



**STATE OF NEW MEXICO
PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
300 DON GASPAR
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87501-2786
Telephone (505) 827-5800
www.ped.state.nm.us**

HANNA SKANDERA
SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

SUSANA MARTINEZ
GOVERNOR

December 5, 2014

Dear Public Education Commissioners:

Enclosed is the Final Recommendation for the Aldo Leopold Charter School 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 charter be renewed, without conditions, for a full 5 year term. Aldo Leopold Charter School has complied with all provisions of law and is financially stable. The governance and administration of the school are stable. Student academic performance is consistently high. Interviews with stakeholder groups indicate the climate and culture of the school are healthy and supportive; and the school has an active and positive presence in the community.

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

After completing its initial charter term, the current charter was granted by the state effective July 1 of 2010. Their mission is: "Aldo Leopold Charter School provides an engaging and challenging educational program emphasizing direct experience, inquiry learning, stimulation of the creative process, and stewardship of our community and natural environment. Aldo Leopold Charter School provides students opportunities to learn the language of thinking and questioning, including required Socratic Seminars; curricula tailored to individual learning needs based on the Common Core State Standards; opportunities to explore connections between subject area disciplines; and opportunities to explore individual learning patterns and make self-directed choices for learning."

CSD recommends the charter be renewed, without conditions, for a full 5 year term. Aldo Leopold Charter School has complied with all provisions of law and is financially stable. The governance and administration of the school are stable. Student academic performance is consistently high. Interviews with stakeholder groups indicate the climate and culture of the school are healthy and supportive; and the school has an active and positive presence in the community.

The State School Grade Report Card shows a three year average of B, an indicator the school has made academic progress and is maintaining high standards. In reading proficiency, 45% of the students scored proficient and advanced in 2012. In 2013, 43.6% of student scored proficient and advanced. In 2014, 69.2% of students scored proficient and advanced, which is a significant increase over the previous two years. Math proficiency score for all students in 2012 was 25%. In 2013 the proficiency score for all students was 23.7%. In 2014, the math proficiency score was 40.7% indicating a significant improvement over the previous two years. School Growth has shown positive results all three years. In 2012, the score was 12.2, 3.3 points above the state average of 8.8. In 2013, the score was 6.38, .58 above the state average of 5.8. In 2014, the score was 7.29, 1.49 points above the state average of 5.8. Regarding the growth of highest performing students, Aldo Leopold has consistently out-performed the state averages. In 2012 their score was a B. In 2013 they received an A and in 2014, a B. The Growth of lowest performing students score showed a downward trend in 2014 with a score of "D" after scoring a B in 2012 and 2013. The school has analyzed the root cause for the drop and created an improvement plan to bring the score back up. The school's graduation scores have improved from a D in 2012 to a B in 2013 and 2014. College and career Readiness has increased from a C in 2012 to an A in the two successive years. Compared to Silver City High School, Aldo Leopold has consistently performed at or above in the final state grade.

In Part B the school conducted a thorough and comprehensive analysis of its many goals, providing informative graphs and comparisons to district schools on each report card indicator. Although not all academic goals were met, all annual data were thoroughly analyzed. The school's mission specific indicators were met and sufficient data were provided to substantiate results. In the Looking Forward section (Part C) the school provided a thorough and comprehensive analysis of its areas for needed improvement and put forward a plan to address areas of deficiency and assure growth during the next charter term. The goals presented are directly tied to the mission of the school, presented in SMART format with specific metrics, and provide for continuing challenges over the new charter term. The goals are adequate for negotiations if the school is renewed.

Aldo Leopold demonstrates compliance with applicable laws, rules, and regulations relating to financial management and oversight expectations as evidenced by an audit devoid of significant findings and conditions, material weaknesses, or significant internal control weaknesses. The school has no material

violations and it appears that the school operates efficiently in terms of Governance procedures, its reporting duties, and organizational stability. The end of year cash balance for FY 2013 was 15.54% of the operating budget.

Organizational analysis indicates the school is meeting all provisions of law. Many of the teachers have been with the school since its beginning. New faculty members are welcomed into the system and encouraged to give input regarding organizational issues. All teachers expressed confidence in the administration and indicated they are given latitude in the selection of course materials as long as they align with the Common Core. The Governing Board has recently added members in an effort to bring new members into its membership. The 17 students interviewed were all in agreement that Aldo Leopold is an excellent school with high academic standards and a supportive culture. They pointed to the peer mediation program as a major reason the culture is so healthy. They also pointed to the policy that students can only get a C or above for a course grade as an incentive for learning. Parents interviewed were very supportive of the school and its administrator. Many stories were shared by the parents about how their students had made remarkable progress since attending Aldo Leopold. CSD recommends the charter be renewed, without conditions, for a full 5 year term given the continued high academic performance of the school, its thorough analysis of areas of needed improvement, its innovative approach to education, and its organizational and financial stability.