

STATE OF NEW MEXICO PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT 300 DON GASPAR SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87501-2786 Telephone (505) 827-5800

www.ped.state.nm.us

KARA BOBROFF
INTERIM SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM GOVERNOR

August 8, 2019

Dear Public Education Commissioners:

Enclosed is the 2019 Charter School Application Final Analysis and Recommendation for **Explore Academy – Las Cruces** applying for a state charter in **Las Cruces**, **NM** and within the boundaries of Las Cruces Public Schools to serve grades 6 -12 and represented by founders, **Justin Bajardo and Elisha Varela**.

This Final Analysis and Recommendation includes a summary of the evidence and rationale gathered from the peer review team's analyses of the written application and the capacity interview. It also includes a brief summary of the participation at the community input hearing and letters of support received. Appendix A contains all of the correspondence received regarding the school, from the Community Input Hearing date until the submission deadline three days later.

The staff recommendation, based on the peer review team's evaluation, is for approval of the application. However, this is only a recommendation and the Public Education Commission will make the decision on the approval, approval with conditions, or denial at the hearing which will take place during the PEC meeting on August 22, 2019.

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,

Alan Brauer Director of Options for Parents

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I. Recommendation

APPROVE Overall the application is complete and adequate; and during their Capacity Interview, the applicant(s) demonstrated a clear capacity to implement the academic, organizational and financial 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 a general capacity to implement the academic organizational and financial management plans as

Overall the application is complete and adequate; and during their Capacity Interview, the applicant(s) demonstrated a general capacity to implement the academic, organizational and financial management plans as described in the application. However, the CSD has identified some specific concerns that would need to be addressed during the planning year. The CSD has listed the noted concerns and conditions to address the concerns below. If the PEC determines that there are any additional conditions that need to be addressed, those should be noted during the public hearing and all approved conditions negotiated in the final contract.

PROPOSED CONDITIONS

None

FOR ALL APPROVALS: The Applicant will negotiate a 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.

II. Overall Score Sheet

Section	Points Received	Applicant School's Possible Points	Percent
Application	260	304	85.5
Education Plan / Academic Framework	92	104	88.5
Organizational Plan & Governance/Organizational Framework	110	132	83.3
Business Plan / Financial Framework	34	44	77.3
Evidence of Support	24	24	100
Capacity Interview	116	116	100
Overall Score	376	420	89.52%

SCHOOL NAME: Explore Academy - Las Cruces

		Total Possible	Response	
ection#		Points	Provided	Score
I	ACADEMIC FRAMEWORK			300.0
A	Mission	16	16	Meets
В	Mission Specific Indicators	12	12	Meets
C1	Bilingual Multicultural, Indian Education, and Hispanic Education	12	6	Approaches
D	Curriculum/Ed Program/Student Standards	12	12	Meets
E1	Graduation Requirements	4	2	Approaches
F1	Ed Philosophy/Instructional Methods	4	4	Meets
F2	Yearly/Daily Calendar	4	2	Approaches
F3	Programs impact for population	4	4	Meets
G1 a	SPED Identification	4	4	Meets
G1 b	SPED Progress	4	2	Approaches
G2 a	ELL Identification	4	4	Meets
G2 b	ELL Progress	4	4	Meets
	Plan to address the needs of students as outlined in the Indian Education Act,			
G3	Hispanic Education Act, and the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act	4	4	Meets
H1	Assessment Plan	6	6	Meets
H2	Assessment Data	4	4	Meets
Н3	Assessment Communications	6	6	Meets
II	ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK			
A1	Governing Board Outline	8	8	Meets
A2	Board Qualifications & Profiles	4	4	Meets
А3	New Member Process	8	4	Approaches
B1	Board Training	4	4	Meets
В2	Board Evaluation	8	8	Meets
C1	Board Oversight	12	6	Approaches
C2	Hiring Head Admin	12	6	Approaches
C3	Principal Job Description (Appendix B)	4	4	Meets
C4	Principal Evaluation	8	8	Meets
D1	Org Chart & Relationship	8	8	Meets
D2	Staff Job Descriptions (Appendix C)	4	2	Approaches
D3	Staffing Plan	8	8	Meets
D4	PD/Novice Membership	8	8	Meets
Е	Employment Terms	4	2	Approaches
F1	PTA	4	4	Meets
F2	Grievance Process: Families	8	8	Meets
G1	Recruitment Plan	4	2	Approaches
G2	Lottery	4	2	Approaches
Н	Conflict of Interest	4	2	Approaches
l1	3rd Party Relationships	Eight		NA
12	3rd Party Contracts (Appendix D)	Four		NA
J	Waivers - No waivers requested	Three		NA
K1	Transportation	Four	2	
K2	Food Service	Four	2	
L1	PSFA Checklist (Appendix E)	4	4	Meets
L2	Facility Identification	4	4	Meets

