

RESPONSE TO COLUMBUS COMMUNITY SCHOOL'S CHARTER APPLICATION

by

Deming Public Schools

August 25, 2013

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1. This application is detrimental to the best interests of projected students, the Village of Columbus and the school district as a whole.

The Village of Columbus is a small, isolated and impoverished community; one of the poorest communities in the United States. Due to this factor, the Deming Public School District endeavors to provide Columbus students, as well as students living in the neighboring community of Las Palomas, Mexico, opportunities to pull themselves out of the generational poverty that surrounds them. Historically, these students have been well-served by the district's efforts. More than **76%** of Columbus students graduate from high school, above the state average of 70% and the national average of 71%. Many Columbus students consistently rank at or near the top of their graduating classes, and many of them receive college scholarships. In 2011, one student from Columbus received over \$1 million in scholarship offers and opted to accept the full scholarship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has been very successful, including receiving the Freshman Math Student Award. In 2013, the valedictorian was a previous student at Columbus Elementary and received full scholarship offers as well. The 5 year total for drop outs for Columbus students 2007 through 2011 is .06%, GED .02%, deceased .009% and no information .14%.

Deming and Columbus are the only two population centers in Luna County. Per the 2000 and 2010 US Census, Deming grew 5.2% while Columbus lost 5.7%. Luna County, as a whole, grew 3.2%. It would not be cost effective to allocate further funding in a declining population area.

Research shows that community schools are beneficial to towns; however, Columbus Elementary School is the community school. It is open to the public for parent meetings, carnivals, programs and other gatherings. In

addition, school administration and teachers often skype to Palomas to keep parents current on the activities of the school and district.

A. Establishment of a charter school in Columbus will erode the quality of the educational opportunities the school district already provides.

The school district already operates on a limited budget, and establishment of a charter school that draws students away from the public schools will decrease the funds available to the district. As a result, the educational opportunities of students throughout the district, not just students from Columbus, will suffer. In communities like Columbus, where student populations and school budgets are small, it makes no sense to divide resources among multiple schools and duplicate expenses. The students in this community are better served when resources are allocated to fewer, but better schools.

The curriculum being offered is one to be designed by the staff and students after the school opens. The charter states that teachers, students and staff will develop the standards and curriculum together during the first year to meet what the students want. During the hearing, the founders stated that the main focus was building adobe (rammed structures) homes and becoming a leader in the solar industry. Obtaining required state standards and benchmarks was not indicated as a top priority. In fact the founders stated that they were not experts in curriculum. Deming Public Schools implements Dr. William Dagget's work on Rigor, Relevance and Relationship with strong career tech opportunities for students in areas beyond the narrow Columbus Community School list. DPS teachers use all of these strategies plus many others that are specifically designed to reach ELL students. Students at Deming High School have built and sold houses as well as completed a large percentage of an addition to a district school that will serve developmentally delayed three- and- four- year olds beginning in the spring of 2014. This has been done under an instructor who is both a licensed contractor as well as PED licensed teacher.

DPS is a participating member of the Economic Development Council and the Southwest New Mexico Council of Governments - entities which are fully involved in the green house complex, Sapphire Energy and other green energy projects in Luna County. DPS has the support of many local businesses and industries which offer students valuable experience and knowledge in the work place.

B. Establishment of a charter school will only increase the tax burden on residents within the district without producing any real benefits.

The charter school will attract some students and siphon scarce resources away from the district; however, because the charter school is unlikely to attract all grade- level students 7- 12 or 6-12 (it is unclear in the proposed charter on which grades are to be served) now served by DPS, the district will still be required to maintain its facilities, faculty, staff and other infrastructure at levels approximating current levels and costs - thus, a new charter school in Columbus will require duplication of these costs with no clear assurance of added educational benefit to the students. Local taxpayers will be required to bear increased costs to operate an additional school facility and to pay salaries for additional faculty and staff. This duplication of expenses is unnecessary and, given the already limited resources available to the district, is unsustainable. The students in Columbus and throughout the district will be better served if this duplication of expenses is avoided.

C. Establishment of a second charter school in Luna County will drain resources from the existing charter school which targets at-risk drop out students.

Deming Cesar Chavez Charter High School (DCCCHS), which targets older students and potential dropouts, was reauthorized by the Deming Public Schools Board of Education in 2011. During the 2011-12 school year, approximately 15 students from the Columbus area enrolled in the current charter high school. During the current 2013-14 school year, 18 students are enrolled in the DCCCHS.

D. Parents are now able to travel into the United States to meet with school staff, attend programs and visit schools in town. In 2013, the Enterprise Zone along the Border was extended which allows citizens with a travel visa to travel 55 miles beyond the border. This will greatly increase the ability of our parents living in Columbus and Palomas to visit the high school and attend activities of their students which will be held in Deming.

