

Attachment #2

Environmental Charter Appeal
to the Board

February 22, 2019

Katrina Johantgen
Executive Director

California School Finance Authority
300 Spring Street, Suite 8500
Los Angeles, CA 90013
Phone: (213) 620-2305
Email: Katrina.Johantgen@treasurer.ca.gov

Re: Appeal of Staff Determination Regarding Environmental Charter Middle School-Gardena's Eligibility for SB740 Funding

Dear Ms. Johantgen:

We hope this letter finds you well. Pursuant to Title 4, Division 15, Article 1.15 of the California Code of Regulations ("CCR") Section 10170.10(d), this letter serves as Environmental Charter Middle School - Gardena's ("ECMS-G") appeal of the California School Finance Authority's ("CSFA") staff determination regarding ECMS-G's eligibility for SB740 funding for "costs associated with the facility" for the 2017-18 school year.

On May 25, 2017, ECMS-G applied for SB740 funding for the 2017/2018 school year, for which it was entitled to receive up to \$380,685. However, due to a series of unfortunate events, including turnover of key staff members, a substantial portion of ECMS-G's receipts were omitted from the application supplement. As a result, ECMS-G was awarded only \$288,750 for its facilities costs—approximately \$90,000 less than it had budgeted for the 2017/2018 school year. These funds would allow ECMS-G to dedicate its remaining funding to crucial staff and programs that support the students' academic achievements and wellbeing. On November 11, 2018, ECMS-G filed an appeal to CSFA staff explaining the filing discrepancy and requesting the additional funding. This appeal was denied on January 24, 2019. Because filing errors of this type are so unusual for ECMS-G, and because of the impact this funding will have for ECMS-G's students, we ask that the Board reverse staff's decision and grant the additional \$90,000 in SB740 funding.

Staffing Challenges Prevented ECMS-G's Timely Submission of Receipts for SB740 Funding.

ECMS-G is a member of Environmental Charter Schools, ("ECS") which is a network of free public schools in Los Angeles. Due to a series of coincidental and unfortunate staffing

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changes at both ECS and ECMS-G, ECMS-G was unable to timely submit all receipts for the additional SB740 funding. First, the Director of Finance & Operations at that time, Tracy Bondi, went on maternity leave much earlier than anticipated, immediately before the application due date. As a result, the training of the incoming COO was incomplete and did not cover crucial SB740 information. ~~Second, and compounding this challenge, the Principal of ECMS-G~~ resigned his position in October 2017, and his permanent replacement did not start until July of 2018. As such, a crucial level of oversight on the application and receipt submission process was missing.

Third, the former Manager of Facilities and Sustainability was the individual receiving the emails from your office regarding SB740. Her responsibilities included preparing and submitting ECMS-G's receipts for SB740 funding. Unbeknownst to ECMS-G and due to the staffing issues discussed above, she did not submit for all additional expenses, nor did she inform leadership when she missed the deadline for submission. This individual is no longer working with ECS.

ECMS-G Has Taken Active Steps to Ensure That All Future Applications are Timely Filed.

ECS prides itself in fiscal acuity and responsibility. To illustrate, ECS has had an impeccable audit history during its 18 years of operation. An oversight like this is extremely unusual for this organization. To prevent similar errors in the future, ECMS-G developed new systems and procedures that involve multiple personnel. For example, ECMS-G created the role of "Compliance and Operations Manager," which was assigned to Jeremiah David. Mr. David maintains a thorough compliance tracking tool that keeps track of all compliance deadlines, including the deadline for SB740 funding. This tool is monitored by several leaders throughout the organization. By involving multiple leaders and staff members in the new compliance system, ECMS-G can prevent future staffing challenges from negatively impacting its funding. With these systems in place, ECMS-G is in a much better position to prevent errors of this kind in the future.

ECMS-G Students Will Bear the Impact of the Missing SB740 Funding.