Ш	FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK			
Α	School Size	4	4	Meets
B1	SEG Worksheets (Appendix F in Excel)	8	8	Meets
B2	5 Year Budget (Appendix G in Excel)	12	12	Meets
В3	Budget Narrative	4	2	Approaches
B4	Budget Adjustments	4	2	Approaches
C1	Financial Oversight (Appendix H)	4	2	Approaches
C2	Financial Staff	4	2	Approaches
C3	Governance Finance	4	2	Approaches
IV	EVIDENCE OF SUPPORT			
Α	Outreach Activities	4	4	Meets
В	Community Support	8	8	Meets
С	Networking Relationships	4	4	Meets
D	Innovation	8	8	Meets
	PART C RATING	304	260	85.53%
	CAPACITY INTERVIEW			
1	Mission	4	4	Meets
2	Innovation	4	4	Meets
3	Mission Implementation	4	4	Meets
4	Leadership & Governance (GB selection & success of school)	4	4	Meets
5	Leadership & Governance (HA selection & success of school)	4	4	Meets
6	Leadership & Governance (GB and school evaluations & success)	4	4	Meets
7	Leadership & Governance (Relationship of founders, GB, and admin & success)	4	4	Meets
8	Leadership & Governance (bylaws, implementation, & success)	4	4	Meets
9	Leadership & Governance (establish, implement, change policies and procedures)	4	4	Meets
10	Facility (plan for facility and educational occupancy; responsible party)	4	4	Meets
11	Facility (next step plan if building does not get PSFA approval)	4	4	Meets
12	Finance (planning year budget without federal start-up funds)	4	4	Meets
13	Finance (enrollment projections)	4	4	Meets
14	Finance (plan if actual enrollment is below projections)	4	4	Meets
15	Planning Year (organizational steps during planning year)	4	4	Meets
	School Specific Questions			
16	adjustments to school model for Las Cruces demographics	4	4	Meets
17	exit exam data shared between the two sites for analysis	4	4	Meets
18	ELL program in a seminar-based model / meaningful parent input	4	4	Meets
19	8th graders earning HS credit?	4	4	Meets
20	instructional hours	4	4	Meets
21	assigned flex periods	4	4	Meets
22	assessments (placement, exit, short-cycle)	4	4	Meets
23	credit recovery	4	4	Meets
	repeat of #5			
24	money budgeted for Governing Board training	4	4	Meets
25	essential job duties of positions not be added until Year 3	4	4	Meets
26	Is Explore Learning Team contract via ACES required; relationship	4	4	Meets
27	consideration of funding transportation	4	4	Meets
28	food service budget	4	4	Meets
29	financial oversight	4	4	Meets
29				
29	repeat of #30 PART C and D RATING COMBINED	416	372	89.42%

III. Explanation Regarding Use of the Score Sheet

In the Recommendation and Final Analysis, the CSD has considered the overall score on the written application evaluation and the rating of the responses during the Capacity Interview, feedback from the Community Input Hearing, and letters of support or opposition. Those components are summarized on the following pages.

The written application and capacity interview evaluations and scoring were provided by an external team of four peer reviewers:

- A licensed NM School Administrator
- A licensed NM Teacher
- A licensed NM School Business Official
- A Team Leader with administration experience

Also please note two additional considerations:

- First, the community input hearing is not scored but is referenced in this
 Recommendation and Final Analysis to summarize and to document any pertinent
 information offered. The transcripts provide further details.
- Second, if the applicant school did not answer any prompt (question) because that
 prompt did not apply to the applicant school (e.g., the applicant school will be an
 elementary school and so did not provide responses to graduation-related prompts),
 then the CSD adjusted the total possible points in the application section where the
 non-applicable item(s) is found, as well as in the final score. For this reason, you may
 see varying total possible points from application to application.

IV. Final Analysis

Application Section	Points Received	Applicant School's Possible Points
EDUCATION PLAN/ACADEMIC FRAMEWORK	92	104

Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section:

The applicant scored "Meets Criteria" in 12 indicators and "Approaches the Criteria" in four (4) indicators.

According to the peer reviewers, with respect to the application, the areas that did not meet the criteria were found to be inadequate for the reasons described:

C Bilingual Multicultural Indian Education and Hispanic Education

The school application gives clear action items, timelines, and responsible parties to address this item. However, the response does not indicate where/how student families will be involved, or give an indication of the supports to be given to help students with a home language that is not English achieve at a high level. The role of choice and opportunities for co-created curriculum do support a culturally relevant learning experience. Also, will the staff have enough time each year before school starts to make lesson plans and curriculum for all the seminars and different "flavors"?

E. Graduation Requirements

The application lists 1.0 credit for PE/Health, while the state of NM graduation requirements are for 1.0 PE and 0.5 Health. In addition, the state specifies that 2.0 of science credits must be lab sciences and that students must complete Algebra II or higher in the course of their four math credits (barring a waiver), an understanding which was not stated or made clear here. There is not a clear plan for administration or creation of the school's ADC.

F2 Yearly/Daily Calendar

The Explore School's response contains all major components, is well-thought-out to support the instructional model, and clearly shows PD days for teachers as well as sample schedules for the same. No break times are indicated. Explore does not plan on offering extended learning. Proposed calendar aligns with Las Cruces Public Schools to provide convenience for families with children in both systems. Explore Academy states that they will have 179 school days totaling 1109 instructional hours, but also states that they will have 38 Fridays with 4.5 hours of instruction or 171 hours of instruction and 141 Monday-Thursdays with 6.2 instructional hours (or 874.2 hours) for a total of 1038 instructional hours. The state requirement for 7th to 12 grade is 1080. For this reason, the team cannot be sure the model proposed meets instructional hours.

G1b Special Education Progress

The response aligns to the structure and learning model described earlier. Teachers report 'at risk' students, whether special or general education, weekly. These students are then assigned targeted intervention to provide support before a student fails a course. Parents are also notified of this weekly; progress towards IEP goals is reported monthly. School utilizes exit exam data and formative data to determine whether or not students are making progress. However, school does not describe how it will evaluate the effectiveness of the special education program and services

Overall, in this section of the application, 88.5% of the possible points were earned for Education Plan/Academic Framework.

NOTE: The peer review team determined that the responses by the school during the capacity interview adequately addressed the concerns in this section of the written application.

Application Section	Points Received	Applicant School's Possible Points
ORGANIZATIONAL PLAN AND GOVERNANCE / ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK	110	132

Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section:

The applicant scored "Meets Criteria" in 13 indicators and "Approaches the Criteria" in 10 indicators. *Please note the applicant received 4 bonus points for school lunch and transportation responses.*

According to the peer reviewers, with respect to the application, the areas that did not meet the criteria were found to be inadequate for the reasons described:

A3. New Member Process

While the school does provide an ongoing process to identify GC needs and potential new council members, responsible parties in the process are vague. The application simply designates this role to the GC. The applicant team has not gone into detail on recruitment for their financial committee that will have two people with financial background. It is stated that the school will follow the 45 day law of getting a replacement if a Governance Council Member leaves, but the process is not detailed here.

C1. Board Oversight

This seems like the place to include information on the Explore Learning Models proposed support services in the organizational and academic arenas. Full GC will monitor organizational performance utilizing indicators such as attendance, enrollment and GC performance. Task forces will be formed as needed in this area. More information should have been included in the financial oversight section to offer a complete response.

