



## Estancia Valley Classical Academy's Response to the Charter Schools Division's Preliminary Analysis of Renewal Application and Site Visit November 2021

**School Name:** Estancia Valley Classical Academy (EVCA)

**School Address:** 110 State Highway 344, Edgewood, NM 87015

**Head Administrator:** Jennifer Rivera

**Governing Board Chair:** Douglas Ghormley

**Business Manager:** Holly Massey

**Authorized Grade Levels:** Kindergarten – Grade 12

**Authorized Enrollment:** 780

**Contract Term:** July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2022

**Mission:** To preserve our Nation's founding principles, Estancia Valley Classical Academy seeks to furnish willing students a rigorous education in the humanities, the sciences, and the arts with such instruction in the virtues as will best develop the mind and character of its pupils.

**Response Introduction:** EVCA is presenting its Response to the CSD's Preliminary Analysis ("Analysis") "inline" with the CSD's report to facilitate understanding of the specific responses in the context made by CSD. EVCA has deleted those sections of the Analysis to which it had no comments. EVCA's responses to the remaining CSD Analysis are shown in red and underlined. EVCA left CSD comments (in black) to provide context for the responses.

By providing this Response, EVCA is not waiving any other objections it may have related to its charter renewal application.

Progress Report (Part B) and Site Visit Evaluation		
Section	Indicator	Rating
<b>ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE</b>		
1.a	<b>Department's Standards of Excellence</b> NM System of School Support and Accountability 2018-2019: 63, <i>Spotlight Designation</i> , 3 <i>DOEs</i> 2019-2020: <i>No data available for schools</i> 2020-2021: <i>No data available for schools</i> Overall NM School Grade 2017-2018: <i>A</i>	<i>Meets the Standard</i>
1.b	<b>Mission-Specific Goals</b> <i>The school did not include a mission-specific goal in its charter contract.</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>
<b>FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE</b>		
2.a	<b>Audit</b> <i>Organizational Performance Framework 2a-2e</i>	<i>Demonstrates Substantial Progress</i>



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2.b	<b>Board of Finance</b> <i>The school has maintained a board of finance throughout the charter term.</i>	<i>Meets the Standard</i>
<b>CONTRACTUAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, AND GOVERNANCE</b>		
3.a	<b>Comprehensive Educational Program*</b> <i>See the narrative below for detail.</i>	<i>Meets the Standard</i>
3.b	<b>Organizational Performance Framework</b> <i>Organizational Performance Framework 1b-1f, 4a-4e, and 5a-5d</i>	<i>Meets the Standard</i>
3.c	<b>Governance Responsibilities</b> <i>Organizational Performance Framework 3a-3c</i>	<i>Meets the Standard</i>

**Response:** \*EVCA agrees that it has complied with Section 4(6) “Comprehensive Educational Program” of its Charter Contract with the PEC. It wishes to point out, however, that the Performance Frameworks incorporated into the Charter Contract at “Attachment B” do not provide indicators for measuring this provision of the contract. Based on Section 5(1) of the Charter Contract, EVCA understands that the “Accountability Plan, Academic Performance Framework, Organizational Performance Framework, and Financial Performance Framework adopted by the Commission” govern the Commission’s evaluation of the school and the criteria and procedures that the Commission uses to assess the operational, financial and academic performance of the school. The CSD’s narrative about the “Comprehensive Educational Program,” inserts criteria for evaluation that are not contemplated by the Charter Contract and integrated Performance Frameworks. Further, EVCA could not find where an evaluation of the CEP has been part of past annual site visits and reports on the charters’ performance.

