schools across the United States, at SCCA, and will provide these services to LCCA.

## Partner School Leadership Team (PSLT) Support

OBL's PSLT will provide comprehensive school operations and oversight services, including the following:

- Supervision, evaluation, and support of the school leader and school leadership team (SLT), focusing on academic achievement and continuous improvement;

- Strategy and process oversight and support for school improvement planning, implementation, and progress monitoring;

- Support and coaching for SLT in the development of professional learning structures and processes, including full participation in highly functioning Professional Learning Communities (PLCs);

- Provide analysis of data relevant to LCCA tasks and priorities across the school year cycle, including onboarding, student and family engagement, instructional support and intervention, grading, behavioral and academic escalation, student promotion, retention, and withdrawal, state and federal regulatory reporting and compliance, state testing, teacher evaluation, etc.;

- Advise school leader and SLT on implementation of OBL's academic and operational model;

- Involve and collaborate with OBL departments to troubleshoot implementation of that model;

- Develop processes to fill unmet needs;

- Support the school in managing staffing to budget;

- Work with LCCA (in collaboration with Program Managers) to ensure charter, statement of agreement, handbooks and other policies and regulations are complete, up-to-date, aligned with relevant laws and regulations, and are complied with in the operation and accountability efforts of the school;

- Offer and coordinator school leader and SLT participation in retreats and professional learning, including Winter and Summer Retreats, Monthly Administrator meetings, Bootcamp, Open Space Meetings, and monthly Professional Development;

- Ensure regulatory and authorizer compliance is accomplished through policies, procedures, and practices; and

- Maintain the capacity to manage a school during a crisis including when a school leader departs on short notice.

## Program Management Support

OBL Program Managers (PMs) will:

- Act as liaison to LCCA and OBL to facilitate issue resolution, business measurement and reporting, and to provide meaningful data to the school based on the school year cycle;

- Work with school staff to review and revise annual processes to ensure regulatory compliance and continued efficiency, including enrollment and placement processes that involve both school staff and OBL staff;

- Ensure that all contract deliverables are met; and

- Work with multiple OBL departments and school personnel to ensure processes are in place for effective marketing, enrollment, placement, instruction, progress monitoring of students, invoicing, etc.

## Additional Areas of Support

In addition to those specific roles, areas of support include the following:

- Policy and Handbooks: OBL drafts, revises, and maintains governance policies and manuals as required by authorizers, state and federal law, or Board request. OBL drafts, revises, and maintains employee policies and handbooks as required by authorizers, state and federal law, or departmental and individual school requests. OBL drafts, revises, and maintains school policies and handbooks (General and Supplements) as required by authorizers, state and federal law, or departmental and individual school requests.

- School Calendar Development: OBL manages the school calendar process. Once calendar is developed by school leadership, OBL provides oversight for any issues and confirm accuracy of proposed school (teacher and student) calendars.

- Annual Report Support: OBL facilitates annual report and provides project management and other assistance in completing external and internal annual reports, including requested data and sharing of best practices of other partner schools.

- National Student Clearinghouse: OBL establishes a National Student Clearinghouse contract for data submission/receipt/sharing, which gives both OBL and the school access to college admissions data for the school. OBL provides aggregate and disaggregated data upon request.

- Accreditation Support: OBL provides accreditation support that includes the following:
  - Assist school with all aspects of the accreditation process, including:
    - understanding and explaining the process and philosophy of accreditation,
    - managing timelines,
    - reviewing/revising/editing narratives and ratings from school,
    - collating, protecting, and providing evidence to evaluators,
    - hosting internal meetings, and
    - attending site visits at school;
  - Assist school with follow-up as needed; and

- o Collate "big takeaways for improvement" and provide to School Leadership Team for consideration about overall program improvements.
- NCAA Approval Support: OBL provides approval support to:
  - o Manage all aspects of NCAA course and program approvals, including trainings and management; and
  - o Manage course list for school and update as needed.

## *Extracurricular*
## Field Trips

OBL has experience coordinating field trips at schools they manage, and LCCA will also provide students with the opportunity to participate in regular field trips and outings throughout South Carolina, facilitated by program staff and Community Coordinators (parent volunteers). Field trips provide students with additional opportunities to socialize with their peers and are designed to help both students and Learning Coaches connect to their school and to each other. Students may go on trips to museums, farms, science centers, cultural centers, and unique experiential learning opportunities throughout South Carolina.

The intent of field trips will be academic-focused as well as focused on the community. It will allow many of the families to connect with each other, connect with the local community, and connect with their educational goals. For example, SCCA has enjoyed field trips at local organizations, including EdVenture Museum in Columbia, Coastal Discovery Museum in Hilton Head, Kazoo Factory in Beaufort, and Charleston Math Trail.

At the time of this application, COVID-19 continues to influence how schools must adapt their approach to student socialization, including field trips. LCCA will prioritize staff, family, and student safety and will not hold in-person field trips, or other in-person extracurricular activities, until it is safe to do so.

