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2017 Charter School Renewal Recommendation – New Mexico Connections Academy

PED RECOMMENDATION

The PED recommends **non-renewal** for New Mexico Connections Academy (NMCA) because the school has failed to meet, and has not demonstrated substantial progress toward, the department’s minimum educational standards and student performance standards identified in the charter; showing a continued decline over the past three years in both. PARCC proficiency rates in math have dropped from 15% in 2015 to 11% in 2017 while the school’s own short-cycle assessment data (LEAP) shows a similar trend in which proficiency rates in math fell from 31% in 2015 to 24% in 2017. In reading, PARCC proficiency rates also dropped from a high of 39% in 2015 to 18% in 2017. The school’s LEAP reading data mirrored this decline in which proficiency of 60% in 2015 dropped to 38% in 2017. Any improvement efforts have been ineffective and have failed to improve student achievement. Further, the school continues not to meet the federally and state required percentage of assessed students; demonstrating continued declines over the past three years.

EVALUATION SUMMARY

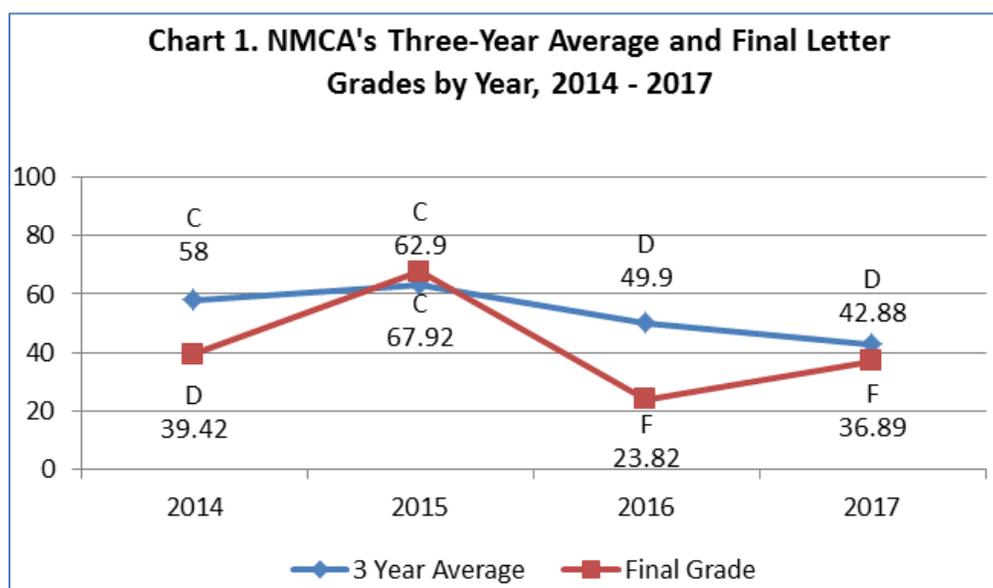
Section	Indicator	Rating
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE		
1.a	Department’s Standards of Excellence—A-F Letter Grades	<i>Failing to Demonstrate Progress</i>
1.b	Specific Charter Goals	<i>Failing to Demonstrate Progress</i>
FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE		
2.a	Audit	<i>Approaching Progress</i>
2.b	Financial Performance Framework	<i>Meets the Standard</i>
2.c	Board of Finance	<i>Meets the Standard</i>
CONTRACTUAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, AND GOVERNANCE		
3.a	Material Terms	<i>Approaching Progress</i>
3.b	Organizational Performance Framework	<i>Approaching Progress</i>
3.c	Governance Responsibilities	<i>Demonstrates Substantial Progress</i>

SUMMARY EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

On the 2014, 2016, and 2017 School Grading Report Cards, New Mexico Connections Academy (NMCA) failed to meet or demonstrate substantial progress toward meeting the department's standards of excellence and the student performance standards identified in the charter contract. Chart 1, below,

illustrates NMCA's three-year average grade and its overall school grade from 2014 through 2017. The school's final grade has gone from a C to an F over the last three years (red line) and the three-year average grade (blue line) has steadily decreased to a D in each of the past two years.

The school has (1) not demonstrated a record of meeting all standards in each of the years of the contract since the 2013–2014 school year and (2) the “data demonstrates performance that has continued to decline” and has “remained at an unacceptable level” (i.e., well below the 23rd percentile in 6 categories during the 2016-2017 school year with 3 categories below the 12th percentile when compared to similar schools) (see Renewal Application Rubric, p. 15). Further, (3) the general improvement actions described by the school to improve performance and outcomes do not appear to be connected to any specific root causes but instead are part of the school's charter program requirements or are required by law (e.g., assessing at least 95% of students), and (4) during the site visit, evaluation of evidence did not fully support the consistent, sustained implementation of reported improvement actions.