## Public Education Commission Performance Framework

Estancia Valley Classical Academy	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
<b>Category I. Academic Performance Framework</b>				
Indicator 1 Components of School Accountability System	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	62.85 Points (Spotlight)		Unable to Review - COVID
Indicator 2 Subgroup Performance	Not Applicable	Pending		Unable to Review - COVID
Indicator 3 Mission Specific Goals	Not Applicable	Not Applicable		Not Applicable
<b>Financial Performance Framework</b>				
Self-Assessment Survey completed and signed by Head Admin, SBO, and Finance Chair	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Not Applicable
<b>Category II. Organizational Performance Framework</b>				
Indicator 1a Educational Program: mission and educational program of approved charter application	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard
Indicator 1b Educational Program: state assessment requirements	Working to Meet Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Unable to Review - COVID	Unable to Review - COVID
Indicator 4a Students & Employees: protecting the rights of all students	Working to Meet Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Unable to Review - COVID	ASSURANCES
Indicator 1c Educational Program: protecting the rights of students with disabilities	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Unable to Review - COVID	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard
Indicator 1d Educational Program: protecting the rights of English Language Learners	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Working to Meet Standard	Unable to Review - COVID	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard
Indicator 4b Students & Employees: attendance, retention, and recurrent enrollment	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard
Included in Indicator 4b	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard
Indicator 2a Financial Mgmt & Oversight: meeting financial reporting and compliance requirements	Not Applicable	Working to Meet Standard	Working to Meet Standard	Working to Meet Standard
Indicator 2b Financial Mgmt & Oversight: following generally accepted accounting principles	Not Applicable	Working to Meet Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Does Not Meet Standard
Indicator 3a Governance & Reporting: complying with governance requirements	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard
Included in Indicator 3c	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard
Indicator 4c Students & Employees: meeting teacher and other staff credentialing requirements	Working to Meet Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Unable to Review - COVID	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard
Indicator 4d Students & Employees: respecting employee rights	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Working to Meet Standard	Unable to Review - COVID	ASSURANCES
Indicator 4e Students & Employees: completing required background checks / reporting ethical violations	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Unable to Review - COVID	ASSURANCES
Indicator 5a School Environment: complying with facilities requirements	Working to Meet Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Unable to Review - COVID	ASSURANCES
Indicator 5c School Environment: complying with health and safety requirements	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Working to Meet Standard	Unable to Review - COVID	ASSURANCES
Indicator 5d School Environment: handling information appropriately	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	ASSURANCES
<b>OTHER</b>				
School specific conditions in the Charter Contract, if any	Not Applicable			
Indicator 1e Educational Program: meeting program requirements for all PED and federal grant programs	Not Applicable	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	ASSURANCES
Indicator 1f Educational Program: NM DASH Plan	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Indicator 2c Financial Mgmt & Oversight: responsive to audit findings	Not Applicable	Working to Meet Standard	Working to Meet Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard
Indicator 2d Financial Mgmt & Oversight: managing grant funds responsibly	Not Applicable	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard
Indicator 2e Financial Mgmt & Oversight: staffing to ensure proper fiscal management	Not Applicable	Working to Meet Standard	Working to Meet Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard
Indicator 2f Financial Mgmt & Oversight: meeting obligations timely / appropriate internal controls	Not Applicable	Working to Meet Standard	Working to Meet Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard
Indicator 3b Governance & Reporting: complying with nepotism and conflict of interest requirements	Not Applicable	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	ASSURANCES
Indicator 3c Governance & Reporting: meeting obligations timely / appropriate internal controls	Not Applicable	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	Meets (or Exceeds) Standard	ASSURANCES
Indicator 5b School Environment: complying with transportation requirements	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Unable to Review - COVID	ASSURANCES

## Organizational Performance

EVCA has made improvement and has maintained a “Meets (or Exceeds) Standard” rating for indicator 4c (meeting teacher and other staff credentialing requirements) during the previous 2 ratings years. EVCA also made improvement from 2018-19 to 2020-21 for indicator 1d (protecting the rights of English Language Learners).



In 2020-21 the school still appears to need improvement with the financial performance indicators. Indicators 2a and 2b refer to the schools 2020 audit report findings.

