September 13, 2013

Dear Public Education Commissioners:

Enclosed is the Final 2013 Charter School Application Final Recommendation and Evaluation for R.I.S.E New Mexico applying for a state charter in Albuquerque to open with grades 9 – 10 and eventually expand to grade 12 represented by founders Eppie and Vanessa Lopez. Please know that the process utilized this year by the Charter Schools Division deviated from past years and was designed to reflect the Amended Charter School Act. We feel we created a very rigorous process. Three teams of highly successful and seasoned charter school leaders and business managers scored both the paper application and the capacity interview totaling up to 333 points for elementary applications and 342 points for high school applications.

Additionally, the CSD allotted itself 10% of the total points (33 & 34 for ES and HS respectively), available for dispersal called the “CSD Team Synthesis Score”. The rationale is that CSD staff has been involved with the people and the applications since the very beginning and have a perspective that is different from the reviewers and the PEC.

So in addition to the application and capacity interview score, the “CSD Team Synthesis Score”, which is on the summary score sheet, includes our analysis of whether the applicants: 1) Presented a good idea for a school that is realistic; 2) Explained their idea thoroughly in written and verbal form; 3) Have requisite capacity to make the school a success; 4) ) Made a convincing demonstration of capacity and 5) Have demonstrated sufficient support for the school and whether it will be sustained after the founders move on.

We realize as well that the stated goals in the applications may be refined during the Contract and Performance Frameworks process that follows at the end of the Planning Year.

Thank you all for your hard work and dedication to ensuring that New Mexico’s Charter Schools represent the best of public school options for parents and students. We are making a difference!

Sincerely,

Tony Gerlicz

Director, Options for Parents: Charter Schools Division

**Recommendation**

Approve : with standard requirements to commence operations, (see below)

1. Obtain standing as an approved Board of Finance

2. Negotiate a contract with the Public Education Commission

3. Secure Appropriate Funding

4. Secure a facility that meets PSFA approval

5. Complete the planning-year checklist

Overall the application is complete and adequate; and during their Capacity Interview, the applicant(s) demonstrated the capacity to implement the education and governance/management plans as described in the application. The applicant(s) have the experience, knowledge, and competence to successfully open and operate a charter school, including having an experienced educator already selected as Principal and the beginnings of an exemplary Governing Council.

Approve with Additional Conditions:

Overall the application is complete and adequate; and during their Capacity Interview, the applicant(s) demonstrated the capacity to implement the education and governance/management plans as described in the application. Nothing was identified that would indicate the applicant(s) do not have the experience, knowledge, and competence to successfully open and operate a charter school; however, the conditions recommended below are necessary to correct minor concerns raised by the reviewers.

**Additional Proposed Conditions**

The Applicant will complete the following additional conditions beyond the standard ones, according to the timelines set forth therein:

**N/A**

Deny: X

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. Further reasons are given in the CSD Synthesis section at the end of this document.

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.

**Options For Parents – Charter Schools Division**

By: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Director of Options for Parents, or Designee

1. **Overall Score Sheet**

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| **Section** | **Points Received** | **Applicant School’s Possible Points** | **%** |
| Application |  |  |  |
| * School Mission | 4.7 | 6 |  |
| * Education Plan/Academic Framework | 58.3 | 81 |  |
| * Organizational Plan and Governance/Organizational Framework | 84 | 126 |  |
| * Business Plan/ Financial Framework | 22.3 | 48 |  |
| * Evidence of Support | 15 | 24 |  |
| * Required Appendices | 3 | 3 |  |
| Capacity Interview | 27.7 | 45 |  |
| **Sub Score** | 215.0 | 333 |  |
| CSD Team Synthesis Score - (CSD up to 33 pts available) | 9 |  |  |
| **Overall Score** | 224 | 333 | 67.3% |

**Explanation Regarding Score Sheet**

Legislation creating Charter Schools in New Mexico was initially passed in 1992, and was amended in 1999 and again in 2011.  The intent was to create independent public schools of choice that would enjoy, and be held accountable for increased autonomy.   Innovation, autonomy, choice and accountability are hallmarks of the charter movement.  In the new charter school application review process, the Charter Schools Division has done a complete analysis of all evaluation components and then analyzed how those components, and the proposed school in general, would contribute positively to the diverse public school educational landscape in New Mexico and the overarching charter schools movement.

