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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 Las Montanas 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 that Las Montañas Charter High School be approved without conditions for a term of 5 years. The school's original 5 year charter was followed by three 1-year renewals with provisions (2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015). The school met the provisions each of the three years. The school has not violated any provision of law. The school has adequately analyzed its progress for this charter term and has proposed goals in SMART format that will provide for adequate growth during the next term. The school faces challenges in some aspects of the report card, however based on their application and Renewal Site Visit, the CSD notes the school's desire and capacity to improve in these areas. The school is not highly effective at this time but there is no evidence to cause concern about its ability to operate the school.

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 Las Montañas Charter High School was founded to serve students whose needs were not being met by traditional public schools and to embrace the diversity of this student population while also striving to cultivate their academic potential. The mission of Las Montañas Charter High School is to develop the academic potential and personal character of each student by engaging and valuing the student, family and community partnership. Students will work to prepare for and meet the challenges of a post-secondary or workforce environment for a globally diverse society.

The Charter School Division recommends that Las Montañas Charter High School be approved without conditions for a term of 5 years. The school's original 5 year charter was followed by three 1-year renewals with provisions (2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015). The school met the provisions each of the three years. The school has not violated any provision of law. The school has adequately analyzed its progress for this charter term and has proposed goals in SMART format that will provide for adequate growth during the next term. The school faces challenges in some aspects of the report card, however based on their application and Renewal Site Visit, the CSD notes the school's desire and capacity to improve in these areas. The school is not highly effective at this time but there is no evidence to cause concern about its ability to operate the school.

The school grade shows a three year average of C; a result of a D in 2011, a C in 2012 and a C in 2013. The school has seen an increase in all areas of the School Grade Report for the exception of Current Standing, Graduation, and College and Career Readiness. The growth of the Highest Performers from an F in 2012 to an A in 2014, and Lowest Performer growth from a B in 2012 to an A in 2014 are particular highlights for this school. They have narrowed the achievement gap between highest and lowest performers by 6.1 points in reading and 3.6 in math. The school has seen a notable drop in their graduation rates, which is reflected in the school grade report. The school has already put programs and goals into place to address this deficiency. Among schools with a similar student demographic Las Montañas Charter High School ranks low in graduation yet ranks high in student growth and opportunity to learn. Las Montañas Charter High School serves a unique student population that has been traditionally underserved in the surrounding community schools, such as Centennial High School, Mayfield High School and Oñate High.

Las Montañas Charter High School proposed a total of six goals. These goals were established by the founders in the original charter in addition to the following short term charter contracts. Several goals included unattainable metrics or did not include base line measurements, making goals unachievable. The school met three of its six goals and the current administrators collected four years of data for each goal and provided detailed explanations of the results in their application. Of the goals that were not met based on the original metrics, the school did track data to show growth within the goals and used the outcomes to appropriately frame the goals they proposed in their "Looking Forward Section C" of the Renewal Application. The goals that were proposed 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.

Las Montañas has met generally accepted standards of fiscal management. All audit findings have been addressed and resolved. The audit report does not include any material weaknesses. The school submitted sufficient data to explain their current school budget in Appendix A. The cash balance for 2013-14 SY was 15.71%.

As stated above, the school has not violated any provision of the law. Over the last 4 years with Las Cruces public schools there were concerns as to the best practices of some Governing Council and business

procedures. These concerns were addressed and District conditions met for all charter terms.

The CSD recommends Las Montañas Charter High School for approval without conditions for a term of 5 years. The 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 outlined clear goals that could to continue to develop the academic potential and personal character of each student.