

State Board of Education Meeting January 26, 2023

SDE Presentation on
Sovereign Community School (SCS)



OKLAHOMA
Education



Overview

- Sovereign Community School
 - Charter school in Oklahoma County
 - Goal of education and training next leaders in Indigenous communities in Oklahoma
 - Approximately 109 students across fifth through twelfth grade

Overview

- Oklahoma Charter Schools Act
 - Purposes of a charter school include:
 - Improve student learning
 - Increase learning opportunities
 - Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods
 - Structure:
 - Academic freedom
 - Public school financial requirements

Performance Framework

- Included as an appendix to Sovereign's charter
- Required as part of Sovereign's charter
 - Exhibit 1 in the handouts

Performance Framework

- Three sections:
 - Academic
 - Financial
 - Organizational

Performance Framework

- Tentative Conclusions
 - Sovereign has failed all academic metrics and all financial metrics for every complete year of operation.
 - Sovereign has consistently met less than half of organizational metrics.
 - The Department's tentative scores are in Exhibit 2 in the handouts.

Academics

- Oklahoma School Testing Program (OSTP) provides scores for schools across the state for grades three through eight.
- Four categories of achievement:
 - Below basic
 - Basic
 - Proficient
 - Advanced

Academics

- Percentage of Sovereign’s students scoring proficient or advanced for Fifth Grade:

	ELA	Math
FY 21	11%	≤1%
FY 22	6%	6%

Academics

- Percentage of Sovereign’s students scoring proficient or advanced for Sixth Grade:

	ELA	Math
FY 21	11%	≤1%
FY 22	8%	≤1%

Academics

- Percentage of Sovereign’s students scoring proficient or advanced for Seventh Grade:

	ELA	Math
FY 21	7%	4%
FY 22	≤1%	≤1%

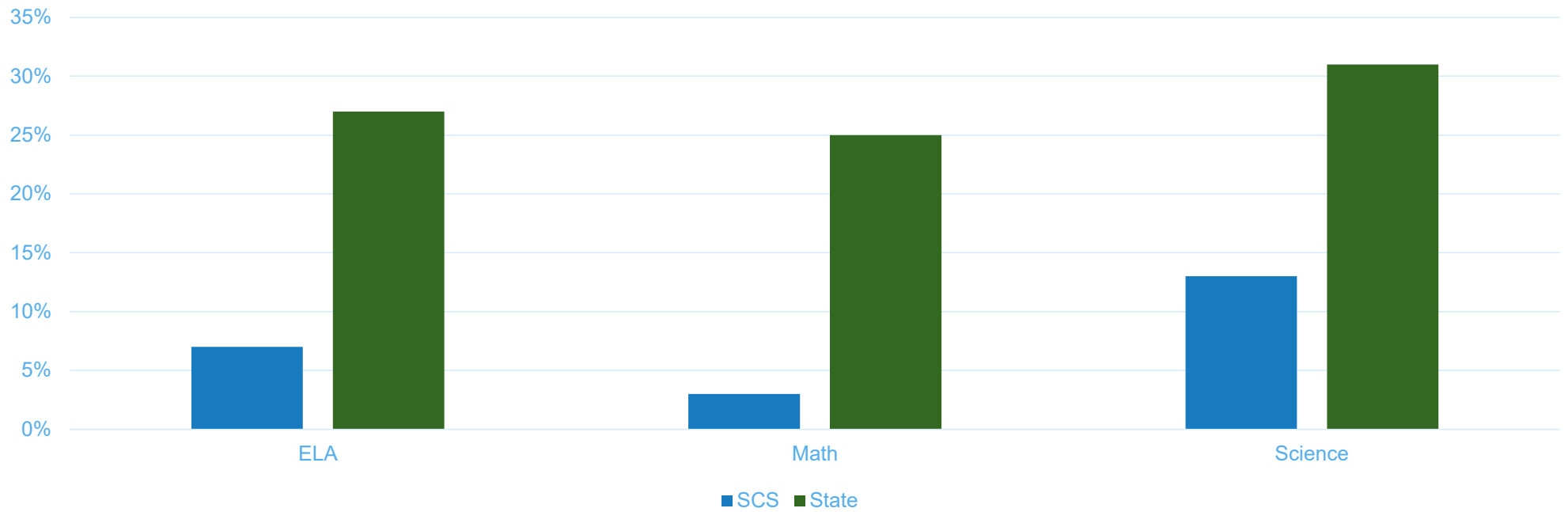
Academics

- Percentage of Sovereign’s students scoring proficient or advanced for Eighth Grade:

