

2010 CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION RECOMMENDATION & EVALUATION

Name: Aspen Grove Academy	Projected Grades: K-12
Projected Enrollment: 260	Proposed location: Albuquerque
Founders: Elizabeth Scheib and James Wisch	
Recommendation: I recommend that the Public Education Commission Deny the application because it is incomplete and inadequate.	

Aspen Grove Academy presents an application that is incomplete and inadequate. Significant concerns arise with regard to the staffing pattern and student assessment. There were inconsistencies and incorrect references that made this application difficult to find a coherent education plan. The education plan provided no assurance that this could be a blueprint for a viable and effective school.

The reasons for recommending denial of this application are based on the evaluation of each of the sections of the application:

The mission that is presented for the Aspen Grove Academy is inadequate and incomplete. The organizational goals presented lack accountability to clear and ambitious outcomes. The application has set forth no connection between participation in identified “programs” and actual organizational results. The statement of need provided does not present data that supports the claim that students are “disengaged.”

The educational plan fails to provide a structure within the school to deliver the wide range of curriculum modifications suggested or to provide students with the critical review and personal academic assessment services that are features of the “immersion democracy” method. The description of the curriculum application and development processes was inadequate to explain how the method of arriving at curricular offerings would serve the academic needs of students and assure that the state’s Standards With Benchmarks are achieved. The “SMART” goals and Student Performance Expectations were inadequate to demonstrate a rigorous method of assessing student performance, relying on an “average” over time rather than a clear, ambitious, and attainable set of expectations for student achievement. The five-year staffing plan is inadequate to provide the many types of curricular offerings and other services proposed under the “democratic” process of curriculum development, assessment practices, and independent study.

The financial plan presented did not clearly articulate the internal control procedures necessary to comply with law and regulation.

The application presents a governance structure that creates a conflict of interest for the head administrator in the selection of the members of the governing body. The five-year staffing plan does not present a clear description of how the variety of curricular offerings and other services will be provided.

Dr. Don Duran, Assistant Secretary of Education
CHARTER SCHOOLS DIVISION

Date: September 2, 2010

CHARTER SCHOOL MISSION AND STATEMENT OF NEED EVALUATION

Inadequate	Approaches	Meets	Exceeds
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The application attempts to offer a creative solution to low performance by students who are presumed to be unengaged in their education. The school would focus on establishing participation by students in democratic processes for making and/or participating in decisions on curriculum and school operation, an extensive mentoring program, and a project-based museum forum.

The various references cited in the statement of need are opinions and conclusions of selected authors but without any measured student progress data attributable to the application of the three methods proposed.

The primary goal of this application is the establishment of a school based on the “democratic” model with success evaluated solely on attendance and participation levels. Achievement of the mission is based solely on attendance records for various activities without any reference to actual accomplishment of the goals set forth in the mission statement. Student academic achievement itself is not included in the mission. The required student demographic data to support the Explanation of Need was not provided.

EDUCATIONAL PLAN EVALUATION

Inadequate	Approaches	Meets	Exceeds
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The Educational Plan for Aspen Grove Academy proposes a significant shift in the basis for school program and operation by incorporating a wide range of student preferences and decisions as the foundation for instructional and curricular organization. There was no clear explanation regarding the extent to which student decision-making would actually affect school operations and academic instruction. The application failed to provide reliable research to support the educational philosophy and approach to instruction.

The description of the curriculum committee and the curriculum application process was inadequate to explain how this method of arriving at curricular offerings would serve the academic needs of students and assure that the state’s standards with benchmarks are achieved. Given the limited staffing plan of only 13 teachers to teach 13 grades, including “multilevel classes” and high school courses, the application did not sufficiently establish a structure within the school to provide the wide range of curriculum modifications suggested or to provide students with the critical review and personal academic assessment services that are features of the “immersion democracy” method. There was no systematic methodology to coordinate or

reconcile independent studies with the required content of scheduled classes.

The “SMART” goals and Student Performance Expectations were inadequate to demonstrate a rigorous method of assessing student performance, relying on an “average” over time rather than a clear, ambitious, and attainable set of expectations for student achievement. “Sufficient progress toward proficiency in all subjects” is not adequately identified and a true timeline for achievement other than merely “throughout the first five years of our charter” was not provided. The portfolio assessment description lacked defined outcomes.

The required sections on alignment of student performance goals with the school mission and educational plan and on documentation and reporting of student progress were missing. The value of the museum forum program and its contribution to academic performance remains unclear.

Little attention is given to the description, design, or execution of instructional methods that would assure high levels of academic achievement by students. The consistent and frequent use of the term “access” to standards rather than “achievement” or “completion” does not describe the school’s methodology for measuring student academic success.

FINANCIAL PLAN EVALUATION

Inadequate	Approaches	Meets	Exceeds
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Although the application provides a balanced 5-year budget that supports the educational plan for the school, the application failed to provide a detailed plan as to how the school will manage its fiscal responsibilities. The internal control procedures provided in the application are limited to assurances and vague statements about general accounting practices.

GOVERNANCE / MANAGEMENT PLAN EVALUATION

Inadequate	Approaches	Meets	Exceeds
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By relying on incorrect legal citations and inappropriate analogies of principal and governing body roles to describe the governance and management structures, these portions of the application are inadequate to establish that the school would operate within the allowable and required provisions of law that are applicable to charter schools. Merely restating what is required by law is an incomplete description that provides no information about the proposed school’s governing body.

The inclusion of the principal as leader or member of the body that will be recruiting and electing governing body members establishes a clear conflict of interest in that an employee of the school is involved in selecting the officials who will conduct future evaluations of his/her

performance and approve or disapprove his/her future employment contracts.

The five-year staffing plan does not adequately described how the many types of curricular offerings and other services will be provided under the “democratic” process of curriculum development, assessment practices, and independent study.

As described, the lottery process proposes to use an electronic sorting mechanism to determine enrollment decisions. The description did not provide details to demonstrate that the selection process would provide a verifiable public process to assure parents that the lottery selection process was fair.

REQUIREMENTS EVALUATION

Inadequate	Approaches	Meets	Exceeds
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The application addressed all of the required components in this section.