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PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
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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 Tierra Encantada 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

APPROVE WITH CONDITIONS

Charter Schools Division recommends renewal for a three year term with conditions to be developed through an improvement plan. The school has stabilized and made steady gains in academics. The school has met all provisions of law and the Governing Board demonstrated knowledge of oversight responsibilities. The school is financially stable.

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 school was originally chartered by the Santa Fe Public School District as Charter 37, indicating it was the 37th charter granted in the state. The charter had a reputation as an “alternative school” for troubled teens. After a succession of directors early in the school’s tenure, the present administration has turned the focus of the school toward academic achievement as evidenced by the improvement in school grade. “The mission of the Tierra Encantada Charter School at Alvord (“TECS”) is to empower students as citizen scholars within a dual language environment through a rigorous learning curriculum, which will prepare students for post-secondary success.”

CSD recommends renewal for a three year term with conditions to be developed through an improvement plan. The school has stabilized and made steady gains in academics. The school has met all provisions of law and the Governing Board demonstrated knowledge of oversight responsibilities. The school is financially stable.

Tierra Encantada has a three year average on the state report card of D which, at first glance, does not reflect its academic growth. In 2012, the school’s final grade was an F. In 2013, it was C and in 2014 it was also C. The reading proficiency scores of all students in 2012 shows 26.9% of students scoring proficient and advanced. In 2013, 40.1% of students scored proficient and advanced. In 2014, 24.2% of students scored proficient and advanced. After significant growth from 2012 to 2013, the reading proficiency score dropped significantly in 2014. The school provided a grade-by-grade breakdown of the scores which indicated a significant drop in grade 12 scores and a smaller drop in grade 7 scores. In the Looking Forward Section (Part C) the school provides a plan to address these deficiencies. The math proficiency scores revealed 16.4% of students scoring proficient and advanced in 2012, In 2013 15.9% scoring proficient and advanced. In 2014, 13.4% scoring proficient and advanced. Because math scores have stayed low the school has developed a plan in the looking forward section (Part C) to address the deficiency.

Regarding growth, the school’s grade in 2012 was an F, 6 points below the state’s average. In 2013, the grade improved to C and again in 2014, the grade was a C. Growth of highest performing students (Q3) was F, 7.7 points below the state average. In 2013 the school improved to A and again in 2014, the grade was A. Growth of lowest performing students (Q1) was a D in 2012. In 2013 Q1 lowest performing students grade was an A and in 2014 the grade fell back to D. In order to raise the math and reading scores, the school has gone to a four day instructional week with Fridays being devoted to tutorials and one-to-one instruction as well as professional development. In response to the continuing low graduation grade of F for three years, the school has hired a counselor who is devoted full-time as graduation and college/career coach. When compared to Capital High School in relation to student reading and math proficiency, Tierra Encantada does not fair as well. In 2014, Capital High students scored 31.5% proficient and advanced in reading and 19% proficient and advanced in math. Capital High had a final grade of D in 2014 while Tierra Encantada had a C.

The school had one goal with two parts during the past five years. Data being tracked by the school through short cycle assessment indicated part 1 of the goal was not met but students are making progress. Data for part 2 of the goal was not tracked and therefore, part 2 was not met. In the Looking Forward Section (Part C) of the application, the school has provided a thorough analysis of their areas of deficit and a plan for improvement. The goals presented, though in SMART format, are a minimally adequate foundation for negotiations if the school is renewed.

Tierra Encantada demonstrates compliance with applicable laws, rules, and regulations relating to financial management and oversight expectations as evidenced by an audit devoid of significant findings and conditions, material weaknesses, or significant internal control weaknesses. The school has no material violations and it appears that the school operates efficiently in terms of governance procedures, its reporting duties, and organizational stability. The end of year cash balance FY 2013 was 21.07% of the operating budget.

Organizational analysis indicates the school is meeting all provisions of law. The current administration has stabilized the school and provided a vision of academic achievement. Interviews with two Governing Board members indicate they are familiar with their oversight responsibilities and the Governing Board membership is stable. They do not have a formal evaluation process for the Governing Board but will implement one this year. The 13 parents interviewed demonstrated a very strong commitment to the school. They had high praise for the administration and the emphasis on dual language and academic achievement. Many shared stories of how their children had excelled since enrolling at Tierra Encantada. The nearly 30 students interviewed all agreed the school provides a safe, inclusive environment no matter what grade they are in. Many of the students indicated they had transferred to Tierra after bad experiences at other local schools. They said the personal attention given to them by the teachers and the friendly environment were a major reasons they liked Tierra. The teachers interviewed indicated a strong commitment to both the personal and academic growth of the school. They said they have been given latitude to determine curricula as long as it is tied to the Common Core.

CSD recommends renewal for a three year term with conditions to be developed through an improvement plan. The school has stabilized and made steady gains in academics. The school has met all provisions of law and the Governing Board demonstrated knowledge of oversight responsibilities. The school is financially stable.