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HANNA SKANDERA
SECRETARY-DESIGNATE OF EDUCATION

SUSANA MARTINEZ
Governor

September 5, 2012

Dear Public Education Commissioners:

Enclosed is the Final 2012 Charter School Application Final Recommendation and Evaluation for New Mexico Connections Academy applying for a state charter in Santa Fe to serve grades K-12 and represented by founders Senator Mark Boitano, Governor Terry Aguilar, Patrick Chavez, Yvonne Duhigg, Paul Gessing, Dr. Patrick Lopez and Carlo Lucero. Please know that the staff at the Charter Schools Division and four teams of independent reviewers gave full consideration to the information gathered in this process.

The review teams and the Charter Schools Division (CSD) have provided evidence and rationale gathered in the team analyses and in this evaluation to fully understand the recommendation.

Thank you all for your hard work and dedication to ensure that New Mexico's Charter Schools represent the best of alternative and innovative options for parents and students.

Sincerely,

Kelly Callahan
Interim Director
Options for Parents: Charter Schools Division

I. Recommendation

Approve:

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.

Approve with 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 listed below are required by law and must be addressed. If the PEC determines that there are any other conditions that need to be addressed, then those should be negotiated in a preliminary contract.

PROPOSED CONDITIONS

The Applicant will negotiate a preliminary contract with the Public Education Commission pursuant to 22-8B-9.1:

1. Obtain standing as an approved Board of Finance
2. Secure a facility that meets PSFA Approval
3. Complete the planning-year checklist

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.

OPTIONS FOR PARENTS – CHARTER SCHOOLS DIVISION



By: _____

Interim Director of Options for Parents, or Designee

I. Overall Score Sheet

Section	Points Received	Applicant School's Possible Points
Application		
• Executive Summary	4	4
• Education Plan/Academic Framework	86.5	114
• Organizational Plan and Governance/Organizational Framework	66	76
• Business Plan/ Financial Framework	18	18
• Evidence of Support	10	10
• Required Appendices	2	2
Capacity Interview	28	30
Overall Score	214.5	254

II. Explanation Regarding Score Sheet

In the final recommendation and analysis the review team and the CSD considers the overall score as well as the score in each individual section. For example, while the total possible points in the Business Plan only equals 18 points, it is essential that an applicant school score high in this section and have a sound financial plan. If an applicant school receives a low score in this section then the review team carefully considers that in their final analysis. Also please note that while the review team did not score the community input hearing, the review team and the CSD may reference it in the final recommendation and evaluation if pertinent information was offered that contradicts or affirms what was found in the application or the capacity interview. Second, if the applicant school's proposal did not answer any prompt as a result of applicability (e.g., the applicant school will be an elementary school and so did not provide responses to graduation-related prompts) then the review team and CSD will adjust the total possible points in the application section where the non-applicable item(s) is found as well as in the final score.

III. Final Analysis

Application Section	Points Received	Applicant School's Possible Points
Education Plan/Academic Framework	86.5	114
<p>Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section</p> <p>The application gives a comprehensive picture of what the school will look like, however, the mission statement lacks meaningful detail and does not easily translate into measureable goals. The Review Team did not feel the academic goals are rigorous enough (“meet or exceed” state averages), as stated, given the school’s intent to have all students meet the highest performance standards and maximize each student’s potential. In addition, the team does not feel the number of students enrolled in STEM courses is rigorous enough given that STEM is a differentiating focus of the school.</p> <p>The philosophical approach and curriculum is clearly defined, researched-based, and has the potential to raise the achievement of the targeted population. A Scope and Sequence is provided as are course offerings. There is sufficient evidence that the chosen curriculum aligns with New Mexico-required standards. The application demonstrates a variety of instructional methods and strategies and can be differentiated to meet the needs of all students. Instructional methods promise to deliver the quality curriculum the school offers, however, a few of the stated methods and strategies and their effectiveness on student learning lack detail and depth.</p> <p>The school has plans to meet the legal requirements and individual needs of those determined to be special needs students, however, this section of the application was partially inadequate and incomplete and reflects a lack of understanding and preparation for serving special education students according to state-specific laws and regulations governing special education services. The staffing plan for this section does not appear to be adequate.</p> <p>The school has appropriate assessments in place to evaluate student needs, the effectiveness of the educational program, and progress toward goals. The plan, however, does not address a plan to address struggling students using the required Student Assistance Team (SAT) and Response to Intervention (RTI) model. School-wide practices that should be addressed based upon the data collected do not include development of the required Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS). How student progress is communicated to stakeholders is lacking in detail.</p>		

