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2017 Charter School Renewal Recommendation – Taos International School (TIS)

RECOMMENDATION

The PED recommends **non-renewal** of TIS, because the school has failed to meet, and has not demonstrated, substantial progress toward the department’s minimum educational standards. The school’s improvement actions are not targeted to address specific root causes, are required actions in the contract or in law, and appear to be in only the beginning stages at the start of their fourth year of operation. The school has demonstrated a downward trend in expected growth of its students and overall performance. In addition, when comparing TIS to similar schools that have equivalent risk indexes (134 schools) as well as to three K–8 dual language charter schools, their performance on the A–F School Grading System shows a clear pattern of underperformance. TIS’s own reporting on the school-specific goals demonstrates that the school has not met or made progress toward meeting these goals. Lastly, TIS’s lack of business management oversight by its governing body over the term of its contract has resulted in repeat financial audit findings and continues to be of great concern.

EVALUATION SUMMARY

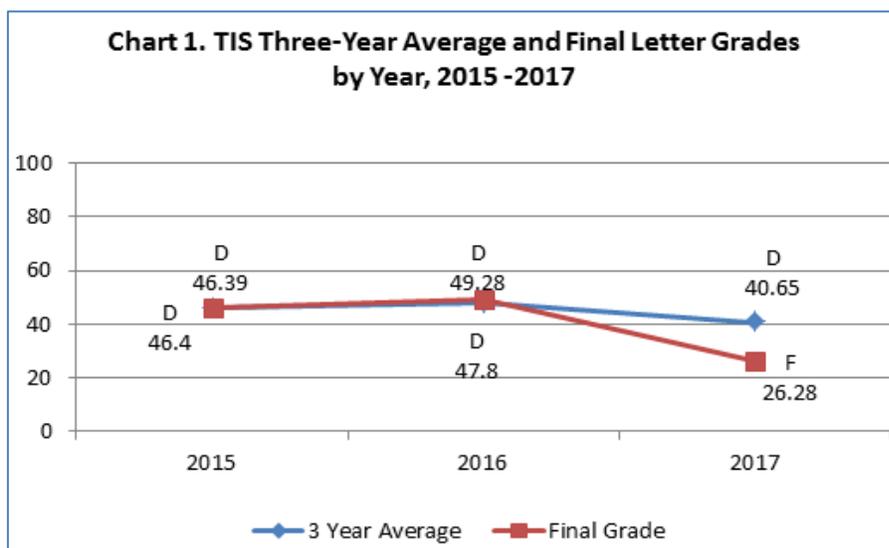
Section	Indicator	Rating
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE		
1.a	Department’s Standards of Excellence—A-F Letter Grades	<i>Failing to Demonstrate Progress</i>
1.b	Specific Charter Goals	<i>Approaching Progress</i>
FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE		
2.a	Audit	<i>Failing to Demonstrate Progress</i>
2.b	Financial Performance Framework	<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>Failing to Demonstrate Progress</i>
3.c	Governance Responsibilities	<i>Failing to Demonstrate Progress</i>

SUMMARY EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

On the 2015–2017 School Grading Report Cards, TIS has failed to meet the department's standards of excellence and the student performance standards identified in the charter contract. Chart 1, below, illustrates TIS’s three-year average grade and its overall school grade from 2015 through 2017. TIS has maintained a D average, not having achieved more than 50 out of the 100 possible points. And in 2017,

TIS dropped over 21 points from the previous year, earning an F grade. While the school’s three-year average grade (blue line) is a D, the final grade (red line) has significantly dropped to an F grade.

The school has (1) not demonstrated a record of meeting all standards in each of the years of the contract since the 2014-2015 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 10th percentile in four of five categories during the 2016-2017 school year when compared to similar schools) (see Renewal Application Rubric, p. 15). Further, (3) the general improvement actions described by the school (i.e., increased instructional time, set-aside time for teachers to collaborate, and ‘use of data’) 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., Response to Intervention), 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 to which TIS was compared in 2017 totaled 134 schools. Among similar schools to which it was compared, **TIS ranked below the 10th percentile on all indicators except one.** See Table 1 below.