The review teams considered three categories of each new charter school application: the Academic/ Educational Plan, the Organizational Plan, and the Financial Plan.  The Paper Application consisted of 81 questions with some questions weighted more heavily than others, as reflected in the score sheets.  The Capacity Interview consisted of 14 pre-selected questions and one that was uniquely tailored to the school. Each question was weighted equally.  Subsequently, community input hearings took place in the community of the proposed school to ascertain the level of support that the applicant school has in the community.

The CSD then added its 10% ***CSD Team Synthesis Score***. The purpose of the ***CSD Team Synthesis Score*** is to ensure that the CSD bring its perspective to the analysis, in addition to the outside reviewers as explained above.

1. **Final Analysis**

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| **Application Section** | **Points Received** | **Applicant School’s Possible Points** |
| **Mission** | 4.7 | 6 |
| **Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section:**  The mission statement incorporates the key elements in stating what it will accomplish, how it will accomplish it, and what is unique. The statement says it will serve all youth, but it needs more focus regarding "success in life", which is an abstract concept and difficult to quantify and measure. | | |

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| **Application Section** | **Points Received** | **Applicant School’s Possible Points** |
| **Education Plan/Academic Framework** | 58.3 | 81 |
| **Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section:**  The achievement percentages are ambitious and mission-related. The goals are clear, comprehensive and reasonable, but it will be difficult to measure success in math and reading if measured over three years with the first year (3rd grade) and the final year (5th grade) being the last year in the school; thus, there is a question about the time frame of the SMART goals. While the school has a series of assessments to measure these goals, there is not a clear plan to cohere measurement of all of them in the aggregate.  The section on differentiated instruction provided clear descriptions and examples. This information ties into the mission of helping ELL and at-risk students. The concerns for strategies and methods is that the CASEL (Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning) strategies are not integrated with the other strategies mentioned and that the integration of science into the math class and social studies into the English class provide a limited overview that only partially supports the school's mission. In essence, the curricular strategies are clearer and more developed than the instructional ones.  The ELL section is clear, cohesive, comprehensive, and detailed with methodologies and strategies. The special education section provides a limited plan and lacks detail as to how IEPs will be monitored, how services will be delivered, as well as how staffing needs will be met.  Overall, the application emphasizes cognitive and non-cognitive instruction yet the details regarding what that instruction looks like, how it is implemented, how it is measured, and how it relates to academic instruction is unclear. | | |

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| **Application Section** | **Points Received** | **Applicant School’s Possible Points** |
| **Organizational Plan and Governance/Organizational Framework** | 84 | 126 |
| **Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section:**  The Governing Council (GC) description is thorough and committee expectations meet the needs of the school. The current potential members have strong educational backgrounds and experiences; however, the GC could gain from a more diverse skill set.  Governance training and evaluation provide a clear plan that meets expectations by ensuring governance receives training as required by statute.  The selection of the head administrator is clear, comprehensive, and cohesive and is in line with the stated mission and goals of the school. A concern is with two statements made in the monitoring section of the application. The first statement is "although the Board will have the power to take action on any issue it chooses." The Board hires a Principal to take action on its and the school's behalf; as a result, it does not have the power stated in the application. Furthermore, on page 53, "the Board will enter into and revoke all contractual relationships, that exceed $20,000 ..." The statement about all contractual relationships would include every teacher contract and a number of other operational items that are under the purview of the Principal. Both statements demonstrate a limited understanding of how to monitor the school as it meets its mission.  The job descriptions are available for most key staff but are not complete. For example, the difference between the CEO and CCO is not clearly delineated. Teacher job descriptions do not discuss the need for licensure, and there is no distinction between certified and at will staff. Performance measures are mostly clear because they are tied somewhat to student performance. The school day and year states the legal number of contact hours; however, the implementation (number of days, number of hours per day) is vague. It is difficult to track the cost of professional development to the budget. For example, the cost of the staff retreat is not a line item.  The school mostly provides a clear, comprehensive, and cohesive plan that describes school structures which will provide meaningful parental, professional educator, and community involvement in governance and operation of the school. The concern with the plan in its entirety is that the first paragraph offers a clear plan and the subsequent paragraphs do not support that clarity. For example there is an expansive role of the PTA in Community/Employee and Parent Involvement, yet the actual mechanism of the formation of the PTA is nebulous. The statement "The advisory council will work in conjunction with the PTA if one is created" implies that the PTA is an optional entity. What will take over this role if the PTA is not formed?  The conflict of interest policy is current, clear, comprehensive and cohesive. The school also provides a clear explanation of how it will comply with the Open Meetings Act. The application listed a limited plan on providing food services to students who qualify for free/reduced lunch. There is nothing budgeted to cover the costs of the food services operation should the reimbursements from the Student Nutrition Bureau not cover all of the costs. | | |

