Sierra Nevada Academy Charter School Family Involvement Program

Letter to SNACS Community

Dear SNACS Community Members;

In a time when there are serious economic challenges for our nation, I am grateful to be part of a movement that brings innovation and dedication in education to the forefront of American society. The charter school movement, as we know it today, officially began 20 years ago in Minnesota when the first charter school law was passed. At the heart of the charter school law is the American spirit in pioneering innovation for public education. Charter schools are one of the fastest growing innovations in education policy, enjoying broad bipartisan support from governors, state legislators, and past and present secretaries of education. At SNACS, we pioneer to reach six underlying federal charter school goals in striving to:

- Increase opportunities for learning and access to quality education for all students
- Create choice for parents and students within the public school system
- Provide a system of accountability for results in public education
- Encourage innovative teaching practices
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers
- Encourage community and parent involvement in public education

Our sponsor, the Washoe County School District, provides oversight and technical assistance in meeting these six goals. We are fortunate to work with Dr. Heath Morrison, WCSD Superintendent, and Michael Doering, WCSD Charter School Liaison. Their leadership and support is crucial to an effective charter school community as integral component in the Washoe County School District offering school choice.

Our board governs to ensure we continually move forward toward these six goals through their governance through four broad areas: board and organizational oversight, policy oversight, contract oversight, and financial oversight. SNACS Board Members provide insight and perspective to often complex issues and help us to maintain a forward direction as we continually evolve to meet our mission: *to improve the quality of primary, elementary, and middle school experiences of the educational system by producing exemplary students in a cost effective way.*

Our administration team works to ensure we translate the overarching goals and mission into an organizational structure through the daily operation of the charter school. This includes establishing a framework for teachers and students to be successful in a high stakes accountability-driven nation. We strive to work with all stakeholders and to ensure teachers embrace our commitment in which every student has an individualized experience that is unique, memorable, and fosters a love of learning. Thank you for carrying the spirit of the charter school torch.

SNACS teachers and assistants make a commitment to our school, students, and themselves to ensure they are mindful of their actions to make every experience they provide accountable to the high stakes standards established throughout our nation. SNACS teachers and assistants help plan and participate in activities that are crucial to our small school community such as: ELOB Living History Days, B & N Author Signing, Science Fair, Invention Convention, Math Game Night, Harvest Festival & Spring Fling, Fun Run & Field Days, Talent Shows, School Dances, and Movie Nights. SNACS teachers and assistants are thanked for their dedication to provide every student with exemplary and differentiated opportunities for success.

We strive to ensure every family that is a part of our school community feels welcomed and appreciated as partners in their child's education. At SNACS, families work in the spirit of the school to make a difference in the lives of all of our children. Families serve the school community through varied opportunities from serving

as a leader on the school board, to painting murals, to sponsoring events, to helping in the classroom. We are grateful to all of our family volunteers and want to ensure volunteerism is a pleasurable experience for everyone. Parents are our students' first teachers and are thanked for choosing SNACS.

Students are at the heart of our school and work hard to meet goals and expectations as outlined through the school, district, state, and national accountability efforts. More than that, SNACS' students provide an opportunity for us to view the world of education as an exciting platform where anything is possible. Thank you students for giving us hope for the future of our world!

As you read the following pages, you should be reminded of a few simple ideas… a small school community flourishes when its members are excited and passionate about the premise of what we are doing – educating children and changing the world, one student at a time. We envision a school where people work together to help children succeed today and become the leaders of tomorrow.

With heartfelt gratitude thank you SNACS School Community! We are the change we wish to see in the community!

Sincerely,

Kimberly Regan Schoenfeldt
Executive Director &
Founding Member of SNACS

SNACS Mission

SNACS mission is to improve the quality of primary, elementary, and middle school experiences of the educational system by producing exemplary students in a cost effective way.

SNACS Alignment with WCSD Mission

With every student and their family, by name and face,
to graduation from SNACS.

SNACS Motto

Bringing the Small School Community Back to the Neighborhood

SNACS Family Volunteer Challenges

Make a Difference in the Life of a Child, Volunteer!

Change the World One Child at a Time!

SNACS Guiding Principles in Supporting Family Involvement

Families are valued as their child's first teacher, bringing a wealth of information, which supports the whole child approach in education.

Families, regardless of family structure; socioeconomic status, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds; gender; abilities; or preferred language are welcomed and encouraged to participate in their child's education as a valued and integral member of the school community.

Family support and participation is vital to every child's success in all aspects of life.

Parents are partners in their child's education and work collaboratively to support student learning and a small

school community.

Parents actively participate in developing personal learning plans that drive their child's education.

Parents and families are encouraged to engage in meaningful two-way communication with educators, as partners, to enhance student learning through activities, policies, practices, and programs.

Students and their families are supported in a P-8 system that will result in sense of community, belonging, and increased student achievement.

Parents and students have a voice and a choice in their child's education. We appreciate parents choosing Sierra Nevada Academy Charter School.. Your contributions are priceless!

