



September 22, 2026

Suzanne Romero
Board of Directors, Ascend College Prep
1650 Telstar Drive, Suite 110
Colorado Springs, CO 80920

Institutional Review Board
University of Colorado Colorado Springs
1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway
Colorado Springs, CO 80918

Dear UCCS Institutional Review Board:

The Ascend College Prep Board of Directors has reviewed the research proposed by Karin McWhorter, a doctoral student at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs and the Principal and Executive Director of Ascend College Prep. The project titled, "Exploring Student–Teacher Relationships in a Relationship-Centered High School: A Qualitative Case Study," will examine how student–teacher relationships develop within the school environment and how students perceive these relationships as influencing their academic, social, and emotional experiences.

The study will include semi-structured Zoom interviews with approximately 6–8 current Ascend College Prep students who have attended the school for at least one full academic year; an open-ended electronic survey of up to 20 eligible Ascend alumni; classroom observations in approximately 6–8 classrooms; and review of publicly available school-level documents. Participation by students and alumni will be voluntary and subject to the consent and assent procedures approved by the UCCS Institutional Review Board.

The Colorado Charter School Institute (CSI), Ascend College Prep's authorizer, has reviewed the proposed research and determined that appropriate student and staff privacy protections are in place. Consistent with the autonomy afforded to CSI-authorized schools, CSI has indicated that formal approval of research activities and access to Ascend College Prep as a research site rests with the school's leadership and governing board.

The Board has also specifically considered Ms. McWhorter's dual role as both the Principal and Executive Director of Ascend College Prep and the Principal Investigator for this research. The Board is comfortable with this dual role given the safeguards incorporated into the research protocol to separate Ms. McWhorter's administrative authority from students' research participation. Student interviews and classroom observations will be conducted by independent research personnel rather than Ms. McWhorter. Participation will be entirely voluntary, and



participation or non-participation will have no effect on students' grades, educational opportunities, standing at the school, or relationships with school personnel. Ms. McWhorter will not receive identifiable current-student interview data, and research information will not be used for academic, disciplinary, evaluative, employment, or other school-related decisions.

After review of the proposed research, including the procedures designed to address Ms. McWhorter's dual role and protect students, alumni, and staff, the Ascend College Prep Board of Directors approves Ascend College Prep's participation as the research site for this study and grants the necessary access to conduct the research activities described above. This approval is contingent upon approval of the research protocol by the University of Colorado Colorado Springs Institutional Review Board and compliance with the final IRB-approved protocol.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Romero
President, Board of Directors