C2 Hiring Head Administrator

Explore Academy has listed the qualifications that they want in a Principal. They have stated characteristics that they want this person to have so that it aligns with the mission statement of the school; however there is not enough clarity around the desired external qualifications of a candidate versus personal characteristics and philosophies. These might include experience running a small charter school, working with a governing board, or opening a new charter school from the ground up.

D2. Staff Job Descriptions

Explore has not designated the role of Business Manager or listed another person that is employed at the school to help with finance. In the thumbnail sketches of staff, there is no entry for the registrar and the

thumbnail for the special education director does not state who that person reports to. In the job descriptions included in Appendix C, there is an entry for ELL coordinator which is not contained on the org chart nor in the thumbnail job descriptions in the body of the application. The job descriptions in Appendix C for Activities Director, Flex Coordinator, Administrative Executive (called Administrative Assistant on org chart and within body of application), Educational Assistants, Technology Director and Security do not list hiring requirements. The thumbnail descriptions delineate reporting lines but this information is not included in attached job descriptions.

E. Employment Terms

Discipline were not addressed in the narrative. Application distinguishes between exempt and non-exempt employees as well as full and part time. Benefits are outlined that will be available to all full time employees and part time employees on a prorated basis. The school's plan does address conflict/grievance resolution processes as well as timelines for re-contracting and termination. Contract terms such as calendar, daily work schedules and pay terms are not delineated. Application states these will be found in the employee handbook to be developed during the

G1. Recruitment Plan

Possibly the narrative should read "non-discriminatory" versus "non-dissimilary" in the first paragraph. The founding team and GC are taking on the recruitment process, but it seems that a head of school should be involved as quickly as possible to coordinate efforts. A list of events held thus far and planned events in the future with dates, places, and times would be helpful here. No explanation was given of why this plan will ensure equal access or how the recruitment/enrollment timelines are reasonable. There is a budget of \$5000 for advertising that is not supported by the narrative.

G2. Lottery

While this narrative meets all basic requirements, it does not specifically state that the lottery process is essentially "blind" and does not differentiate between students based on race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or previous academic progress. The school also may not give preference to the children of staff members.

H. Conflict of Interest

Narrative and policies are clear and complete; no forms were submitted as required. School provides copy of conflict of interest policy statement in the application and the by-laws in the appendix which complies with NMSA. GC will adopt conflict of interest statement and first meeting annually.

Overall, in this section of the application, 83.3% of the possible points were earned for Organizational Plan and Governance/Organizational Framework.

NOTE: The peer review team determined that the responses by the school during the capacity interview adequately addressed the concerns in this section of the written application.

Application Section	Points Received	Applicant School's Possible Points
BUSINESS PLAN/ FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK	34	44

Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section:

The applicant scored "Meets Criteria" in three (3) indicators and "Approaches the Criteria" in five (5) indicators.

According to the peer reviewers, with respect to the application, the areas that did not meet the criteria were found to be inadequate for the reasons described:

B3. Budget Narrative

Priorities are consistent and aligned with vision, but the application did not explain some of the underlying assumptions in the budget worksheet. There is a clear plan for flexibility of staffing should enrollment not hit projections. However, there is no rationale given for the lease amounts used and some of the percentages for benefit estimations are incorrect. The school has also not budgeted money for the start of the Food Service program as it might take 3 to 4 months to receive reimbursement from the federal program.

B4. Budget Adjustments

Response lacks specificity and depth; in addition, lease, purchases of supplies, books, furniture are all not budgeted. These are all regular startup costs for new schools that should be considered here. No technology and computers are budgeted for as well.

C1. Financial Oversight

School has alternate staffing plan to eliminate 4 teaching positions and a coordinator position should enrollment not meet expectations. There is a question of how procurement will be handled to initially retain the Vigil Group; there is a disconnection between the budget (which states \$65,000) and the narrative which was at (\$59,000). There was no clear plan for dual signature checks or for inventory for safeguarding/protecting assets. Also, the there is only one financial officer on site, which is the Principal who does not have financial experience.

C2. Financial Staff

The school's plan places all responsibility on the principal for financial tasks at the school level. An off-site contractor will provide financial services in terms of processing payments, maintaining records and filing required reports. It seems as though the same person (Principal) will be in charge of both inventory and procurement, but for internal controls, this should not be the same person.

C3. Governance Finance

The school's response does not include legal oversight or advisement of the administration, GC, or finance committees, nor does it address the interaction of the finance committees with the school administration. GC finance committee may be a committee of the whole and conduct finance committee activities during regular GC meetings. There is no detailed plan to determine how the audit and finance committees will be formed.

Overall, in this section of the application, 77.3% of the possible points were earned for Business Plan / Financial Framework.

NOTE: The peer review team determined that the responses by the school during the capacity interview adequately addressed the concerns in this section of the written application.

Application Section	Points Received	Applicant School's Possible Points
EVIDENCE OF SUPPORT	24	24

Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section:

The applicant scored "Meets Criteria" in all four (4) indicators.

Overall, in this section of the application, 100% of the possible points were earned for Evidence of Support.

Section	Points Received	Applicant School's Possible Points
CAPACITY INTERVIEW	116	116

Evidence/Statements Supporting Score in this Section:

The peer reviewers asked fifteen standard questions (#1-15) and fourteen school specific questions. The applicant scored "Meets Criteria" on all 29 responses.

The proposed school was represented by the following:

- Justin Baiardo, founder
- Elisha Varela, founder

Overall, in this section, 100% of the possible points were earned for the Capacity Interview.

COMMUNITY INPUT HEARING

During the July 19, 2019 community input hearing in Las Cruces, attendees expressed both support and opposition of the school. One representative of the school district, Taryn Landin, Chief of Staff for Las Cruces Public Schools attended the hearing and spoke on behalf of the Superintendent and Administration of LCPS in opposition to the proposed school.

The proposed school was represented by the same representatives that attended the capacity interview:

- Justin Baiardo, founder
- Elisha Varela

Four (4) other attendees spoke, all in favor.