2. The applicants' proposed budget is unsound and unrealistic.

Section 22-8B-8 requires a charter applicant to submit evidence that the plan for the school is economically sound. The applicants have not satisfied this requirement.

The applicants' budget assumes that 100% of eligible Columbus students in grades 6- 12 or 7-12 (exact grades unclear in the charter proposed) will attend the charter school. The district expects that most of these students will continue attending the public schools in Deming, where they can take advantage of the sports, arts, academic and other programs (such as AP classes), those schools offer, rather than attend a smaller, inadequately funded, unproven and likely short-lived charter school that offers limited educational and extracurricular opportunities. It is unrealistic to believe that the charter school will attract enough students, and thus have sufficient funding, to pay the school's myriad expenses, including start-up costs, salaries, facility acquisition, rent, capital improvements, renovation and maintenance costs. For example, the salaries in the proposed budget will likely need to be increased in order to attract the necessary bilingual faculty and staff to such a remote area as Columbus. There is also need to attract qualified and licensed special education staff. Because the charter school will likely lack the funding necessary to meet its projected budget, the educational opportunities the charter school hopes to provide will be vastly inferior to those the district currently provides.

3. No suitable location for the proposed school exists.

A. There are no facilities in Columbus or the surrounding area that could adequately house a school for more than 350 students in six or seven grades as the applicants propose.

The applicants attempt to skirt the fact that no facility exists in or around Columbus that is adequate to house their school by stating that they are still investigating possible locations. It was stated at the hearing in Columbus on August 2, 2013, that the school founders are looking at the old Columbus Elementary or just putting portables on vacant land and using the kitchen at the Columbus Community Center for providing food. The stringent rules for preparing food for students and meeting safety requirements could not be easily provided in that location without major upgrades.

B. This facility does not meet the adequacy standards required for all public schools, and can only be brought into compliance with those standards at great cost to the school district.

Several years ago the district faced a choice between renovating the elementary school to bring it into compliance with the adequacy standards or closing the building and constructing a new one. Inspections of the school revealed a long list of work necessary to bring the school into compliance with applicable laws, codes and state imposed safety and adequacy standards, at a cost of approximately \$4 million. It was determined that:

- I. the school was required to filter all potable water through reverse osmosis machines, and those machines were inadequate to handle the capacity of the school.
- II. the plumbing system did not work properly and the septic tank was inadequate.
- III. the exterior masonry walls of several buildings were cracking.
- IV. several buildings required roof repairs or replacement.
- V. the size of the cafeteria did not meet adequacy requirements.
- VI. the fire sprinkler system did not work properly.
- VII. the administrative offices did not meet adequacy standards.

- VIII. the student health area was too small and did not have adequate facilities, like a restroom.
- IX. maintenance and janitorial space did not meet minimum requirements.
- X. repairs or upgrades were needed to the gymnasium, the playground areas, the parking lot, the exterior lighting, the library, the fire alarm system, the security system, sidewalks, the storm drainage system, electric and telephone systems, the HVAC system, and the bus drop-off and pick-up areas.

The district determined that students would be better served by closing the building rather than incurring the significant cost of these required renovations, simply to bring the facility up to minimal occupancy standards. If the applicants are granted a charter, their stated intent is to apply for funds necessary to bring the abandoned facility into compliance with the adequacy standards. These funds would come directly from the school district's operating budget, forcing the public to pay out the costs the district's taxpayers had intentionally saved. All of the district's taxpayers would have to choose whether to increase the current tax burden in order to finance such upgrades to a seriously deficient site.

As a practical matter, neither the State of New Mexico nor the Deming Public School District has the more than \$4 million dollars that would be required to renovate this facility for use by a charter school that would serve only a comparatively small number of students.

5. Habitual Truancy Rates were quoted from four years ago.

Deming High School has lowered its habitual truancy rate significantly from 49.77% in 2009-2010 to 34.13% in 2012-2013 (New Mexico Public Education Department Habitual Truancy Report 200-2010 and 2012-2013).

6. Evaluation of certified teachers is not consistent with current law and the implementation of the new evaluation system required in New Mexico. (See page 38 of application.)

**Columbus Student Graduation Matrix
2007 - 2013**

	Graduated	Transferred	Transferred to DCCCHS	Dropped Out	Expelled	GED	Deceased	Left without Disenrolling	TOTAL
Class of 2007	42	17	-	3	-	1	-	3	66
Class of 2008	27	9	3	3	-	1	-	4	47
Class of 2009	38	16	-	1	1	1	-	8	65
Class of 2010	27	19	5	4	-	-	-	8	63
Class of 2011	26	23	1	2	-	1	2	9	64
Class of 2012	19	23	8	2	-	2	1	8	63
Class of 2013	30	17	6	5	-	-	-	1	59

From: [Jorge Domínguez González](#)
To: [Olivas, Linda M., PED](#)
Subject: FW: Delivery Status Notification (Failure)
Date: Saturday, August 24, 2013 11:57:37 AM
Attachments: [ATT00001](#)

From: postmaster@mail.hotmail.com
To: jorgedogo52@hotmail.com
Date: Thu, 22 Aug 2013 22:30:01 -0700
Subject: Delivery Status Notification (Failure)

This is an automatically generated Delivery Status Notification.