The school received a *Working to Meet* rating for indicator 2.a. (meeting financial reporting and compliance requirements) because the school had two (2) audit findings and provided a management response to the auditor.

**Response:** The CSD's explanation for why the school was ranked "working to meet" for the 2.a. indicator, "because school had two (2) audit findings and provided a management response to the auditor," does not address any of the applicable measures for this indicator. Moreover, the PED's audit for FY21 has not yet been released and information related to that audit should not be used as a basis for a negative finding.

Indicator 2.b. (following generally accepted accounting principles) refers to the severity of the audit finding.

**Response:** EVCA disagrees with the CSD's conclusion that having one "material weakness" equates to "not meeting generally accepted accounting principles." As noted in our Part B at p. 42, the FY2020 audit deemed the school as having met Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.

The school received a *Does Not Meet* rating because one of the two audit findings in 2020 was a material weakness. The school currently employs a full-time, on-site business manager. The school leadership acknowledges the heavy financial requirements and administrative supports a school of this size requires. Therefore, the school's FY22 budget includes an additional .5 FTE for business office support.

**Response:** Indicator 2.b, according to the Performance Framework attached to EVCA's Charter Contract, links any ranking to the outcome of the corresponding year's audit. The Public Education Department's FY2021 (2020-2021) audit has not been released. Consequently, this appears to be a reporting error on behalf of the CSD.

## Financial Performance

EVCA is on a quarterly reporting status, which indicates the school's business manager is responsive to School Budget Bureau requests and reports are submitted in a timely manner. The school's business manager has been serving in this capacity throughout this contract term and at no time during the contract term did the school move from quarterly reporting status.

Student membership at EVCA has grown an average of 8% each year of the current contract. The school moved into a new building late in the 2018 calendar year to accommodate the growth. As expected, rent expense increased during this time. The school has been successful in using Public School Capital Outlay funds (Fund 31200) to offset rent expense throughout the contract term, but the fund has not increased at the rent has. In 2017-18 PSCO provided \$331,681, which was 62% of total rent, compared to 2020-21 when \$440,527 in PSCO funds covered only 36% of the year's rent.

The school received eleven (11) audit findings from 2017 to 2020.

**Response:** EVCA would like to clarify that five of the 18 findings were attributable to its Foundation in FY2019, the year in which the Foundation was completing EVCA's new facility construction. These findings were resolved without repeat findings by FY2019.



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Since the school's foundation is a component unit of the school, any findings received by the foundation is reflected in the school's findingcount which was the case in 2018 when the foundation received one (1) significant deficiency finding. Inthe most recent published audit report, EVCA received a material weakness finding for lack of policies, procedures or internal controls.

**Response:** EVCA contends that this statement is inaccurate. As set forth in EVCA's Part B, the FY2020 "material weakness" is described by the auditor as "[d]uring our audit of capital assets, we noted the school improperly identified and include supply assets totaling approximately \$72,000 as fiscal year 2020 capital asset additions. The school also listed construction in progress of \$71,000 that related to expense in the current year fiscal year 2021." Nowhere does the auditor state that the material finding was due to a "lack of policies, procedures or internal controls," as stated by the CSD. Each year EVCA must submit to its auditor as part of the annual field work all internal control policies. To date, it has not been informed by the auditor that the school "lacks" any required policy or procedure relating to internal controls. In addition, the CSD's "3b. Organizational Performance Framework" at indicator 2.f, "Financial Mgmt & Oversight: meeting obligations timely/appropriate internal controls" did not rank the school prior to 2020-2021, but for 2020-2021 (FY 2020) CSD ranked EVCA as "Meets (or Exceeds) Standard" for this indicator Thus, the criticism in CSD's narrative is at a minimum inconsistent, but EVCA contends it is inaccurate.