Of the twenty (21) individual people that signed in, one (1) was either undecided or did not indicate support or opposition. Of the remaining twenty (20) people who signed in, 95% (19 individuals) were in support of the school.

Please see the transcript of the Community Input Hearing for details regarding all comments made.

Two petitions, in-person and online formats, were provided by the founders. Signatures were obtained immediately following information sessions hosted by the school in Las Cruces. The **in-person petition** was signed by families representing <u>32</u> students (who also provided email addresses) and the online version had signatures (and street addresses) of <u>69</u> students' family members. It was observed that 11 students are on both lists.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT OR IN OPPOSITION

Several letters and email messages were received by the deadline of three business days after the applicant's PEC hearing (by 5:00 pm on July, 24, 2019). Of the seventeen (17) documents received, 100%, expressed support of Explore Academy Las Cruces. No letters of opposition were received.

In addition, the petitions, described in the previous section, contained **101 total signatures**, representing **90 students' families**.

The correspondence received is attached here in their entirety in Appendix A, along with the petitions.

SUMMARY

Overall, the application is complete and adequate. During both the capacity interview and the community input hearing, the applicant team demonstrated the capacity to implement the educational, organizational, governance, and financial plans as described in the application. The team is strong and represented by experts in the finance, legal, and education arenas with strong community support.

The minimum scoring expectations set by the Public Education Commission, from page 3 of the New Charter School application are:

- No scoring area received a score of "Falls Far Below the Criteria".
- No more than 3 responses were evaluated as "Approaches the Criteria" in any one section of the application
- The applicant must earn at least 80% of the available points in order for a positive recommendation by independent reviewers

The application scored 89.52% and received no "Falls Far Below" ratings. On the written application, five responses were scored as "Approaches the Criteria" in the Organizational section, four (4) responses were scored as "Approaches the Criteria" in the Academic section, eight (8) responses were scored as "Approaches the Criteria" in the Organizational section, and five (5) responses were scored as "Approaches the Criteria" on the Financial section. All responses to the capacity interview questions were rated as "Meets the Criteria". The peer review team determined that the responses by the school during the capacity interview adequately addressed the concerns identified during the review of the written application.

The applicant team has clearly demonstrated their preparedness to open a high quality charter school. **The CSD recommends approval of the application.**

APPENDIX A

Letters of Support (17) or in Opposition (0)

plus Petitions

with 101 signatures from the families of 90 students

From: <u>Anita Martos</u>

To: Schools, Charter, PED

Subject: [EXT] Explore Academy Las Cruces
Date: Sunday, July 21, 2019 3:26:58 PM

Good afternoon,

My name is Anita Martos and I am a parent of student is Las Cruces who I would like to attend Explore Academy. I am thrilled to see that this charter school is looking to get established in our city.

Please know I support this school completely and would be physically present in Santa Fe if I could.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, Anita Martos From: <u>Claren Wilson</u>
To: <u>Schools, Charter, PED</u>

Subject: [EXT] Explore Academy Las Cruces

Date: Wednesday, July 24, 2019 4:25:55 PM

Good afternoon,

I am writing in strong support of the charter school Explore Academy Las Cruces. I have know Mr. Justin Baiardo (a founder) for 13 years. I was a student of his when he was a teacher at Rio Rancho High School. During my time in high school and college Mr. Baiardo has always stuck out as one of the best teachers. What I learned from him in high school helped me succeed in college. This is because of his different way of approaching teaching, which is reflected in the structure of Explore Academy. Being a student, and teaching students, I am a professional dog trainer and was a teaching assistant for Mr. Baiardo and then again for a college professor, I understand how no two people learn in the same manner. Some need more hands on, others need repetition, others need multiple scenarios or explanations to understand something, and many need a combination. With Explore Academy, students are going to be able to strive in a learning environment that teaches in a manner that is going to stick with them throughout their educational career and into the professional world.

10 years ago when Mr. Baiardo first began his journey to create Explore Academy I had the wonderful opportunity to speak on his behalf to create the school. And I'm very honored to be able to do it again.

Thank you for your time,

Claren Wilson, BS, CPDT-KA, CBCC-KA
Head Dog Trainer
Cloud K-9 Dog Training Services
https://clicktime.symantec.com/3TLjdGhuKi42xMmHESdq9Wv7Vc?
u=www.cloudk9nm.com

From: Nellie Barrazas
To: Schools, Charter, PED

Subject: [EXT] Explore Academy Las Cruces

Date: Sunday, July 21, 2019 10:49:51 AM

I am writing this email to show my support for the Explore Academy to open here in Las Cruces. This school makes learning fun again, and my kids have not been excited about school for years until we went to the parent night and read the website and facebook. My friend went to that meeting at the Farm and Heritage and said the interviewer seemed to not like the school. I want to say as someone from Las Cruces that this is exactly what we need and it will be very helpful for many kids like mine. I hope your able to approve this school so it opens as soon as possible.

Thank you for listening

Nellie Barrazas

From: Rebecca Nelson

To: Schools, Charter, PED

Subject: [EXT] Explore Academy Las Cruces
Date: Sunday, July 21, 2019 1:34:31 PM

To whom it may concern:

I am a parent of two school age children in the LCPS system, my younger daughter is entering 5th grade and the elder is entering 8th grade this year. Our family is very excited about the possibility of Explore Academy and both of my children are interested in attending, if it should be approved. Both of my children have been enrolled in public schools in Las Cruces since kindergarten and our time in the school system has not been without strife. We have been very lucky with our elementary school, it's a relatively small school with teachers that do what they can to accommodate children's educational needs to the best of their abilities. While neither of my children qualify for AES, both of them have always been above grade level in reading and at the top of their class in math. The lack of options available to teachers to engage them within the context of a large class has led to each of them struggling to remain engaged in their lessons due to boredom. I've been frustrated with the public school system's way of teaching for as long as I can remember because it seems very 'one size fits all', which translates into one size fits none. Explore Academy offers a solution to this problem with their "flavors" that allows the children to learn the same material in different ways that appeal to each of them. This reminds me of when my mother, a former special education teacher, was homeschooling my brothers and I. Learning was an ongoing, interactive experience that pulled from daily activities and outings to round out textbook learning.