	Current Standing	School Growth	Highest-Performing	Lowest-Performing	Opportunity to Learn
Percentile Rank	1 st	2 nd	8 th	3 rd	41 st
Rank Order (Out of 134 schools)	134 th	133 rd	125 th	130 th	93 rd

SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SPECIFIC CHARTER GOALS

TIS has three mission-specific indicators. The first two focus on measuring school-wide reading and math growth using the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) short-cycle assessment, and the third focuses on measuring Spanish language reading using DIBELS for full academic year (FAY) K–3rd grade students. In its renewal application, the school was required to present a composite or overall progress for its reading and math indicators but instead chose to highlight specific grade-level performance (e.g., “[r]ates in reading have increased from 1–15% in 6th grade and 0–7% in 7th grade” p. 21). For the third indicator that focuses on Spanish language reading, the school rated its own progress as *Falls Far Below*

Standard at the end of the 2016–2017 school year. In previous years, the school did not meet the standard for the indicator.

TIS has two school-specific terms. The first focuses on administration of the Woodcock-Munoz (CALP) assessment that measures cognitive academic language proficiency of students. The second focuses on implementing the “International Baccalaureate [IB] Primary Years Programme [PYP] in a Spanish Language Immersion learning environment in K, 1, and 6” (Performance Framework, p. 22). The school has met the first term since 2015, providing evidence of the assessment administration in 2017. The school also met the second term, providing evidence that it had completed the initial elements (train new teachers in IB, prepare three IB program inquiry units, and submit the Application of Candidacy, phase 1) as required in its performance framework.

SUMMARY EVALUATION OF FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE

Audit. Fiscal oversight continues to be an issue, resulting in repeat audit findings.

- Noncompliant use of Internal Revenue Service (IRS) standard rate for mileage reimbursement two years in a row, in FY15 and FY16. During the October 2017 renewal site visit, lack of supporting documents for recent travel reimbursement was observed (no requisition, purchase order, receipts, and certified mileage chart/odometer reading by the traveler).
- Background checks were not completed in a timely manner in FY15. In staff file reviews during the renewal site visit, multiple staff files contained background checks that were cleared *after* the employees had begun work. One employee did not have a background check on file.
- Retiree Health Care (RHC) withholdings and contributions were not made in FY15 and FY16.

During the October 2017 site visit, the PED site visit team attempted to validate implementation and oversight of improvement efforts. During the governing board member interview portion of the visit, the PED team asked the governing board the steps the school had taken to remedy past audit findings. It appeared the board members who were interviewed were unaware of such findings. The audit committee members and the board as a whole do not appear to be fulfilling their duty to oversee the financial operations of the school and do not appear to have an understanding of their responsibilities in relation to audits and audit findings. The lack of awareness and oversight raises serious questions as to the governing body’s capacity to oversee school leadership in regards to financial audits and disseminating critical information to other board members.

SUMMARY EVALUATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Education Plan. PED records for 2016–2017 indicate that TIS received a *Working to Meet Standard* rating in the following areas: (a) rights of homeless students and English learners and (b) safety (e.g., required staff trainings).

Governance Responsibilities. PED records also indicate that only one board member fulfilled training requirements during the FY17 and has not received records for other governing board members of the school. TIS did not submit any training hours for FY2016. For additional information regarding financial and audit-related functions, see financial performance subsection above.

PROPOSED MOTION

Move to **deny the renewal application** presented by Taos International School, because the school has failed to meet, and has not demonstrated, substantial progress toward the department’s standards of excellence and the student performance standards identified in the charter contract; the school earned a 3-year average of D on the state’s A–F School Grading Report, earning an overall grade of F; TIS was ranked in the bottom five percent in three of four academic categories on the most recent A–F School

Grading Report when compared to similar schools across the state; the school has not demonstrated the implementation of improvement efforts that are effectively improving student achievement; and the school has failed to demonstrate that the governing board is able to meet its obligation to oversee financial oversight, including oversight of audit findings.