EVCA explained its reasoning in Part B of its Renewal Application for why the capital asset was categorized as it had, that is, the PED's procedural manual was confusing about how to properly identify the asset. EVCA will include a procedure to address this particular issue in its policies according to the auditor's technical assistance related this one issue. Not correctly interpreting PED's asset categorization procedures, does not translate to the school entirely lacking policies for internal controls as inferred by the CSD's narrative.

The school business manager stated this occurred due to insufficient guidance on proper reporting of capital asset additions.

Audit Year	# of Findings	# of Repeat Findings	# of Material Weaknesses	Significant Deficiencies
FY 2020	2	0	1	0
FY 2019	2	1	0	0
FY 2018	5	0	0	1
FY 2017	2	1	0	2

## Comprehensive Educational Program

**Response:** As indicated above, EVCA contends that evaluation of the "Comprehensive Educational Program" is not contemplated by the Performance Frameworks that make up the criteria for its contract assessment. EVCA has indicated below where it considered CSD's narrative inaccurate, incomplete or unwarranted.

EVCA is a K-12 state charter located in Edgewood, New Mexico. The school currently utilizes a Hillsdale College endorsed curriculum through the Barney Charter School Initiative (BCSI), an outreach program of Hillsdale College. The curriculum is devoted to "the revitalization of public education through the launch and support of classical K-12 charter schools." The curriculum "promotes a model of education that is rooted in the liberal arts and sciences, offers a firm grounding in civic virtue, and cultivates moral character." According to the affiliate page on the Hillsdale website, the college appears to endorse schools that identify as either public classical charters or private Christian schools in nature.

**Response:** EVCA is not Hillsdale College, which is private institution and objects to any inference that





by adopting the curriculum developed and licensed by Hillsdale College that EVCA is not in compliance with NMSA 1978, §22-8B-4(J), which requires a public charter school to be, “a nonsectarian, nonreligious and non-home-based public school.” CSD does not point to any curriculum, program, governance policy/practice, or other materials, that evidence otherwise. Note: CSD states that it has reviewed the curriculum, interviewed families and students and observed classroom instruction, but offers no evidence that the school is not adhering to its commitment to provide a nonsectarian, nonreligious public education. EVCA’s current Comprehensive Educational Program is the same program described in its current contract with the PEC.

Upon review of the curriculum, it appears to be robust in its depiction of American History but is lacking in diversity of voice and representation.

**Response:** EVCA’s curriculum covers all content as set forth by the NM state standards as demonstrated on EVCA’s performance on NM standard based assessments and meets all state graduation requirements.

As per the school’s contract with Hillsdale, EVCA is required to teach Latin and as a result, students in grades 3-6 are required to learn Greek and Latin roots and two years of Latin is required for students in the upper school.

**Response:** CSD’s statement concerning “the school’s contract with Hillsdale [College]” is inaccurate. Notable, the CSD does not point to the contract to which it refers. For clarification, EVCA has a contract to license its curriculum and related materials from Hillsdale College. The only agreement EVCA has with Hillsdale College, which is and was available upon request, is a Licensing Agreement that deals exclusively with Hillsdale College’s copyright and trademark interests in the curriculum and related materials it developed. There is no discussion in the agreement addressing authority to control EVCA’s academic program. No other contractual relationship exists between EVCA and Hillsdale College.

Note, that like many charter school networks that provide a curriculum and education model to affiliated charter schools, the success of the charter school’s mission is premised on the charter school following the developed curriculum and program methods established by that network. EVCA has shown by its academic outcomes that the course sequencing and educational program developed by Hillsdale College and part of the licensed materials is successful in producing high student achievement. Importantly, teaching Greek and Latin Roots in elementary grades is part of EVCA’s Comprehensive Education Program as stated in the Charter Contract at Section 4(6)(vii)(e).

While EVCA’s Latin requirement will satisfy a students language requirement for the State of New Mexico, it is also important to note that if a student wants to take an additional language, that that language will be counted as an elective. Furthermore, the Latin requirement also poses a potential issue for students who transfer into EVCA, especially those coming in with credit recovery. When asked, the school does not conduct exit interviews for students who exit the school.