The cluster of schools in which NMCA was compared to in 2017 (see School Grading Report) totaled 9 schools. Compared to similar schools, NMCA ranked no higher than 7th out of 9 schools on any of the indicators. NCMA ranked last in current standing, higher-performing students, and lowest-performing students. NMCA ranked 8th in school growth, and 7th in graduation and college and career readiness (CCR).

	Current Standing	School Growth	Highest-Performing (Q3)	Lowest-Performing (Q1)	OTL	Graduation	CCR
Percentile Rank	11 th	22 nd	11 th	11 th	-	22 nd	22 nd
Rank Order <i>(Out of 9 schools)</i>	9 th	8 th	9 th	9 th	-	7 th	7 th

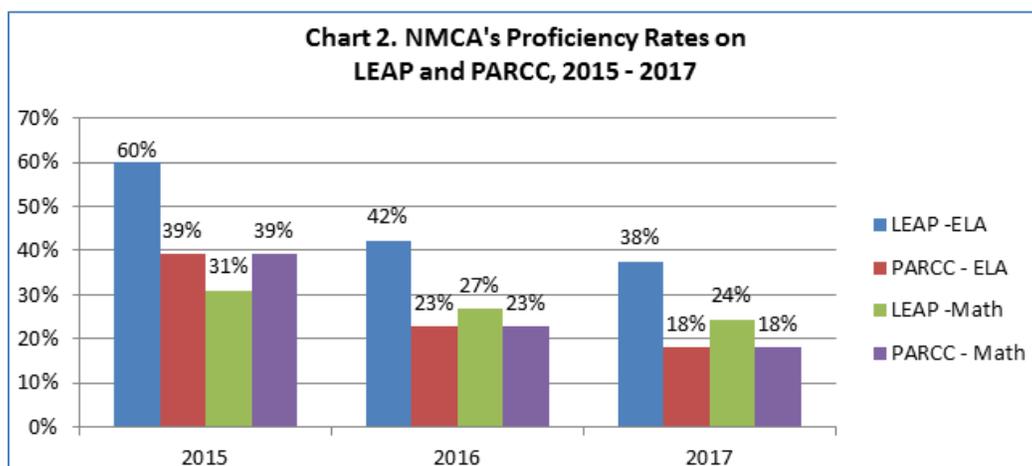
SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SPECIFIC CHARTER GOALS

NMCA has 4 mission-specific indicators and 3 optional supplemental indicators. The 4 mission-specific goals focus on math and reading performance on short-cycle assessments (LEAP), attainment of 6

credits per year by students, and enrollment in “advanced STEM courses.” NMCA also has 3 optional supplemental indicators that focus on guardian/adult student satisfaction, completion of such survey, and updating of Personalized Learning Plan (PLP).

At the end of the 2016-2017 school year, NMCA claimed that it met all mission-specific and optional supplemental indicators except for LEAP-reading which was rated *Falls Far Below Standard*. This was a downgrade from the 2015-2016 school year when the school rated LEAP-reading *Does Not Meet Standard*.

The school has not met all its mission-specific charter goals in all the years of its charter contract. Chart 2, below, illustrates a comparison of LEAP and PARCC results from 2015 to 2017. While the school reports that it has met the majority of its goals, NMCA’s own data aligns with PARCC data showing declines in both math and reading over the past 3 years.



SUMMARY EVALUATION OF FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE

Audit. Fiscal oversight continues to be an issue for the school with repeat findings occurring during FY15 (i.e., noncompliant mileage reimbursement, failure to obtain dual signature on checks), and purchase orders prepared subsequent to vendor invoice dates). For FY16, 3 compliance findings (lack of valid background check, overpaying payment for travel reimbursement, and unallowable reimbursement for alcohol) were noted. Findings from one year to the next over the past 3 years have decreased from six in FY14 to three in FY16.

SUMMARY EVALUATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Educational Plan and Employees. During the 2016-2017 school year, NMCA received ratings below *Meets Standard* in 4 areas (instructional hours, recurrent enrollment, financial compliance/reporting, and employee rights such as lack of compensation for mentor teachers). In 2015-2016, the school failed to meet standard for recurrent enrollment, while in 2014-2015 a material term (use outside presenters for some courses) and next step plans were not implemented. Lastly, a state-level special education complaint related to alleged violation of special needs rights was filed with the Special Education Bureau (SEB). The SEB anticipates completion of its investigation by December 15, 2017.

PROPOSED MOTION

Move to **deny the renewal application** presented by New Mexico Connections Academy because the school has failed to meet the department’s standards for excellence; the school earned a 3-year average of “D” on the state’s A-F School Grading Report and earned an overall grade of F in the last two years;

the school ranked in the bottom quartile in 6 of 7 indicators –current standing, school growth, highest-performing, lowest-performing, graduation, and college and career readiness—on the most recent A-F School Grading Report when compared to similar schools across the state; and the school has not demonstrated the implementation of improvement efforts that are effectively improving student achievement.