## Clubs and Activities

As mentioned earlier in this application, LCCA will include clubs and activities as an integral part of the academic program. Students will be offered access to a large variety of nationally-facilitated virtual clubs and special events (i.e. virtual talent show, virtual art exhibition, contests, and other events). National clubs are academically-focused and facilitated by teachers. In addition, an online yearbook allows each student, in participating schools, to create a personal page including photos, videos, responses to poll questions, and autographs collected from friends.

LCCA will offer various monthly educational clubs and activities. Examples include Art Club, College Planning Club, Debate Club, Gaming and Technology Club, Robotics Club, Science Sleuths Clubs, and the *Monitor*: Student Blog. LCCA will produce monthly newsletters that celebrate student and school successes, showcase student work, provide tips from teachers, and highlight upcoming events.

**10. List all schools currently or formerly operated by the EMO/CMO. Identify those schools that serve the same grade levels and student populations demographically similar to the anticipated population of the proposed school. Include name, year opened, contact information, location, number of students, and contact information for the authorizer for each currently operating school.**

A list of schools operated by OBL is included as Appendix H.

**11. State accountability data for the schools in comparable markets (if available) managed by the EMO/CMO for at least the last three years including performance data for all subgroups served by grade level; data demonstrating the schools' progress in closing within school and within comparable schools' achievement gaps; and any additional evidence that the existing design has been effective in raising student achievement.**

South Carolina Connections Academy (SCCA) has consistently outperformed the state average test scores in English Language Arts, while Math has been a focus of improvement. However, between 2016-17 and 2018-19, achievement gaps closed in Math and ELA for African American students, Hispanic students, and students eligible for free and reduced lunch. A table showing performance data for the last three school years (2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19) at SCCA, which represents LCCA's comparable market, is provided below as Table 5. Please note that there is no performance data available for 2019-20 because of Covid-19's impact on testing. This data will be used as baseline accountability data for LCCA. As SCCA's authorizer, much of the state performance data is available to the Charter Institute. However, the Charter Committee and OBL are happy to provide any additional state accountability data upon request.

*Table 5. Performance Data for SCCA*

| SCCA | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | SY 2018-19 | | SY 2017-18 | | SY 2016-17 | |
| Category | Subject | % Proficient | Total | % Proficient | Total | % Proficient | Total |
| All Students | Math | 28.0% | 1977 | 30.9% | 2076 | 30.0% | 1741 |
| All Students | Reading | 45.2% | 1978 | 42.3% | 2077 | 40.6% | 1736 |
| Grade 3 | Math | 36.5% | 148 | 42.6% | 202 | 37.1% | 175 |
| Grade 4 | Math | 34.6% | 231 | 36.8% | 239 | 43.6% | 165 |
| Grade 5 | Math | 27.7% | 267 | 37.8% | 241 | 26.9% | 216 |
| Grade 6 | Math | 31.5% | 336 | 28.0% | 378 | 31.5% | 276 |
| Grade 7 | Math | 28.2% | 465 | 29.2% | 442 | 29.1% | 406 |
| Grade 8 | Math | 20.4% | 520 | 24.7% | 563 | 24.3% | 437 |
| Grade 3 | Reading | 47.3% | 148 | 42.1% | 202 | 31.8% | 173 |
| Grade 4 | Reading | 48.7% | 232 | 41.4% | 239 | 44.8% | 165 |
| Grade 5 | Reading | 37.5% | 267 | 36.9% | 241 | 32.9% | 216 |
| Grade 6 | Reading | 45.5% | 334 | 42.7% | 377 | 42.0% | 276 |
| Grade 7 | Reading | 47.4% | 466 | 43.1% | 443 | 40.2% | 403 |
| Grade 8 | Reading | 45.3% | 521 | 44.3% | 564 | 44.9% | 437 |
| Asian | Math | 55.6% | 18 | 51.9% | 27 | 50.0% | 20 |
| Black/African American | Math | 15.2% | 290 | 21.9% | 288 | 14.7% | 232 |
| Hispanic or Latino | Math | 31.2% | 141 | 27.4% | 146 | 23.2% | 112 |
| Multiple Races | Math | 37.8% | 135 | 38.2% | 136 | 41.4% | 99 |
| White | Math | 29.3% | 1381 | 32.1% | 1466 | 32.6% | 1265 |

| Asian | Reading | 72.2% | 18 | 59.3% | 27 | 45.0% | 20 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Black/African American | Reading | 34.3% | 289 | 35.1% | 288 | 28.4% | 229 |
| Hispanic or Latino | Reading | 45.4% | 141 | 49.0% | 147 | 36.6% | 112 |
| Multiple Races | Reading | 54.8% | 135 | 45.6% | 136 | 48.0% | 100 |
| White | Reading | 46.4% | 1383 | 42.6% | 1466 | 42.6% | 1263 |
| FARM-eligible | Math | 19.0% | 805 | 23.9% | 787 | 19.9% | 703 |
| Not Eligible | Math | 34.1% | 1172 | 35.2% | 1289 | 36.9% | 1038 |
| FARM-eligible | Reading | 35.9% | 806 | 36.2% | 789 | 30.6% | 700 |
| Not Eligible | Reading | 51.7% | 1172 | 46.0% | 1288 | 47.3% | 1036 |

## 12. List and describe any management contract terminations as well as any charter revocations, non-renewals, or withdrawals/non-openings that the proposed EMO/CMO has experienced in the past five (5) years.

