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HANNA SKANDERA
SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

SUSANA MARTINEZ
GOVERNOR

December 5, 2014

Dear Public Education Commissioners:

Enclosed is the Final Recommendation for the Albuquerque Sign Language Academy 2014 renewal application. Charter Schools Division (CSD) staff at the Public Education Department analyzed the renewal applications, reviewed past performance of the school, conducted site visits and gave full consideration to the information gathered in this process.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matthew Pahl".

**Matthew Pahl
Interim Director
Charter Schools Division**

I. Recommendation

APPROVE

The Charter School Division recommends The Albuquerque Sign Language Academy for approval without conditions for a term of 5 years. The school has had no material violations during the course of their current charter. CSD finds that the school operates efficiently in terms of Governance procedures, its reporting duties, and organizational stability. The ASL Academy School Report Card Grades for years 2-4 have been suspended while the school works with PED to develop an appropriate evaluation formula that can more accurately capture the performance of the student population. The school community has worked diligently to research, develop, and collaborate around this initiative to ensure program rigor and accurate measurements of growth. Financial audits of ASL Academy show no significant findings, material findings, or internal control weaknesses. The school has not violated any provision of the law and the CSD recognizes that the school's leadership and governance are sound. The school has thoroughly and carefully analyzed its progress and growth areas during the last charter term, and proposed measurable goals in SMART format that are adequate for negotiations if the school is renewed.

APPROVE WITH CONDITIONS

PROPOSED CONDITIONS

The Applicant will negotiate a contract with the Public Education Commission pursuant to 22-8B-9.1: to include:

1. A shortened contract term of two or three years
2. Completion of an improvement plan specific to the school
3. Two annual monitoring visits by CSD

DENY

Overall the application is either incomplete or inadequate; or during their Capacity Interview, the applicant(s) did not sufficiently demonstrate the experience, knowledge, and competence to successfully open and operate a charter school.

The Charter Schools Act, in paragraph 1 of Subsection L of Section 22-8B-6 NMSA 1978, states that a chartering authority may approve, approve with conditions or deny an application. A chartering authority may deny an application if:

- (1) the application is incomplete or inadequate;
- (2) the application does not propose to offer an educational program consistent with the requirements and purposes of the Charter Schools Act;

- (3) the proposed head administrator or other administrative or fiscal staff was involved with another charter school whose charter was denied or revoked for fiscal management or the proposed head administrator or other administrative or fiscal staff was discharged from a public school for fiscal mismanagement;
- (4) for a proposed state-chartered charter school, it does not request to have the governing body of the charter school designated as a board of finance or the governing body does not qualify as a board of finance; or
- (5) the application is otherwise contrary to the best interests of the charter school's projected students, the local community or the school district in whose geographic boundaries the charter school applies to operate.

CHARTER SCHOOLS DIVISION

By:  _____

Matthew Pahl, Interim Director of Charter Schools Division, or Designee

CSD Summary and Final Recommendation

The Albuquerque Sign Language Academy was established due to the need for a community school that served students and families of the deaf and hard of hearing community. This school is not a traditional school for the deaf as it serves hearing students and deaf and hard of hearing students alike. The school serves the student population through a full inclusion model. The mission of the Albuquerque Sign Language Academy is to improve educational outcomes for deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing students in the greater Albuquerque area by providing a rigorous standards-based bilingual educational program which utilizes American Sign Language and English to achieve academic excellence, support family involvement, and promote multicultural community partnerships.

The Charter School Division recommends The Albuquerque Sign Language Academy for approval without conditions for a term of 5 years. The school has had no material violations during the course of their current charter. CSD finds that the school operates efficiently in terms of Governance procedures, its reporting duties, and organizational stability. The ASL Academy School Report Card Grades for years 2-4 have been suspended while the school works with PED to develop an appropriate evaluation formula that can more accurately capture the performance of the student population. The school community has worked diligently to research, develop, and collaborate around this initiative to ensure program rigor and accurate measurements of growth. Financial audits of ASL Academy show no significant findings, material findings, or internal control weaknesses. The school has not violated any provision of the law and the CSD recognizes that the school's leadership and governance are sound. The school has thoroughly and carefully analyzed its progress and growth areas during the last charter term, and proposed measurable goals in SMART format that are adequate for negotiations if the school is renewed.

As mentioned above, the ASL Academy School Report Card Grades for years 2-4 have been suspended upon the PED's determination that the basic formula used to calculate the School Report Card Grade became distorted when applied to the ASL Academy, which has a 50+% special education student population - significantly higher than the state average at other elementary schools. School leadership has proposed an assessment model which includes a short cycle assessment, ASL Receptive test, and the FQSS assessment model. This assessment model is developed in collaboration with PED and is awaiting final approval. Where students scored low in short cycle assessments, ASL Academy has explained measures being used to ameliorate the challenge, for example a Math and Reading intervention teacher has recently been hired to support student growth. The ASL Academy is the only school of its kind in the state of New Mexico. The school cannot be compared to surrounding community schools, as it offers options for parents that are not offered anywhere else.

The ASL Academy proposed 4 organizational goals and 3 academic goals. They met or exceeded 3 of their 4 organizational goals. The school did not meet their academic goals, however it should be noted that 2 of these goals were established with metrics that could not be applied to ASL acquisition (which is what the goal purported to address). In all of their 8 goals the school tracked data consistently, allowing for a comprehensive view of student achievement and programmatic accomplishment. The school has utilized information obtained from the current charter to inform proposed goals in Section C. The goals in Section C are in SMART format and will serve as an adequate foundation for Contract Negotiations with the PEC should the school be approved for renewal.

The ASL Academy has met generally accepted standards of fiscal management. The school received an unqualified audit opinion. All minor audit findings have been addressed and resolved. The audit report does not include any material weaknesses. In 2013 the school had 0 audit findings. The school submitted sufficient data to explain their current school budget in Appendix A. The cash balance for 2013-14 SY was 21.07%.

As stated above, the school has not violated any provision of the law. The CSD finds the school is stable and with a 5 year termed contract will be in a good position to continue moving students towards high academic performance

and continued community building. The Governing Council functions are sound and in accordance with their bylaws and open meetings act. The faculty and GC are in alignment with the mission and striving to create systems of support and assessment of deaf and hard of hearing students that do not currently exist in New Mexico.

The CSD recommends Albuquerque Sign Language Academy for approval without conditions for a term of 5 years. The CSD is confident that this school is on an upward trajectory with regards to student performance and is implementing its mission with fidelity. The school has presented action steps to address areas of weakness and has clear goals outlined to continue to develop the academic potential of each student as well as the overall potential of the school community.