I'd like to share my 13 year old's experience in middle school to further highlight why she is so excited about the prospect of the Explore Academy. She has been in the Science and Math magnet program since 6th grade. It is a rigorous program that includes double science classes and advanced math. While she is more than capable of performing the work, the methods of teaching and the inability (or unwillingness) of the school to address bullying led her to a severe mental breakdown with suicidal ideation in the spring of 2019. Her grades dropped from A's and high B's to D's and F's. Not once did her teachers reach out to me regarding this sudden and significant drop in performance. It wasn't until she had a panic attack in class near the end of the semester that anyone from the school contacted me. Even then, they did not mention that her grades had been slipping or that she seemed to be having problems, only that she had had to leave class. She finally came to me at the end of April and told me what was going on and that she was severely depressed and suicidal. Through some intense therapy it came to light that her depression was a combination of high expectations in school and a lack of support from teachers. When she was having problems with a topic, help was not forthcoming. She would approach her teachers during class and they were busy helping other kids who were struggling "more." My daughter wasn't a behavioral problem and hadn't had academic problems prior to this break, so she wasn't a priority in a class of 30 kids. Luckily, she and I have a relationship that allowed her to seek help prior to a tragedy, but how many children do we have to lose before we realize that what we're doing isn't working? Suicide rates among adolescents continue to rise. Explore Academy has several aspects that make both her and me hopeful that she would not face the same struggles and would have more support when she begins to feel overwhelmed.

During the PEC public hearing on Friday 7-19-2019, several issues were mentioned by the commissioners that I would like to address. The first of these is that there is already adequate school choice in the district. This has not been my experience as a parent. While it is true that there are 4 main high schools and the Early College High School, going to a school outside of one's district is very difficult, regardless of the reason for the request. Which means a given child really only has 2 choices: their indistrict school or the Early College High School. That isn't much of a choice at all. There are of course several private schools, assuming one can afford the tuition and arrange transportation. A large portion of our district is impoverished or just barely scraping by, a private school is not a realistic option for most of us. Furthermore, traditional 8-5 M-F jobs are not the norm in this generation of parents, as many work 2-3 jobs in retail or food service. Therefore transporting their child to school every day further limits their options. There is the John Paul Taylor Academy, which has excellent reviews from every parent I've ever spoken to. However, the last time I tried to enroll my children they had a 2.5 year waiting list. This tells me there are plenty of parents who would be interested in another school choice. Explore Academy would

help address the lack of choice for parents that cannot utilize private school choices for the reasons mentioned above. The second issue I would like to address is really the combination of two comments by the commissioners. The first of these comments is that Las Cruces is a small town, the second is that it is a very traditional community. Las Cruces is the second largest city in the state. Local government would like to continue to act as though we are not a city, but we are, and we need the resources that a community of our size would normally have, including increased educational opportunities. Part of this idea of a "small town" is the traditionalism of which the commissioner spoke. While it is true that Las Crucens whose families have been here for generations have very strong feelings regarding the local high schools, many of us do not have those connections or traditions. Every year more and more people move to Las Cruces from out of state. These people, like myself, do not have a familial loyalty to one school or another, we simply want the ability to choose a school that meets our children's needs. Limiting choices does not benefit our community, nor does it benefit our children or the future of this world. We need innovative ways of addressing academic and social issues, and our current school system is failing at this mandate. Our current educational viewpoint is failing our children which leads to failing our community, our state, and our country. We have to address these short comings and locking out ideas that diverge from the common is not helpful.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Nelson 575-921-6817 From: DnA Roberson
To: Schools, Charter, PED
Subject: [EXT] Explore Academy

Date: Monday, July 22, 2019 10:15:03 AM

Hello,

I am a Las Cruces resident and I would like to express my support for a charter for an Explore Academy in Las Cruces. More school options would be so wonderful, and the individualized approach at Explore looks like a great way to get kids excited about learning and ready for college.

Thank you,

Adriana Roberson

From: Andrea Cisneros
To: Schools, Charter, PED
Subject: [EXT] Explore Academy

Date: Monday, July 22, 2019 8:18:42 AM

I am writing to express my support for Explore Academy in Las Cruces. My family and I attended their information night last week and we feel that this school would be a huge benefit to the Las Cruces school system and to provide better choices for parents and students. Please approve their campus here in Las Cruces.

Thank you,

Andy C.

From: Kristen Chastine
To: Schools, Charter, PED
Subject: [EXT] Explore Academy

Date: Monday, July 22, 2019 7:45:27 AM

To whom it may concern,

My name is Kristen Chastine. I am a resident of Las Cruces and I am in support of Explore Academy Las Cruces. My son will be entering 6th grade in the Fall of 2020 and I look forward to having an option like Explore Academy for him to attend. He is a gifted child and is a very "outside the box" kind of child. He would greatly benefit from the smaller class size, shorter course terms and the plethora of diverse course options that Explore Academy offers to its students.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter!

Sincerely, Kristen Chastine

Sent from my iPhone

From: Norma

To: Schools, Charter, PED
Subject: [EXT] Explore Academy

Date: Tuesday, July 23, 2019 7:17:50 AM

Good morning, I am a Las Cruces resident and recently became aware that the charter school, Explorer Academy would like to open its doors in Las cruces, but would need patent support, as a parent or one child I would like to have the option to send my daughter to that school. I have heard great things about it.

Thank you, Norma Orrantia

From: <u>Dawn Anaya</u>

To: Schools, Charter, PED

Subject: [EXT] Explore Academy-Las Cruces

Date: Sunday, July 21, 2019 3:27:29 PM

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in regards of Explore Academy-Las Cruces, in which I am in full support of. I am mother of 3 children who all attend Las Cruces Public Schools. My oldest who will be in 7th grade this coming school year. He was diagnosed with ADHD and is on the Autism Spectrum. Since he has been in school, I have been continuously fighting for his right to have all his accommodations met within his IEP and BIP. Over the years as he has gotten older, I have realized that the way of teaching that is done at his school does not benefit him and the way he learns best. I have even gone as far as looking to out of town and out of state schools to see which ones will benefit not only him but my other 2 children.

