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1

June 1, 2020

Via: Electronic File

Carrie Lopes, Education Administrator  
Charter Schools Division  
California Department of Education  
1430 N Street  
Sacramento, California 95814

**Re: 2019-20 SBE Academic Memo (Rocketship Futuro Academy) w/Response Request  
Due June 1**

Dear Ms. Lopes and SBE:

This letter is in response to a request sent by the California Department of Education (CDE) in an email dated April 30, 2020 requesting that Rocketship Futuro Academy ("RFA") prepare a written response to reflect on the 2018-19 CAASPP data and to identify how we have or will address improving performance schoolwide and for how the low-student groups (specifically, any area that is red on the California Dashboard) will be addressed.

Rocketship Futuro Academy (RFA) opened in Fall 2016 serving Kinder through 2nd grade. In the 2019-2020 school year, which is its fourth year of operation, RFA enrollment increased to 528 students in grades Transitional Kinder through 5th grade from 424 students the year before with a robust waitlist. 81% of the student population are classified as Socio-Economically Disadvantaged (SED), while 63%, are designated as English Language Learners (ELL). The special education population is 9%.

RFA took the CAASPP assessment for the second time in 2018-2019, and the results from 78 students in the third and fourth grades demonstrate strong academic growth for the school.

Student proficiency increased substantially from RFA's first year of testing in 2017-2018. In 2018-2019, 51% of students tested demonstrated proficiency in ELA--an increase of 17% from the previous year--and 64% demonstrated proficiency in math--and increase of 21% from the previous year. We are pleased that our efforts to support students' academic growth are meaningfully increasing students' proficiency in core subjects.

June 1, 2020

Page 2 of 3

RFA's student proficiency rates are higher than the state and local district and these differences are most profound when considering the population that RFA serves. For socio-economically disadvantaged (SED) students--who are the vast majority of students served by RFA, proficiency rates for ELA were 30% and 38% at the district and state, respectively, compared to 53% for SED students at RFA. Even more dramatically, proficiency rates for math were 23% and 32% at the district and state, respectively, compared to 60% for SED students at RFA. This trend held for EL students with the school math proficiency of 58% significantly outpacing the state average (18%) and district (6%) while ELA results of 40% were also higher than the state average (17%) and the district average (6%). However, proficiency rates for special education students at RFA revealed room for growth, with no students with IEPs demonstrating proficiency in ELA and 10% demonstrating proficiency in math.

Updates to the academic program--particularly a focus on sharing and using strong data and information--facilitated the strong academic growth at RFA during the 2018-2019 school year. We've improved our data systems to allow teachers access to data more quickly and coached teachers to utilize data as soon as possible, often turning it around to adjust their lesson for the next day. This makes the most of the time that students spend in the classroom--ensuring that lessons and activities are focused on the most important content and that each student's mastery is considered. Additionally, we've worked to consistently share information about academic content and achievement with students and their families, including daily and weekly celebrations for student progress and parent workshops to share about academic content and rigor. These improvements were carried forward into the 2019-2020 school year.

In addition, this year we've focused on best supporting student groups with unique needs--our EL and special education students. For our EL students, we've made a deeper investment in teacher training, including GLAD teacher certification for all new teachers and a GLAD "school takeover" to improve designated EL time and integrated EL practices. For our special education students, we're leaning into a co-teaching model with the classroom teacher and special education teacher working together to design and execute lessons that are meeting all students' needs. Additionally, for special education students who are not showing progress, we've built short term plans to help them move forward, including increased time with our special education teachers.

The only two state indicators with large enough student populations to be reported on the dashboard were chronic absenteeism, which was 13% -- a 4.7% improvement from the year before -- and rated "yellow," and student suspension, which was 0.5% -- a 1.3% improvement from the prior year -- and rated "blue." Attendance and absenteeism has been a major school focus. In addition to regular protocols, RFA has been making additional efforts to decrease absenteeism. This year, we are focused on communicating with families clearly and often around absences and also working with them individually to problem solve. We have always reached out to families when a student is absent and met with families if absenteeism becomes a pattern. We have increased our follow up with families and come alongside them to problem solving any barriers to

June 1, 2020

Page 3 of 3

school attendance. This has resulted in more meetings to discuss school attendance, including workshops with multiple families and one on one meetings with school leaders.