Application Section	Points Received	Applicant School's Possible Points
Organizational Plan and Governance/Organizational Framework	66	76
<p>Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section</p> <p>This section is generally adequate and complete and reflects knowledge of the steps necessary to build a quality, high-performing governing body. The composition of the Governing Body reflects a wide range of expertise, knowledge and experience and demonstrates the capacity to oversee a successful school. Knowledge of and an understanding of the oversight of a governing body in the areas of legal compliance, management of public funds, best practices and holding management responsible for school and student outcomes is demonstrated. The role between leadership and management is clearly and appropriately defined.</p> <p>Clear job descriptions for employees are provided, and the relationship between the school and the employees, including policies, employee discipline, and staff evaluations is clearly defined with the exception of Due Process (the School Personnel Act is referenced, but the school's process and procedures for addressing Due Process was not included).</p> <p>The school has a comprehensive plan to include the community, parents and employees in the governance of the school and a stated process for receiving and responding to concerns. Policies surrounding student recruitment are student enrollment are complete, however, dates and timelines for instituting the lottery are missing. The student policies follow state laws and regulations and are appropriate for an online school; however, student discipline policies for special education students are not addressed.</p> <p>Waivers being sought were clearly explained and are appropriate for an online school. The school does not plan to provide transportation or food services. How students might access ancillary services that cannot be provided in-home, is not addressed, however. The section on Facilities is adequate and complete and appropriate for an online program.</p> <p>The school plans to contract with Connections Academy of New Mexico, LLC. A comprehensive plan for the contract is provided and demonstrates an understanding of all legal implications and state statutes surrounding contracting with a third-party.</p>		

Application Section	Points Received	Applicant School's Possible Points
Business Plan/ Financial Framework	18	18
<p>Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section</p> <p>This section is adequate and complete. The school budget is based on realistic revenue and expenditure projections, valid assumptions and supports the mission and educational program of the school. Plans for long-range success and sustainability are outlined with a plan in place to involve all major stakeholders to assure viability.</p>		

Application Section	Points Received	Applicant School's Possible Points
Executive Summary, Evidence of Support, Required Appendices	16	16
<p>Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section</p> <p>The Executive Summary is complete and adequate. The vision/mission statements clearly and concisely present an overall picture of the school and what it plans to accomplish.</p> <p>The Evidence of Support section is adequate and complete and demonstrates both community interest support for the school. A list of potentially interested families from around the state is provided, and clearly demonstrates evidence of need. Outreach with other organizations and community partners are evident which reinforces the support this school has throughout the state.</p>		

Section	Points Received	Applicant School's Possible Points
Capacity Interview	28	30
<p>Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section</p> <p>The Capacity Interview presented a clear and comprehensive picture of what the various "typical" days may look like in a virtual setting. The founders are aware of the challenges they may face in the planning year. They did not, however, address how some of the expenditures might be met with the omission of the Federal Planning Grant funds.</p>		

The founders have worked with NM Connections Academy who has successfully implemented programs in other states. The responses to the prompts were thoughtful and reinforced the applicants' ability to form a strong governing body and provide the oversight and monitoring required assuring successful school and student outcomes. They are aware of any procedures/processes required in forming a partnership with NM Connections Academy and the separation of that entity with the school.

Other Pertinent Information

New Mexico Connections Academy is a state-wide virtual school. There may be a question concerning the ability of the Public Education Commission to approve state-wide virtual programs.