SNACS Family Volunteer Philosophy

SNACS is known for its motto: *Bringing the Small School Community Back to the Neighborhood.* Establishing and maintaining a thriving small school community involves families and staff working together participating in many activities, events, and celebrations throughout the school year. The small school community network is the foundation to student achievement and life-long learning.

School community is promoted through collaborative learning where younger students work with and learn from the older students and parents work as partners in their child's educational experiences. At SNACS, parent volunteers are vital to help facilitate daily activities and participate in events. SNACS families are embraced as important stakeholders who have a voice.

SNACS promotes an environment where parents are welcomed to volunteer in and out of the classroom in a meaningful way. SNACS relies heavily on volunteers and requests that each family volunteer 10 hours per month. Volunteers play an important role and contribute valuable time towards helping our small school community. We are grateful to our volunteers and want to ensure volunteerism is a pleasurable experience for everyone. There are several basic guidelines and procedures to help keep our volunteer program effective and efficient with safety and student learning as the driving forces.

SNACS has a list available for suggested ways to fulfill family volunteer expectations. However, SNACS encourages each family to use its unique talents and interests in volunteering at school. The school will benefit the most when volunteerism is conducted with school spirit and passion for learning.

Family members who are interested in starting a new event or helping in a way that will enhance the student learning environment should talk to their child's teacher and/or the front office.

Volunteer Expectations

SNACS promotes a collaborative learning environment where parents are welcomed to volunteer in and out of the classroom in a meaningful way. SNACS relies heavily on volunteers and requests that each family volunteer 10 hours per month. Volunteers play an important role and contribute valuable time towards helping our small school community. We are grateful to our volunteers and want to ensure volunteerism is a pleasurable experience for everyone. There are several basic guidelines and procedures to help keep our volunteer program effective and efficient.

Safety

In order to protect the safety of the students, **all** persons who wish to volunteer in the classroom and/or around the students must complete a Volunteer Application (at least yearly) for a background check and submit a set of fingerprints through the Washoe County School District School Police Department. Those persons who hold other agency clearances related to fingerprints must still submit a set of fingerprints as SNACS is solely responsible for our volunteer fingerprints and may not accept other agency reports in lieu of current fingerprints. Unless a background check is returned with any arrest/conviction information that contradicts the documentation provided in the Volunteer Application, volunteers may be allowed to volunteer in the classroom. Safety is of utmost importance and volunteers are expected to not be a distraction to the class or school environment. Volunteers must adhere to all school rules and follow proper protocols which ensure the safety of all students and the school community.

Supervision

All volunteers must be under the direct supervision of a qualified and trained staff member. They may not be alone with students or unsupervised on school grounds. All volunteers are permitted at the discretion of the school administrators. At any time school administrators have the right to refuse volunteerism if they deem it is in the best interest of the school.

Behavior

Volunteers are expected to behave in such a way that is conducive to the learning environment and not impeding the primary focus of schooling. Volunteering should be conducted with a positive attitude keeping the spirit of the school as a guiding principle. Those who volunteer with a positive attitude and refrain from complaining help the school climate flourish. Those who volunteer with a focus on the negative can hurt the school climate. The latter will not be tolerated. A volunteer should refrain from interference with classroom or school related issues that are the responsibility of school personnel. All school rules must be followed, including the use of appropriate language, dress, and overall behavior.

FERPA

According to federal law, the Family Educational Rights to Privacy Act (FERPA), classroom volunteers are not permitted to discuss any student or student related information they witness as a result of their being in the classroom or on school grounds as a volunteer. Any volunteer violating FERPA may be asked to volunteer in situations where they are not working directly with or around children.

Purposeful Volunteerism

SNACS has a list available for suggested ways to fulfill family volunteer requirements. However, SNACS encourages each family to use its unique talents and interests in volunteering at school. The school will benefit the most from such meaningful volunteering, and the families will enjoy volunteering more.

Celebration of Contributions

From time to time SNACS will send to each family, a detail of its volunteer hours. Therefore, it is absolutely vital that each family keep accurate records of their volunteer time or donations. A volunteer log via computer is available

in the front office for recording hours or donations. Please remember that if you are making material donations, the receipt needs to be turned in to the front office.

Sign In/Sign Out

All visitors, volunteers and board members must sign in at the front office on the volunteer sign-in sheet & receive a badge. Classrooms will be called to announce a visitor before the visitor will be allowed beyond the front desk. This is a fire code requirement and safety protocol. This is not optional. All volunteers must be under the direct supervision of an SNACS staff member and may not be alone with students at any time. The only considered exception to this if SNACS is provided with a current copy of a valid Nevada teaching license or a WCSS Child Care work card.

Volunteerism through Celebrations and Events

Events and Celebrations are opportunities for families to contribute to the school community. Family volunteers and community organizations are vital to help facilitate activities and participate in events. Please see your child's teacher to plan, organize and participate in events!

Daily Classroom Activities– SNACS implements a unique model where differentiated instruction is the core of classroom activities. Family members who are able to participate in the classroom are always welcomed and encouraged. Everyday is a celebration at SNACS!