The additional \$90,000 of SB740 funding would make a significant impact on student outcomes. The outgoing Director of Operations included these SB740 funds in ECMS-G's budget forecast. Without them, ECMS-G will not be able to add an additional math teacher, a position that was budgeted for the 2018/19 and 2019/20 school years. ECMS-G's students begin school at ECMS-G approximately two years below grade level in math. Research clearly demonstrates that students who require high school math remediation are much less likely to enter or complete college. For this reason, it is crucial that ECMS-G is able to provide the

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academic programs and staff that its students require to reach and then perform at their grade levels. An additional math teacher would reduce the student-to-teacher ratio and enable ECMS-G to ensure that its students are ready for college preparatory courses in high school.

~~This funding will also ensure that ECMS-G does not have to remove a school counselor~~ position due to budgetary restraints. ECMS-G's counselors provide crucial wraparound and support services to 360 children. These services include ECMS-G's Gentleman's League, Male Success and Empower Her programs, which provide mentorship, field trips, support, and guidance for ECMS-G's students. With fewer counselors, ECMS-G's students will not have access to the services and support that they deserve.

Without the SB740 funds, ECMS-G would need to use money allocated for the additional math teacher and existing counseling position to pay for basic facility costs. It pains ECS leadership to consider that a singular, unfortunate misstep could result in a measurable, negative impact on its students' achievement and success.

ECMS-G Provides Exceptional Academic Programs to Its Students.

Founded in 2010 in southwest Los Angeles, ECMS-G offers students a small, caring school environment, which supports their transition from elementary school to a college preparatory high school. ECMS-G's rigorous academic program prepares students for a college-prep high school and places an emphasis on social responsibility.

- ECMS-G serves a high-need population. To illustrate, 20% of ECMS-G students are English Learners, more than 15% are students with disabilities, and 92% qualify for free and reduced lunch.
- ECMS-G students arrive more than two years below grade level. ECMS-G prepares them for its college preparatory high school, where 97% of graduates are accepted to four-year colleges.
- The California Department of Education recognized ECMS-G's success in meeting the educational needs of underserved students living in low-income communities when it awarded us the Gold Ribbon Schools Award.
- ECMS-G consistently outperforms the schools its students would otherwise attend.
- Because of ECMS-G's consistent and outstanding performance, the LA County Board of Education recently renewed ECMS-G's charter petition.

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With your support, the SB740 funding can be used to cover facilities costs, and ensure that ECMS-G can hire an additional math teacher and retain its counselors. This support will allow ECMS-G to continue providing the targeted, high-quality academic programs that its students need.



ECMS-G is Dedicated to Creating a Positive Impact for Its Students and for the Community.

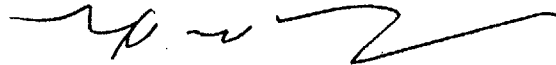
ECMS-G is located in the Gardena/Harbor Gateway community. Although this community has higher rates of crime than surrounding neighborhoods, ECMS-G's campus provides a safe, clean, and nurturing space for students and families in need. ECMS-G's campus was formerly an abandoned building frequented by transients and used for illicit gang activity, which created a nuisance and blight on the community. ECMS-G transformed this neglected property into a thriving community space with a beautiful playground, composting facilities and gardens, vibrant classrooms, and activities for the whole community. These activities include ECMS-G's Green Up Days and adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. ECMS-G is

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proud of the way its campus and facilities serve the wellbeing of its students, their families, and the Gardena/Harbor Gateway community.

We greatly appreciate your consideration, and urge you to consider the significant, measureable impacts that the SB740 funding will have for ECMS-G students. To the extent that this funding is available, your support would mean so much to ECMS-G's students and to the community. ECMS-G has been proactive in creating new compliance procedures to prevent filing errors in the future, and we can assure you that ECMS-G's error in this regard is a one-time occurrence. We are truly grateful for your partnership and support.

Sincerely,



Randall W. Keen

cc: Farnaz Golshani-Flechner
Alison Diaz