In October 2016, the Board of Trustees of University View Academy (previously known as Louisiana Connections Academy) made a decision to gradually bring school operation services in house rather than contracting with an external provider for a full turn-key school. They exercised a contractual right to terminate a contract for curriculum products and services without cause with Connections Education, LLC.

A contract with North Carolina Connections Academy (June 2019) and with Oregon Connections Academy (June 2020) expired for a full turn-key school.

## 13. Describe any current or past litigation that has involved the EMO/CMO or any school it operates.

The lists do not include agency level proceedings that the EMO or any school it supports may be involved in, including but not limited to matters relating to special education, accessibility, labor and employment, or union activity.

Litigation that has involved OBL:

- North Carolina – Connections Education LLC brought a declaratory judgement action in state court requesting the court determine the date its contract ended with the nonprofit board of directors of North Carolina Cyber Academy (formerly known as North Carolina Connections Academy) in 2019. Case was voluntarily dismissed. Subsequently, Connections Education LLC brought a breach of contract action against North Carolina Cyber Academy.

Litigation that has involved OBL operated schools:

- Idaho - INSPIRE Connections Academy was named in a class action lawsuit along with every other school district and charter school in the state in 2018. The lawsuit against INSPIRE Connections Academy was dismissed with prejudice.

- Indiana – The nonprofit board of directors of Indiana Connections Academy along with other charter school plaintiffs sued the state for failure to fully pay past tuition support for the 2013-

14 school year. On November 8, 2019, the charter school plaintiffs applied to the state's Supreme Court for a petition to transfer the case for it to review the opinion of the court of appeals. The petition to transfer was denied.

- Michigan – An action alleging negligence and breach of contract brought against the nonprofit board of directors of Michigan Connections Academy by the guardian of a former student in 2019. Case was dismissed with prejudice by the court.

- Nevada – The nonprofit board of directors of Nevada Connections Academy applied to the state court in 2016 seeking injunctive relief to prevent a mid-charter-term school closure. Case was voluntarily dismissed when an agreement to keep the school operating was reached.

- New Mexico – The nonprofit board of directors of New Mexico Connections Academy filed an action in state court in 2018, challenging the state-authorizer's decision to not renew the school's charter. In March 2019, the court of appeals issued an order in the school's favor, and the case was remanded to the state's Public Education Commission to renew the school's charter.

- Oregon – In 2016, the nonprofit board of directors of Oregon Connections Academy brought action for declaratory judgment, alleging that charter school law did not bind charter school to an additional 10-year contractual term with its school district-sponsor and that charter school was free to seek contractual relationships with other potential sponsoring school districts that would begin upon expiration of the charter. The school district counterclaimed for declaratory and injunctive relief. The state court granted declaratory relief to the charter school and the decision was affirmed by the court of appeals.

## 14. Additional requirements for replication applications:

- **Describe any key educational features that will differ from the operator's or management provider's existing schools or schools proposed for replication, not previously mentioned above. Explain the rationale for the variation in approach and any new resources the variation would require.**

Any key distinctions for LCCA, including detail around approach and resources, have been outlined above.

- **Discuss the results of past replication efforts and lessons learned – including particular challenges or troubles encountered; how you have addressed them; and how you will avoid or minimize such challenges for the proposed schools.**

LCCA's Charter Committee has not participated in a replication effort prior to this application. The Charter Committee's ESP, OBL, has not done a formal replication though their Connections Academy core education model, though it has had great success throughout the United States, including SCCA.

**Appendix Item(s):**

**If applicable, include the following corresponding information:**

**EMO/CMO Documentation:**

A. **Term sheet – for the proposed management of the charter school to include clear performance measures and contract severance provision(s)**

B. **Conflict of Interest Form(s) –for any individual of an EMO/CMO with which the Charter Committee plans to partner**

C. **Proposed EMO/CMO Management Agreement/Contract to include:**

   i. **the scope of services and costs of all resources to be provided by the EMO/CMO;**

   ii. **the compensation structure and payment schedule, including clear identification of all fees, bonuses, and any other compensation to be paid to the EMO/CMO;**

   iii. **the term (duration) of the management agreement? Explain the conditions and procedures (including time frames, notice, and decision-making procedures) for renewal and termination of the contract. How often will the management agreement be renewed; and**

   iv. **the conditions that both the EMO/CMO and the school must satisfy for the management agreement to be renewed. On what grounds may the EMO/CMO or the school terminate the management agreement for cause, and without cause? List any indemnification provisions in the event of default or breach by either party.**

D. **Copy of EMO's/CMO's SC business license**

E. **Draft copy of employee contract**

F. **Copy of the EMO/CMO employee policy manual**

G. **Evidence of the financial health of the EMO/CMO – include the most recent independent financial audit report of the organization and its most recent annual report.**