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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 Southwest Secondary Learning Center 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

APPROVE WITH CONDITIONS

The Charter Schools Division at the PED recommends a 3 year renewal term for Southwest Secondary Learning Center. Financial difficulties at the school are the primary reason for a 3 year term. The Federal Bureau of Investigation recently began an investigation into the school, and the PED has taken over the school's board of finance and is conducting a forensic audit. Results from the investigation and the PED's forensic audit are not yet known. These recent events present considerable risk to the appropriate use of public school funding, and any conditions of the three year term should focus on the school's financial difficulties.

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

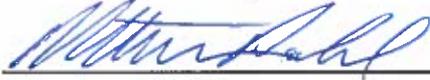
Overall the application is either incomplete or inadequate; or during their Capacity Interview, the applicant(s) did not sufficiently demonstrate the experience, knowledge, and competence to successfully open and operate a charter school.

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 Preliminary Recommendation

July 1 of 2010, the school was granted a charter by the PEC. It had previously operated under a different name, chartered by Albuquerque Public Schools. Following an investigation into the school's finances, the FBI conducted a raid of the facility and took the school's financial records. Shortly thereafter the school's Director resigned. A forensic audit is currently being conducted by the PED. To date, no charges have been filed. "The mission of the Southwest Secondary Learning Center is to prepare students in grades 7 - 12 to become self-motivated, independent, competent, lifelong learners in a unique 21st century educational environment. Students will be equipped with the reading, writing, mathematical, technological and problem solving skills necessary for success in post secondary education and personal career choices."

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An analysis of the school's State Grade Report Card indicates a final grade of B in 2012, an A in 2013, and an A in 2014. The Current Standing grade of the school has been an A for all three years. Student reading proficiency scores show 75.1% of students scored proficient and advanced in 2012. In 2013, 81.7% of students scored proficient and advanced, and in 2014, 79.1% of students scored proficient or advanced. In math, students scored 76.3% proficient and advanced in 2012. In 2013, 79.7% of students scored proficient or advanced, and in 2014, 73.9% of all students scored proficient or advanced. Despite a slight downward trend in reading and math scores in 2014, students are still scoring well above state and national averages. In growth of highest performing students (Q3), the school has shown a marked increase from an F in 2012 to A's in two successive years. Although growth scores have fallen from an A in 2013 to a C in 2014, similar drops are being experienced by high performing schools across the state. As student academic achievement gets higher, it becomes more and more difficult to show growth. The school's graduation rate has gone from a B in 2012 to A in both 2013 and 2014. In career and college readiness the school has attained an A all three years. A comparison to ABQHS shows their students scoring 45.8% proficient and advanced in reading and 38.8% proficient and advanced in math. Cibola HS students are scoring 57.9% proficient and advanced in reading and 48.1% proficient and advanced in math. Southwest Secondary is significantly outscoring both schools in reading and math.

Southwest Secondary provided a thorough and comprehensive analysis of its goals. Of the 7 goals presented, the school met 5, missed one by 1%, and provided a detailed analysis of why one goal was not met including a plan for how to improve their results. The school identified concrete strategies to continue improving academic achievement in the Looking Forward section. They have provided four comprehensive growth goals in SMART format and included metrics. CSD feels the goals will provide sufficient room for growth during the renewal period if granted.

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Organizationally, the school is highly functioning. The administrative team has been with the school since its inception and they are very knowledgeable of all facets of the operation. Despite some staff and Governing Board turn over early in the year, things appear to be running smoothly. Students, parents and faculty members interviewed expressed strong support for the school and stated concerns that the school might be closed even though they are performing at very high academic levels. Teachers interviewed indicate they are able to work with the students individually rather than in large groups, which leads to higher achievement for all students. Students interviewed were very knowledgeable about what they were learning and why. The students also indicated the SMART lab was an incentive for them to be very creative and take academic risks. All stakeholders expressed hope that whatever financial issues the school faces could be put behind them so the school could move forward.

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