**Response:** If a student transfers to EVCA without prior Latin credits, the student is enrolled in Latin I. If the student’s time before graduation would not allow the student to complete Latin II, the school, as it has done in the past, waives or otherwise modifies this requirement on a case by case basis to ensure the student can graduate on time. Of course, the student must have met all other graduation requirements.

It is unclear why the CSD staff does not believe the school conducts exit interviews. This is incorrect. The administration asks each family who leaves the school about their reasons for leaving. The Governing Council is provided a summary of the responses at each month’s regular meeting.

Interwoven into the school’s curriculum and mission is instruction in virtue through the 8 Pillars of



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Character: citizenship, cooperation, courage, honesty, integrity, perseverance, respect, and responsibility. The pillars are used as both a touchstone and framework for shaping ideas during class discussion (i.e. “which pillar of character is this character currently showing, how do you know it to be true?”) and a vital aspect of the school’s SEL program. During student focus groups, students at EVCA often referenced back to the pillars of character as a form of accountability for themselves. Teachers hand out “Pillars of Character” cards to students who demonstrate one of the pillars.

The Governing Board and school staff work hard to maintain integrity to the classical program. Teachers participate in professional development offerings focused on rigor, equity, and Socratic methodology; most of the school’s professional development is offered through Hillsdale, as well as conducted internally.

**Response:** The CSD’s depiction of EVCA’s professional development (“PD”), is misleading. The College does provide professional development when requested, which is focused on the teaching of phonograms, Socratic teaching and discussion, and Singapore math. However, these opportunities constitute approximately 30% of the school’s PD programs. Although conducted on site, EVCA has provided the following PD to staff in the past 4 months: Professional Development on the NM Indian Education Act, “Culturally Responsive Instruction for Native American Students,” “ELL and ESL Teaching Strategies,” “Educating Students with Autism: Basics and Beyond,” McKenny Vento student training, SEL “Stop & Think” professional development by Dr. Howie Knoff, MLSS training, and accommodations and modifications training. While these trainings took place on campus and most were led by EVCA faculty, the resources and training information was acquired from outside sources, including the “Center for Standards, Assessment, and Accountability,” “Teachings in Education,” “New Mexico Public Schools Insurance Authority’s Technical Assistance Program (TAP), and NMPED. EVCA does not consider programs offered by external entities, including the Public Education Department, at the school’s location as “conducted internally.” For the past year and a half, EVCA Special Education teachers, first grade teachers, and administrators have also participated in Structured Literacy Professional Development including LETRS and Mr. Owl trainings for conducting dyslexia screenings. First and second grade teachers will begin LETRS Structured Literacy training in January 2022. Clearly, during the pandemic, it is safer and, in the employees’, best interest to avoid attending functions outside of the EVCA facility whenever possible.

Student and parent focus groups expressed an understanding of high expectations. Most courses at the upper level are the equivalent of honors classes. Seniors prepare a moral philosophy thesis which aims to expose students with the works and teaching of historical philosophers with the intention to learn to reason and make and refute arguments to support a final project. Of the 54 students at EVCA in their junior senior year, 30 are enrolled in a dual credit program. Classes are offered through Mesalands and CNM and the school is working to add courses through ENMU. These classes count towards both high school elective credit and college credit. Students talked about rising to meet academic demands and said they like learning at high levels, and believe the teachers are there to support them in their learning. However, during the student focus group, many students discussed taking “mental health days,” to help offset the stresses associated with school. Several upper-level students said they appreciated having fewer distractions than in most public schools, i.e., the dress code, ban on technology in classrooms, and no sports program.