RFA met all of its local indicators on the dashboard. Local indicators are based on a variety of sources, including internal parents and student surveys, as well as assessment of the services provided to students. Our network ensures teachers are appropriately credential, provides standards-aligned instructional materials and supplies and facilities repairs.

Since RFA transitioned to distance learning on March 16, we've been working diligently to make sure that we continue to serve all students and that our students are learning. Our distance learning program consists of teachers teaching synchronous and asynchronous lessons via video, resources and assignments posted on private community Facebook pages and on Google classrooms, and online learning programs (e.g., Lexia) that students have used throughout the year.

Students are connecting with their teachers at least twice a week for 1:1 check-ins. These activities are supplemented with daily enrichment videos that include, but are not limited to, cooking, art projects, workouts, dancing, bedtime stories, and SEL lessons. We have worked closely with our families to make sure that they have the technology to access distance learning. Currently, all families have reported having a laptop or device to access their student's distance learning content--many of which we provided--and 99% of students have internet access. We're tracking student engagement, based on participation in live lessons and completion of work, and we are proud that for the last three weeks, we have averaged 96% student participation each day. We also have designated CareCorps staff who are focused on meeting the needs of students and families that are surfaced through surveys and referrals. They work one on one with families to problem solve and to connect them with needed resources (e.g., local food banks, rent assistance, etc.).

Please notify us if you require any additional information and we will make every effort to submit the supplemental documentation in a timely manner.

Sincerely,



Marie Issa Gil  
Bay Area Regional Director  
Rocketship Public Schools

CC: Jason Colon, Principal of Rocketship Futuro Academy  
Rachel Heredia, Associate Director of Compliance Strategy, Rocketship Public Schools  
Matthew Huddleston, Education Programs Consultant for the SBE-Authorized Charter School

## Response from Rocketship Futuro Academy



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October 9, 2020

Via: Electronic File  
CLopes@cde.ca.govCarrie Lopes, Education Administrator  
Charter Schools Division  
California Department of Education  
1430 N Street  
Sacramento, California 95814**Re: Addendum to SBE Academic Memo**

Dear Ms. Lopes:

This letter is in response to a request sent by the California Department of Education (CDE) in an email dated September 24, 2020 requesting that Rocketship Futuro Academy ("RFA") provide additional descriptions (detailed below) to be provided to SBE with the Academic Memo.

*1. A description of how the charter school will provide continuity of distance learning instruction during the school year to ensure pupils have access to curriculum.*

Our first consideration in continuity of learning is to ensure we have a high quality distance learning model. Rocketship Futuro launched a distance learning model last March that showcased our commitment to our community and the innovative spirit of our educators. In order to provide continuity of instruction during the 20-21 school year, we are iterating on this learning model to improve the instruction that our students receive when it is necessary for them to engage in distance, rather than in-person learning. Core elements of the model that were updated based on feedback and observations in the spring of 19-20, include:

- **5 Hours of Daily Live Teaching:** As we learned last spring, daily blocks of live teaching are critical to promote student engagement, social emotional development, and interaction with classmates.
- **Small Group Instruction:** Our enhanced distance learning model will provide small group instruction on a daily basis to ensure we continue to meet the individual needs of each and every Rocketeer.
- **On-Demand Learning:** Full-time distance learning places a significant burden on parents and caregivers to help facilitate student learning at home. We will continue to produce recorded content for our Rocketeers and leverage our adaptive online learning programs (e.g., Lexia, Reflex) and Rocketship Goals platform to support independent learning that can adapt to the schedule of our families.

The content that our students receive is consistent whether students are learning in-person or from a distance. Our distance learning model--for both spring of 19-20 and fall of 20-21--is based on our internally developed curriculum. We have made curriculum adjustments for the 20-21

October 9, 2020  
Page 2 of 3

schools that reflect the realities of the distance learning that our students experienced (e.g., building in additional time for review of content that students may have missed during the distance period), and our distance learning plan still allows students to access a curriculum the full content and rigor that students would receive in the classroom.