I attended the public education commission meeting on Friday July 19th. As I sat there listening to one particular commissioner speak about how loyal some families are to the high schools here. I couldn't help but disagree with what was being said. For myself being born and raised here in Las Cruces, I do not care if my child chooses not to go to the same high school as I attended. Having the right education and being able to learn the way that best benefits the child is what I care about most.

I know from experience that everyone is different and not everyone learns the same way. I believe every family should have the right to have options open for their children to have a choice of what type of school they would like to attend. I strongly believe that Explore Academy will bring those choices and options for children who want and need to learn in a different setting and educational way. I am in full support of this exceptional charter school opening in Las Cruces.

Sincerely,

Dawn Anaya

From: <u>Justin Baiardo</u>
To: <u>Schools, Charter, PED</u>

Subject: [EXT] FW: Explore Academy - Las Cruces - Letter of Support

Date: Sunday, July 21, 2019 12:04:02 PM

Attachments: Letter to Ped.docx

Attached is an email from a parent in support for Explore Academy – Las Cruces

Justin Baiardo

Founder, Executive Director Explore Academy baiardo@exploreacademy.org

From: Michelle LaGanga < mlaganga 70@gmail.com >

Sent: Thursday, July 18, 2019 10:09 PM

To: Justin Baiardo < baiardo@exploreacademy.org >

Subject: Re: Explore Academy - Update

Hi Justin,

My apologies it has taken me so long to get this to you. Aidan has a cold so he was unable to write a letter. I hope mine helps. Please let me know any way I can help from this point forward.

Good luck tomorrow!

Michelle LaGanga

Michelle LaGang 3644 Albion Avenue Las Cruces, NM 88012

July 18, 2019

Re: Explore Academy

To whom it may concern:

I am unable to attend this week's meeting to provide my support for bringing a school like Explore Academy to Las Cruces in 2020. Upon moving to Las Cruces in 2015 it didn't take long to figure out that the education system here is lacking. When a parent starts worrying about middle school when your child is in the third grade, is bothersome. There are some amazing elementary schools here, but the middle schools are a different story. I ask parents, what's the disconnect between elementary and middle school. I've been told teachers don't care or they are scared of the students and that administrators don't discipline or care to address the issues. They can't teach the way they want to. None of the middle schools have good scores. Visit the social media community pages and you'll see parents reaching out for help who are desperate for solutions for the issues rocking our schools. Bullying is a huge concern and parents tell you they feel like there is zero support from school staff and administrators. It's a sad state.

We made the decision to attend the Explore Academy information session because we are looking for something better for our child and a school that promotes a child's individuality and support through the education process. My son does not look forward to going to school currently. It's not because he struggles, in fact he's gifted, but it's because he's scared of the stories he hears from other families and kids about how scary middle school is in Las Cruces. After attending the info session for Explore Academy, he was excited and went on and on about all types of classes and platform this school offers. It was so amazing to see that excitement in him. Even now, two months later, he proclaims that he wants Explore Academy to be his middle school if it gets to open. Otherwise, honestly, I will probably have to home school him because I have no confidence in the LCPS as it stands today. Las Cruces is in desperate need of an education revamp. I feel a school like Explore Academy will be of great benefit to our community and will set an example and standard for other schools to follow. For my son, I know he would thrive at Explore Academy and look forward to learning again. Please give the school a chance to bridge the gap and blaze a trail that desperately needs to be. Our kids deserve this!

Respectfully,

Michelle LaGanga

 From:
 Elisha Varela

 To:
 Schools, Charter, PED

 Cc:
 Baiardo, Justin

 Subject:
 [EXT] Fwd:

Date: Sunday, July 21, 2019 10:41:46 AM

Hello,

Below is an email from a parent that was sent to my email address. Just forwarding on in case she does not also send it to the CSD email address.

Thank you,

Elisha Varela

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Gabriela Graham < emilad3@gmail.com >

Date: Fri, Jul 19, 2019 at 1:58 PM

Subject:

To: < varela@exploreacademy.org>

To whom it may concern,

I am in full support of Explore Academy starting up in Las Cruces. I believe that it will benefit the community as a whole. specially those students that have a different way of learning and can explore their choices. Education should be fun and the teachers should also enjoy teaching and this school seems to do that.

I strongly believe that if a teacher takes pride in teaching and a student sees that, then the student is eager to learn from that teacher. It's sad that there are educators out there in the public schools that make it difficult for students to enjoy going to school, especially if they don't respect the students or acknowledge them or refuse to listen to a student's input.

I am very excited to send my son to Explore Academy. Everything I have heard through the meetings and research are only positive about your school. It's what we need.

Thank you,

Gabriela Graham

--

Elisha Varela Director of Operations Explore Learning Network 505-710-3214 - cell From: Myriam & JD

To: Schools, Charter, PED

Subject: [EXT] In Support of Explore Academy

Date: Friday, July 19, 2019 1:25:42 PM

Having attended two public meetings concerning the proposed Explore Academy charter school to be established in Las Cruces, my wife and I want to go on record

in support of the academy. While Las Cruces Public Schools are doing a fine job with what they are given, we have come to realize that the needs of our grandchildren are not being addressed. The promise of Explore Academy with it's smaller class size, it's spiral approach to curriculum and evaluation and the amount of choice given to individual students to play an active role in planning their line of study is very forward thinking and seems designed to address students who normally fall through some of the cracks.

For example, our granddaughter is quite bright and fluent in English and Japanese. In addition to Las Cruces public school, she has attended a Japanese charter school in El Paso. Her classes at the public school were not challenging enough for her and when she moved up to middle school the environment was so loud and chaotic that she began to show symptoms of anxiety disorder. Her parents pulled her out in favor of home schooling, but worry about her further socialization. A middle school as described by the Explore Academy would have been ideal for her. We also have an eleven year-old grandson who needs to be challenged in his school work. Fortunately he is a very social kid but needs a lot of variety in his experience to keep him focused and interested. The smaller class size and the revolutionary approach that Explore Academy would take in organizing classes that last for one month instead of a normal semester and then offer a new choice in classes with a different emphasis or "flavor," while still monitoring his academic success relative to established outcomes seems exactly right for him.