	ELA	Math
FY 21	≤1%	≤1%
FY 22	8%	≤1%

Academics

% Proficient or Advanced



Academics

- Comparison to other school districts for FY 22 Fifth Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	6%	6%
OKC	10%	7%
Mustang	35%	36%
Norman	39%	33%

Academics

- Comparison to other school districts for FY 22 Fifth Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	6%	6%
Edmond	46%	44%
Guthrie	25%	19%
Moore	39%	40%

Academics

- Comparison to other charter schools for FY 22 Fifth Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	6%	6%
Dove	21%	27%
Epic Blended	18%	11%
Epic One on One	16%	7%

Academics

- Comparison to other charter schools for FY 22 Fifth Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	6%	6%
John Rex	44%	35%
KIPP OKC	32%	13%
LeMonde	39%	6%

Academics

- Comparison to other school districts for FY 22 Sixth Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	8%	≤1%
OKC	11%	6%
Mustang	35%	42%
Norman	33%	25%

Academics

- Comparison to other school districts for FY 22 Sixth Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	8%	≤1%
Edmond	42%	37%
Guthrie	29%	20%
Moore	44%	37%

Academics

- Comparison to other charter schools for FY 22 Sixth Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	8%	≤1%
Dove	29%	33%
Epic Blended	20%	13%
Epic One on One	20%	11%

Academics

- Comparison to other charter schools for FY 22 Sixth Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	8%	≤1%
John Rex	41%	38%
KIPP OKC	18%	8%
LeMonde	27%	18%
Harding Indep.	15%	8%

Academics

- Comparison to other school districts for FY 22 Seventh Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	≤1%	≤1%
OKC	9%	7%
Mustang	31%	35%
Norman	28%	26%

Academics

- Comparison to other school districts for FY 22 Seventh Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	≤1%	≤1%
Edmond	32%	39%
Guthrie	25%	28%
Moore	29%	34%

Academics

- Comparison to other charter schools for FY 22 Seventh Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	≤1%	≤1%
Dove	24%	32%
Epic Blended	19%	17%
Epic One on One	19%	14%

Academics

- Comparison to other charter schools for FY 22 Seventh Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	≤1%	≤1%
John Rex	22%	45%
KIPP OKC	16%	15%
LeMonde	35%	12%
Harding Indep.	7%	10%

Academics

- Comparison to other school districts for FY 22 Eighth Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	8%	≤1%
OKC	13%	5%
Mustang	33%	29%
Norman	32%	19%

Academics

- Comparison to other school districts for FY 22 Eighth Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	8%	≤1%
Edmond	35%	24%
Guthrie	16%	28%
Moore	32%	28%

Academics

- Comparison to other charter schools for FY 22 Eighth Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	8%	≤1%
Dove	32%	31%
Epic Blended	22%	9%
Epic One on One	18%	8%

Academics

- Comparison to other charter schools for FY 22 Eighth Grade

	ELA	Math
Sovereign	8%	≤1%
John Rex	33%	35%
KIPP OKC	46%	31%
Harding Indep.	17%	4%

Academics – January 2023 Site Visit

- Positive Signs
 - Class structure improved
 - Curriculum shifting toward more in-person instruction

Academics – January 2023 Site Visit

- Concerning Signs
 - Only 69% attendance out of 109 students
 - No attendance register
 - No transcripts showing seniors on track to graduate

Finance

- Audits contain three areas of concern:
 - Lack of internal controls
 - Problems with encumbrance accounting
 - No surety bonds
- Audits are Exhibit 3 in the handouts

Finance

- FY 21 audit had two additional concerning notes:
 - Future revenues are obligated to pay for current and past year obligations
 - Sovereign's financial position over several years caused in part by enrollment not meeting projections of leadership

Finance

- Sovereign is addressing this shortfall through a series of grants and loans.
 - \$550,000 in debt (\$500,000 unpaid)
 - \$700,000 in one-time grants and donations

Finance

	FY20	FY21	FY22
State Aid	\$252,279	\$510,803	\$733,923
Federal Aid	\$200,436	\$92,751	\$235,593
Grants/Donations	\$425,992	\$61,041	\$320,000
Loans	\$102,500*	\$403,597*	\$150,000
Other	\$28,046**		
Total Revenue	\$1,009,254	\$1,090,742	\$1,496,039

Finance

	FY20	FY21	FY22
Loans	\$102,500*	\$403,597*	\$150,000
Total Revenue	\$1,009,254	\$1,090,742	\$1,496,039
CARRYOVER (For Next FY)	\$20,812	\$47,651	\$67,155

Finance

- Chart does not include:
 - \$100,000 in debt incurred in August 2022
 - Adjustments for encumbrances

Finance

- Preventable Error: Child Nutrition
 - Only completed reimbursement process for 2 months of school lunches
 - Eligible for reimbursement throughout its existence