Throughout the 20-21 school year, we anticipate maintaining a distance learning option for students. Some of our families have indicated that they would like to have their student learn at a distance this year--due to risk factors for the student or family or comfort--so we are continuing to provide an option for students to access the full curriculum from a distance. This will also help us to transition our full student body back to distance learning, if needed at any point during the school year.

- 2. A description of how the charter school will ensure access to devices and connectivity for all pupils to support distance learning.*

We are providing technology and support to ensure that all of our students have technology devices and internet connectivity. In the spring of 2020, the Rocketship network made the decision that 100% of Rocketship students will be assigned a school Chromebook for the 20-21 School Year. In addition to assigning school devices to every student, our staff is working with each family on WiFi connectivity. Many of our families already had WiFi prior to school closure. Other families indicated that they needed support in signing up with a service provider for internet connectivity at home. A small subset of our families were unable to obtain WiFi service, either because of cost or due to their living circumstances. For these families we are providing internet hotspot devices so that their students can engage in all our distance learning programming.

During our Digital Learning Academy, we also walked our families through caring for their devices and explained how to reach out for tech support. We know that issues may arise with our technology during distance learning, so we have assembled a tech team to support families directly with any technology problems that come up quickly.

- 3. A description of how the charter school will address pupil learning loss that results from COVID-19 during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years with consideration to the charter's demographics and grade levels served.*

We are seeking to find creative ways to assess students' skills and progress, understanding that the ability to measure learning status will be critical in identifying learning loss and designing appropriate solutions. In the distance learning context, we will offer our regular assessments, when they can be given effectively (e.g., NWEA MAP testing for higher grades, virtual STEP tests). We are also regularly reviewing data from the online learning programs to see what skills and strategies students have shown that they have mastered when using those programs. Additionally, teachers will be observing students in live lessons and noting their skill development. We have begun bringing students on to campus for critical beginning of year testing, using NWEA MAP, STEP, and ELPAC tests to measure their ELA and math growth, reading level, and English language skills, respectively.

- 4. A description of how the charter school will monitor and support mental health and social and emotional well-being of pupils during the school year.*

October 9, 2020  
Page 3 of 3

At Rocketship Futuro, we have always prioritized the social and emotional health of our students, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, continue to provide personalized support to all of our students in academics as well as through a multi-tiered system of support. This is what our SEL curriculum addresses confidence and a sense of belonging, which are critically important. Students will participate in an SEL lesson each morning, providing space to process feelings and build relationships with their classmates and teachers. Students whose teachers identify that they may have emotional needs that would benefit from additional support will work with our staff mental health provider, who exclusively serves the students on our campus, connecting individually or through online group sessions.

We've also been intentional about opportunities to integrate joy and connectedness into our school days. This includes movement breaks, facilitated snack and lunch times, and Launch and Landing--moments of song and dance as a whole school--to start and end the day. Additionally, our Care Corps staff are dedicated to providing support for families to ensure that our students have the best social environment while they are learning at a distance. Care Corps staff review regular surveys that our families receive and identify families' social needs (e.g., rent assistance, childcare, food access). Care Corps members then follow up with these families individually and refer them to community resources that can meet those needs.

5. *A description of how the charter school will address the anticipated apportionment deferrals.*

Rocketship Futuro Academy will employ a number of strategies in order to continue to support cash flow that will cover costs during apportionment deferrals. These strategies include:

- Using cash reserves during the deferral period
- Pursuing CSFA Trans/ASAP program
- Pursuing ADA growth funding (SB 820) which would result in an anticipated revenue increase
- Deferring management fees for Rocketship network
- Receiving short-term intercompany short term loans from the Rocketship network

Please notify us if you require any additional information and we will make every effort to submit the supplemental documentation in a timely manner.

Sincerely,



Marie Issa Alvarado-Gil  
Bay Area Regional Director  
Rocketship Public Schools

CC: Kimberly Brown, Principal of Rocketship Futuro Academy  
Rachel Heredia, Associate Director of Compliance Strategy, Rocketship Public Schools  
Matthew Huddleston, California Department of Education