Arts Celebration Days—SNACS students participate in celebrating the arts with organizations such as the Nevada Museum of Art and Tahoe Players to involve students in art studio, history, theater, music, and dance. Families are welcome to attend and participate in these events!

Author's Book Publishing—Every student publishes a hard cover book. Students create their own stories and fully engage in the writing process as they write, edit, design, and illustrate their work. The world of writing books leaves an open ended opportunity for creativity. The event is culminated at Barnes and Noble where SNACS hosts an Author's Signing Event. Each student has the official unveiling of their publication as they sign the first copy of their book in front of their family and friends.
Outdoor Lab Experiences—Bringing the classroom studies to the real world is an exciting way to engage students in expeditionary learning. Teachers instruct and engage students in classroom activities on habitats, environmental science, art, culture, history, astronomy, and leadership skills and then allow students opportunities to apply their knowledge in real world settings. Families participate in canoeing, kayaking, fishing, flower, fauna, and tree identifying, animal observing, hiking, biking, ranger activities, orienteering, rock climbing, and swimming. The SNACS Community has traveled to places such as Mt. Lasson, Davis Creek, Washoe Lake, Boca Stampede, Mt. Mammoth, Fort Churchill, Fallen Leaf Lake, Point Reyes and Yosemite National Park.

School Dances—Students and families participate in various school and grade level dances.

Fire Prevention and Safety—Onsite visit from local firemen who teach children fire safety and stop, drop, and roll through interactive activities. Students test their abilities to hold the hose and explore the inside of the fire engine. Parents are encouraged to attend and learn about fire prevention.

Nevada Ranch and Farm Days— Parents support this event by helping set up and run various activities

including: onsite pumpkin patch, square dancing, petting zoo, roping and saddling, horseback riding presentation, pioneer experiences via baking and mining activities. Local square dance callers and ranchers come onsite to work with children. Families are welcome!

Lattinberry Farms– This is a family day trip to explore the farm, fruit & vegetable picking, pumpkin patch, farm animal tour, and scarecrow making. The event culminates with the SNACS Great Corn Maze Race!

Harvest Festival—Onsite carnival activities where every classroom is a fun filled carnival game area – complete with a student created haunted house. Families and friends are welcome!

SNACSgiving Festival - SNACS students and families participate in creating baskets of goodies for the local family shelter in Reno. Then, they participate in their own Thanksgiving Festival where all students gathered to enjoy a Thanksgiving feast.

SNACS Multicultural Celebration of Children Around the World—Every classroom focuses on the life of children in a different country. As a culminating event, classrooms are designed and set up as a different country. Students dress up, like the children in the country they are studying, and participate in activities that are representative of their country including food, activities, dance, etc.

Winter Celebration—SNACS students and families participate in making various winter crafts in each classroom including ornaments, candles, wreaths, pins, and gingerbread houses which culminate with a caroling gathering in our circle.

Scientific Inquiry - Students explore the scientific process and experience a science fair creation through guided and supported activities in an inquiry based, hands-on approach. Families help children conduct various experiments.

Math Game Family Night—Students and their families come to celebrate learning about mathematics concepts, problem solving through playing games in all of the classrooms. Each room has a different theme or focus through gaming. Children and families learn a love of mathematics!

Invention Convention - Student collaboratively worked to build inventions out of everyday items such as a pair of glasses & spaghetti bridges/structures. Families support by assisting students in completing invention projects.

Celebrating Young Children through Picture Books - The NAEYC Week of the Young Child is held during the month of April. Various activities will be held all week and will culminate with students dressing up as their favorite book character or children's book author. Parents come dressed as book characters and read to children promoting a love of literacy.

Celebrating Nevada Charter Schools - National Charter School Week is celebrated across the county. SNACS will hold activities throughout the week to celebrate students, families, educators, and the community.
SNACS Fun Run & Earth Day Celebration— Students participate in creating earth awareness artifacts and establish displays to teach other students about earth day. Simultaneously students participate in the annual fun run where they run laps around the school campus to raise awareness on physical education, health, and nutrition. Parents are vital to tally laps and provide support.

SNACS Spring Fling – Students participate in outdoor carnival activities in a family filled event that includes bounce house, dunk tank and various other games. Parents help in managing games and booths at carnival-like

event.

Cinco de Mayo—SNACS students participate in Cinco de Mayo celebrations with various activities including food, dance, dress, and other celebratory customs. Families and children enjoy music and dance when our guest Mariachi band performs.

SNACS Field Day—Students participate in a fun filled outdoor lab of various games and activities such as a three legged race, water races, tug of war, long jump, relay races, board races, hula hoop contest, etc. Parents help coach field games.

SNACS Talent Show- SNACS staff and students participate in a talent show where the students (and families) compete against one another for the SNACS Idol winners.

SNACS Family Breakfasts SNACS staff members sponsor monthly themed pancake breakfasts where students and their families come to school early to enjoy a home-cooked breakfast. These events are themed in attire and celebrations.

SNACS Fundraisers and Book fairs—Several SNACS fundraisers and book fairs are vital to the SNACS community and helping children succeed. Parents are encouraged to participate in these events.