Delivery to the following recipients failed.

`lindaolivas@state.nm.us`

--Archivo adjunto de mensaje reenviado--

From: jorgedogo52@hotmail.com
To: lindaolivas@state.nm.us
CC: jorgedogo52@hotmail.com; jacklong42235@yahoo.com; philipskinner47@gmail.com
Subject: FAVOR REENVIAR
Date: Thu, 22 Aug 2013 22:30:00 -0700

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Nuevo Casas Grandes, Chih., México, a 22 de Agosto del 2013

Linda Olivas/NM PED, Charter School División
P R E S E N T E.-

Srita. Olivas:

Ruego a usted, reenviar el presente e-mail a todos los miembros de New Mexico Public Education Commission que presidieron la Audiencia en Columbus NM el pasado 21 de agosto:

Estuve visitando a mis amigos en Columbus NM, entre ellos a Jack Long quien fue cofundador de la escuela Preparatoria Puerto Palomas junto con otros profesores que vivíamos en esa población fronteriza de Chihuahua a principio de los 90's.

Agradezco a los representantes que presidieron la Audiencia de la New Mexico Public Education Commission permitirme el día 21 mi presencia en la misma. Quiero dejar por escrito mi opinión, que a mi parecer guardan relación con los puntos ahí tratados

El pasado día 20 escuché decir a un hombre que su hijo tomaba, diariamente, el camión escolar en Columbus para trasladarse a Deming para asistir a sus clases en aquel lugar pero, el padre esperaba la graduación y le informaron que el estudiante no podría graduarse porque no asistió a clases. Si los grados faltantes de la Charter School de Columbus hubieran sido autorizados para impartirse en Columbus, creo que estos lamentables hechos no hubieran sucedido.

A pesar de las facilidades para que los alumnos aborden el autobús escolar, desde la línea fronteriza a la escuela de Deming, el tiempo diario de traslado de estos estudiantes, a mi entender, sería más provechoso que lo utilizaran en actividades en una Charter School en Columbus.

A mi parecer, quienes presidieron esa audiencia escucharon la opinión favorable de la mayoría del pueblo favoreciendo la Charter School (a excepción de la mayoría de los empleados del Distrito Escolar de Deming). Vox populi, vox Dei.

Parece que debe tomarse nota del esfuerzo de todo el colectivo en dicha reunión. Los padres y madres de familia, las autoridades y de las autoridades de la Comisión de Educación Pública de Nuevo México.

Por las características de esta comunidad, pienso que debe revisarse las propuestas de incluir en el currículo escolar asignaturas relacionadas con la economía de sus habitantes, por ejemplo: asistentes geriátricos, gastronomía regional y arquitectura de tierra.

Entiendo que la esperanza de los padres de familia de Columbus para una solución favorable no se ha apagado desde hace varios años porque confían en la sensibilidad de las autoridades educativas.

Ojalá cada miembro de la New Mexico Public Education Commission tome nota de la opinión de los padres de familia de Columbus

Fraternalmente

Mtro. Jorge Domínguez González

BLOG: www.tolvaneras.blogspot.com

Columbus Community Input from Public Comment Site

Email	Name	School	Comments
robertogtz1@msn.com	Roberto and Isabel Gutierrez	Deming - Columbus Community School 8/26/13 2:50 am	<p>First of all, as residents and supporters of the Columbus Community charter school, we would not encourage antagonism against Deming Public Schools or anyone else in the field of education. In fact, the main idea is to work, cooperate, and enhance with all whose true mission is to educate.</p> <p>In the near future, you have to decide on a charter school application for Columbus. Do it with the principles of freedom and equality in mind. Freedom to allow 400+ American students and their parents to choose a school in their community, and with equality for that school to offer similar opportunities as other schools in New Mexico do for their communities.</p> <p>Present day reality is that a small group of people are taking on the task of trying to obtain permission for a charter school in Columbus. They are ordinary persons with a mission and limited educational skills and have done their best with budget and curriculum and education logistics. Once the permitting process allows for funding, they will obtain the needed, specialized help in the different areas of importance for setting and maintaining a charter school. Yes, there are serious concerns on the difficulty of this endeavor but the potential reward is highly important to this community. And very significantly, it will have the state education establishment to provide vital assistance. Thank you.</p> <p>Roberto and Isabel Gutierrez Columbus, N.M.</p>