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| **Application Section** | **Points Received** | **Applicant School’s Possible Points** |
| **Business Plan/ Financial Framework** | 22.3 | 48 |
| **Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section:**  Most of the budget documentation meets the needs of this section by supporting the mission and demonstrating some understanding of NM school funding. However, the 910B5 forms did not use the most recent unit value. The T&E index for years 2 - 5 were the districts T&E index and not an estimate of the schools own T&E index. There were no ancillary service data in the 910B5, but these services were included in the budget. The 5 year budget plan did not include a clear narrative of assumptions.  The charter application stated financial oversight provides a clear description of what the Governing Board will do, but the remainder of the section provides limited or inadequate description of what the school will do to sustain or ensure adequate personnel. The financial policies list seven principles, but they are not clear policies. The policies do not indicate which staff members are responsible for which policies. There is no clear separation of duties. The school sustainability question was not addressed. | | |

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| **Application Section** | **Points Received** | **Applicant School’s Possible Points** |
| **Evidence of Support** | 15 | 24 |
| **Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section:**  The school offers a unique program that assesses cognitive and non-cognitive factors. The application provides limited evidence that it currently has community support and community ties. The remainder of this section offers adequate information. The application proposes that the school will be led by members of the community and could grow on that strength. | | |

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| **Section** | **Points Received** | **Applicant School’s Possible Points** |
| **Capacity Interview** | 27.7 | 45 |
| **Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section:**  The Capacity Interview demonstrated that founders and potential board members are passionate about realizing their mission in their community as evidenced by their intent to build a culture of community support. They articulated the mission very well. The representatives also spoke passionately about their dual purpose program (cognitive and non-cognitive) and the research supporting this approach; however, their explanation regarding the details on the implementation and evaluation of dual purpose instruction was limited. The interview also exposed gaps in understanding of the clear boundaries among the roles of founders, Governing Board, and the school's administration. The representatives answers regarding the transitional period between the planning year and the first year of operations was limited, as well as their explanation regarding how to collect data, use it, and apply it to improvements or change. While the representatives emphasized that they have good and knowledgeable people to help them with topics with which they are unfamiliar, the overall interview did not demonstrate enough current capacity to suggest high probability of success. In general, the applicants need to provide more details to demonstrate a full understanding of the implementation of their proposed school. | | |

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| |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **Section** | **Points Received** | **Applicant School’s Possible Points** | | **CSD Synthesis** | 9 |  | |
| **Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section:**  The CSD recommends denial of the R.I.S.E. New Mexico Charter School Application. Overall, the probability that this new charter school applicant will succeed is unclear. The review team, which was made up of veteran and high-quality charter leaders, deemed this new charter school application adequate in only some of the necessary components in the application and the Capacity Interview.  The scoring of the Capacity Interview mirrored the application in the sense that the reviewers and CSD staff recognized and admired the dedication, passion, and commitment of the founders. What was lacking was an overall understanding of what it takes to open and run a charter school including the importance of Governance, budgeting well, and of the details needed to channel that passion into reality.  The CSD and the reviewers recognized that the founders have an interesting idea for a mission of a school. In addition, it was commendable that founder, Eppie Lopez received a letter of support from the Deputy Coordinator of Educational Programs of the Gates Foundation as well as a letter regarding the potential for a $250,000 grant from “Partners for Success.” The explanation of how this idea would work, however, needed more expansion. The question of whether or not the founders have capacity to take on this enormous endeavor remains unclear, and as a result, we encourage the founders to let the idea incubate for the remainder of this year and return next year with an improved and more thorough plan of execution for their proposed school. Research indicates that an experienced leader is essential to the success of a charter school; thus a high-quality educational leader committed to this proposal could help address the deficiencies identified by the review team in the application and Capacity Interview. |