Again, Public Schools are great, but the one-size-fits-all approach simply does not seem appropriate for what has been learned in recent times about childhood development. Public Schools and charter schools need to work together and where appropriate Charter Schools could compliment Public Schools and provide choice to parents and students alike who need a bit more from the educational experience. If the choice before us today was a fully funded Public School system with smaller class size, better learning environments and increased flexibility and opportunity for an individualized approach to education, we would not even consider a Charter School. But until that happens and for the future of our particular kids at this particular time we must whole heartedly support the establishment of an Explore Academy here in Las Cruces. We trust that the PEC will accept and support Explore Academy in it's proposal.

Best Regards, JD Jarvis and Myriam Lozada-Jarvis

Dunking Bird Productions Digital Art, Consultations and Printing From: <u>Liz O</u>

To: <u>Schools, Charter, PED</u>

Subject:[EXT] Support Explore AcademyDate:Sunday, July 21, 2019 1:16:16 PM

I am in support of Explore Academy-Las Cruces

Get Outlook for Android

From: <u>Lorenzo Martinez</u>
To: <u>Schools, Charter, PED</u>

Subject: [EXT] Support for Explore Academy - Las Cruces

Date: Sunday, July 21, 2019 7:34:19 PM

Hello,

I would like to express my support for a new charter school in Las Cruces. Explore Academy has proposed to come to Las Cruces and I would like to tell the state that I support this. I am a Las Cruces resident and would enroll my two children if this school was to be approved to come to Las Cruces.

Thank you,

L Martinez

From: Araceli Milner
To: Schools, Charter, PED
Subject: [EXT] Thank you

Date: Tuesday, July 23, 2019 1:08:01 PM

I am in support of Explore Academy - las cruces New Mexico, My son is so happy and very excited



Justin Baiardo <baiardo@exploreacademy.org>

Fwd: In support of EA-LCS!!

1 message

Elisha Varela <varela@exploreacademy.org> To: Justin Baiardo

baiardo@exploreacademy.org Fri, Jul 19, 2019 at 8:18 AM

Forwarded message -----

From: Anna Robillard <annakrobillard@hotmail.com>

Date: Thu, Jul 18, 2019, 8:15 PM Subject: In support of EA-LCS!!

To: varela@exploreacademy.org <varela@exploreacademy.org>

We are thrilled to learn about another school option coming to Las Cruces! We need more school choices and would love to see this charter school come to our city! Best Regards, Anna and Dan Robillard

Sent from my iPhone

 From:
 Yaritzi Gonzalez

 To:
 Schools, Charter, PED

 Subject:
 ITYTI Apple

Subject: [EXT] Apoyo

Date: Sunday, July 21, 2019 11:05:05 AM

Buenos dias,

Me dijeron que puedo ecribir para demostrar que apoyo la academia Explore aqui en Las Cruces. Mi familia esta tan agradecida que ellos quieren abrir una escuela tan interesante y nueva aqui para que los ninos tengan mas oportunidades y que puedan escoger sus propios caminos educativos. Tengo anos aqui viviendo en Las Cruces con mi esposo y su familia y las escuelas nunca cambian y tienen que luchar siempre contra los mismos obstaculos. Mis hijos ni querian hablar de la escuela antes y ahora hablan de la Explore y me dicen que quieren inscribirse.

Espero que lo abran porque es necesario tener mas opciones para los estudiantes para que vayan al colegio y tengan exito en sus carreras.

A su servicio y gracias,

Yaritzi Gonzalez

EXPLORE ACADEMY

Support Sign-Up Form

If you would like to offer your support in favor of Explore Academy coming to the Las Cruces area, please sign below. Please provide the student's name, parent name, and contact email address.

STUDENT NAME	PARENT NAME	EMAIL
ECICK GOYEZ Dornwick Orona Santiago M. Orona Melody Amezcua Sgrah	JOHN OFONA	mann_go@yahoo.com John orona Zle@gmail (m oun orona?le@gmail.com macloa 1970@gmail.com
Kyra Richardson Kairyuu Cruz Sara Cruz Nataly Hata Niguel Montes Christophy Trist ZDCKLY TRIST Z	Cristina balunuck Hamilton Grez Xochitt Hata Antene Againe Encle Triste Encle Triste Encle Triste Anere aluma Navisor Son Lean Jentine 1/a/h 0905 Heldi Parts Liarlie Yabbay.	Ceo na be name
Allyna Romero Evan Digutte	Paul + Charles Diparte	theologuethes e live com

EXPLORE ACADEMY

Support Sign-Up Form

If you would like to offer your support in favor of Explore Academy coming to the Las Cruces area, please sign below. Please provide the student's name, parent name, and contact email address.

STUDENT NAME

David Hudson
Encelyne Sanchez
Helen Moreno
Alexander Milner
Aiden Avaya
Bobby Eagar
Shai esa egas
Marine Maron
Rubien Rumirez
Michelle Horales
Pearle Larthar
Josiah Quintum

PARENT NAME

Delvatted son
Jun Sanchez
Greuge Moreno
Avaceli Hilner
Dawn araya
Heather Eagar
Tooi Holl
Elizabeth Ogas
Anto Martes
Tima minor Birnes
Army & Roger Romirez
Natura Casillas
Randy Lovete
George Guinteran

EMAIL

debra @montell fr. com

Josephez 198 Ghall son

myklldserre e gmail. com

uramin 1911 wagnan com

dr_ araya 290 yahro

sisteralways 101 Chotman.

for ihull egmail. com

lizevaldez-200 hot

aymartas 10 gmail.

zeessiceg mil.com

Omyraminez 11001.com

nylia. cos. llos eyshoo.

raplarener e giran.

d. guntone 20 hotmil.com

EXPLORE ACADEMY

ONLINE SUPPORT PETITION



By filling out this form, you are expressing your support for the establishment of Explore Academy - Las Cruces charter school