Finance – January 2023 Site Visit

- Positive News
 - Sovereign has received a donation of \$150,000
 - Allison Black maintains a more organized filing system than her predecessors

Finance – January 2023 Site Visit

- Lack of Sufficient Documentation to Verify Finances
 - No full-time staff with knowledge of school finance
 - No treasurer’s reconciliation report
 - Encumbrance register appears inaccurate
 - Debt with unpaid interest accruing

Organization

- Over 3.5 years, leadership changed 5 times
 - Current Board President: Kendra-Wilson Clements
 - Board member since early 2021
 - President since March 2022
 - Current Head of School: Alison Black
 - Assumed position in December 2022

Organization

- Teaching staff frequently changes
 - Started this year with 5 teachers for 115 students
 - At lowest point, had 2 teachers
- Lack of staff contributes to deficiencies in special education
 - Missing data for almost half of Individualized Education Plans

Organization – January 2023 Site Visit

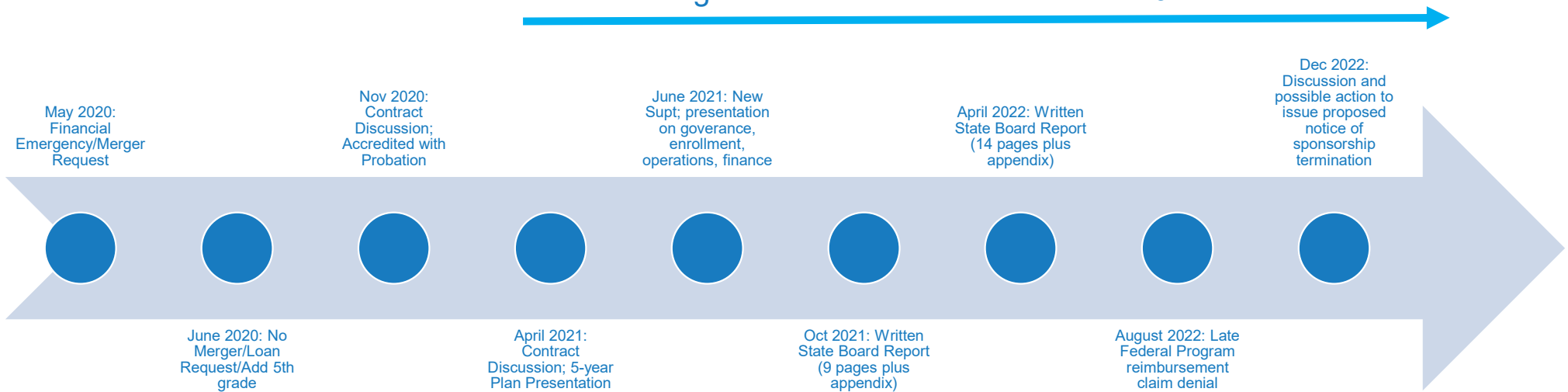
- Improvements
 - Had employment contracts for all staff
 - Hired a new teacher

Organization – January 2023 Site Visit

- Needs Work
 - Employment contracts were incomplete, and some still needed Board approval
 - Personnel data submitted to the Department still inaccurate
 - No records from December or January board meetings
 - No documents for bus driver's certification
 - Number of classes exceeded number of teachers

History of Sovereign & SBE Interaction

Western Heights PS timelines started March 2021



History of Sovereign & SBE Interaction

- November 2018
 - SBE agrees to sponsor Sovereign
- July 1, 2019
 - Sovereign's charter begins
- May/June 2020
 - Sovereign already in financial difficulty

History of Sovereign & SBE Interaction

- November 2020
 - SBE imposes probation
- April 2021
 - Department expresses concern that Sovereign is not complying with probation, recommends termination
- June 2021
 - Sovereign presents on a five-year plan

History of Sovereign & SBE Interaction

- October 2021
 - Department again expresses concern
 - Exhibit 4 in the handouts
- March/April 2022
 - Department again expresses concern
 - Exhibit 5 in the handouts

History of Sovereign & SBE Interaction

- December 2022
 - Department renews its recommendation for termination
 - SBE tables until January 2023

Options

- Issue notice of termination
- Order further information from Sovereign
- Table the discussion again

Options

- Termination under Oklahoma Charter Schools Act:
 - Failure to meet student performance requirements in the contract
 - Failure to meet standards of fiscal management
 - Violations of the law (financial reporting, children with disabilities)
- Termination under Sovereign's Charter:
 - Violation of Section 4, which requires Sovereign to meet or exceed performance framework
 - Violation of Section 4, which requires Sovereign to comply with law regarding children with disabilities
 - Violation of Section 11, which requires compliance with financial laws