STUDENT NAME	PARENT NAME	ADDRESS
Sophia Hernandez	Antonio & Sylvanna Hernandez	P.O. Box 255 Mesilla Park N.M 88047
Aren Rankin	Kari Cena	2874 San Miguel Ct. Las Cruces, NM 88007
Maia Rankin	Kari Cena	2874 San Miguel Ct., Las Cruces, NM 88007
Pearce Larcher	April Larcher	1212 Gunsight Peak Dr
Clarabell Crespin	Amanda Gately	1515 Roberts Dr.
Johnathan Astore	Penelope Astore	Las Cruces, NM
Jet Mitchell	Marly Mitchell	2929 Scenic Circle Las Cruces, NM 88011
Daniel Saldivar	Gabriel Saldivar	4645 MESA RICO DR Las Cruces NM 88011
Armando Saldivar	Gabriel	4645 MESA RICO DR Las Cruces NM 88011
Manuel Barela	Jose and Lupe Barela	Las Cruces, NM
Allison Humphreys	Laura Humphreys	2317 Aguirre Ct.; Las Cruces 88011
Jacob Ellvinger	Marc & Nicole Ellvinger	3756 Ascencion Cir Las Cruces, NM 88012
Scarlett Ellvinger	Marc & Nicole Ellvinger	3756 Ascencion Cir Las Cruces, NM 88012
Yarely Romero-Bahena	Maria Jose Bahena-Gomez	Las Cruces, NM
Santiago Martinez-Orona	Modesta and Juan Orona	1220 Alamo St Las cruces nm 88001
Aidan Pastores	Keith and Michelle LaGanga	3644 Albion Ave, Las Cruces 88012
Whit and Wyatt Gibson	Piper and Jason Gibson	1251 Oneida,lc, nm 88005
samantha dale	jennifer dale	1813 juniper ave
Eder ureno	Carla ureno	12214 tel high rd radium springs nm 88007
Vincenzo Bonacci	Charles Bonacci, Marylou Bonacci	4499 Nambe Arc Las Cruces 88011
Jude Levi Lange	Joseph & Marisela Lange	916 Conway Ave
Averey Liefeld	Trina Witter	PO Box 1780, Mesilla, 88046
Guillermo	Magdalena	624 Morton Lane ; Fairacres, Nm 88033
Alessio Cisneros	Antoinette and Noel Cisneros	747 San Ysidro Rd., Las Cruces, NM 88007
Benjamin Bever	Laura and Joe Bever	1513 andrews dr las cruces nm 88001
Penny Bever	Laura and Joe Bever	1513 andrews dr las cruces nm 88001
Miguel Montes	Arilene Aguirre, David Montes	5970 Calle Lamina
Mara Owen	Dawn and Jason Owen	4355 Echo Canyon Road
Connor Gamache	Celeste Gamache	1240 Antelope Pass Drive , Las Cruces, NM 8801.
Marcos Jaramillo	Martin Jaramillo	Las Cruces, NM
William Edwards	Ashley Edwards	2463 Silver Sage Dr
Phaedra Nelson	Rebecca Nelson	5862 Cliff Ln
Calvin Chastine	Parquer and Kristen Chastine	4605 Wildwood Pl, Las Cruces, NM 88011
Ella Gamache	Celeste Gamache	1240 Antelope Pass Drive
Zachary Wallace	Matthew Wallace	1030 Marilissa Ln, Las Cruces, 88005
Analee Arvizu	Denise Lopez	2984 Onate Rd., Las Cruces, NM 88007
Christopher Triste	Erica Triste	1810 Rio Grande, Las Cruces, NM 88001
Jocelyne R. Sanchez	Juan Sanchez & Romelia Sanchez	4708 Diamante ct. Las Cruces, NM. 88012
Eduardo Salas	Nayeli Salas	Las Cruces, NM
Zackery Triste	Erica Triste	1810 Rio Grande, Las Cruces, NM 88001
Aiden Anaya	Dawn Anaya	4424 Valle Del Luz , Las Cruces, 88007
Carlos J Wendler	Liz and Carlos Wendler	Las Cruces, NM
Daniel Lopez	Dave and Lili Bates	4894 calle bella ave, las cruces nm 88013
Jeremiah Ogas	Mark & Elizabeth Ogas	2200 Holiday Ave trlr 23
Shaiesa Ogas	Mark & Elizabeth Ogas	2200 Holiday Ave trlr 23

Marina Barron Rosanna Martinez 4872 Califa Ave Las Cruces NM 88012

JD MalizaJehmaima Maliza4865 califa aveDenn Mark Maliza JrJehmaima Maliza4865 califa ave

jack robertson cale robertson belinda robertson 2900 bowman st las cruces 88005

Cesario AstorgaJessie Dunalp1829 Bromilow StLuis penaJessie Dunalp1829 Bromilow StJosiah QuintanaDesiree Quintana1014 Ivydale DrApril AragonSamuel AragonLas Cruces, NMItzel VerduzcoRoman VerduzcoLas Cruces, NM

Kylie JenkinsLean & Mark Jenkins3200 del rey blve #136 88012Michael MoralesNydia Casillas1020 Circle Dr Las Cruces 88005Michelle MoralesNydia Casillas1020 Circle Dr Las Cruces 88005Meghan MoralesNydia Casillas1020 Circle Dr Las Cruces 88005

Alexander Milner Araceli Milner 518 E court ave ap c las cruces New Mexico 8800

Nicole Chavez-Montelongo Carmen Montelongo Las Cruces, NM

Wyatt Sowards Cody Sowards 200 Sunshine Valley Ct, Las Cruces, NM 88007

Chase Sowards Cody Sowards 200 Sunshine Valley Ct

Alexander Milner Araceli Milner 518 E court ave , las cruces New Mexico 88001

Carlos Lujan Bethany Lujan 5051 Galina Dr Jazzelle Baeza Art Baeza 5579patgonia Dr

Emiliano Escalera Gabriela Graham 2138 Laredo Ave Las Cruces, NM 88011

Chase SowardsCody Sowards200 Sunshine Valley CtLilly BrungardTanzi and Colby Brungard1515 E. Amador Ave.Samuel BrungardTanzi and Colby Brungard1515 E. Amador Ave.