**Response:** EVCA believes CSD’s statement “ban on technology in the classrooms” is misleading and implies that EVCA does not consider students’ use of technology a fundamental skill necessary for learning and living in our current world. Here is the reference to student’s use of cell phones during class from the EVCA Discipline Policy: “[s]tudents are permitted to carry cell phones to school for the purpose of emergency communication. However, to minimize classroom disruption and remove an opportunity for cheating, cell phones must be put away and not used or visible throughout the school day. Students may



use cell phones in cases where the teacher has determined that there is an educational reason. Students may also use cell phones for medical reasons when the student has a 504 on file with the administration that permits such use.”

Students identified the mission of the school as having a focus on the arts, humanities, and science. Students talked about learning to apply lessons from math and science to “real life.” One recurring theme was the focus on not only learning information, but why that information is important to know.

Students practice study skills during many classes. Notetaking skills are emphasized (in some classes more than others). Several students in one class were observed in the library, facilitating their own learning/study group. Students in focus groups reported that teachers are supportive, help students organize, and treat all students equally. Technology is seldom used as a teaching/learning tool in the classroom, apart from a special education classroom, where students were using computers to work on individual goals and assignments.

**Response:** CSD’s statement incorrect. EVCA students often use cell phones, computers, and other technology to complete assignments, tests, research and other activities **related to the educational program**. Students use I-Pads to complete I-Station assessments, and K-1 use I-Pads daily for Lexia. Grammar school students use I-Pads and computers when deemed appropriate by the teacher, for example to type “Letters about Literacy” assignments in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Upper school students use technology to complete research and type papers as requested by teachers. In addition, a number of students have technology specific permissions included in their IEPs and 504s, including C-Pens, lap-tops, and teacher microphones. Students use computers and I-Pads to complete a variety of interventions including additional Lexia, Math Buddies, Core5, PowerUp, Prodigy, Teaching Textbooks, Khan Academy, and Distance Learning Dual Credit courses.

As to Special Education students, they receive most of their instruction in general education classrooms. EVCA does have a computer lab located in the upper school, which is used as a study hall location, but this classroom is a general education room for all students; students are able to use these computers during study hall when they have assignments that require computer use. The interventionist does have individual and small group pull-out time with students and does use technology at times to provide interventions for individual student needs.

This is intentional, so students will not be focusing on computers or phones. during classroom observations, However, CSD did not consistently observe learning goals, assignments, and lesson objectives for student and teacher to see or reference throughout the class period.

**Response:** Learning goals, assignments, and lesson objectives are not always identified on the board in the front of classrooms, but all teachers use Planbook.com to record objectives and assignments on a daily basis; Planbook.com is available to all students and families. In addition, students receive planners as part of our Study Skills requirements, and are given time at the beginning of class to write down assignments and homework. Each grammar school class has a daily agenda in the room that lists topics for each subject, and all upper school courses include a syllabus listing topics and objectives for each course.

Most teachers in focus groups reported implementing the curriculum with rigor. The renewal team saw few examples of Socratic instruction in the classroom, but students knew the principles and practices of Socratic instruction. Most teachers used a lecture style model with very little back-and-forth dialogue between either teacher and student or student-to-student.

**Response:** Socratic method can be applied in various ways. At EVCA, Socratic discussion requires students to receive instruction from the teacher first. Teachers in upper school do lecture prior to engaging



## students in Socratic questioning.

While nearly every teacher observed posted an agenda for the day, learning targets were rarely seen in the classrooms. When asked how they knew they were learning what they were supposed to, students said that they know how to present their ideas and justify them, that they do research and come up with their own understanding, and that what they are learning is about citizenship and being someone who contributes.

## Response: EVCA's students are clear about the learning objectives for the reasons stated above.

There is a student council, and students involved in student government have gone before the Governing Board to make public comments about their concerns. There is no sports program, but students can participate in the district schools' team sports. Students have opportunities to participate in afterschool programs such as intramurals, bible club, robotic club, swing dance, and violin.

Response: EVCA wishes to provide additional information and context to CSD's assessment of the school's student programs. First, the statement that "there is no sports program" is misleading. As CSD acknowledges, EVCA students participate in competitive sports through local district team sports. EVCA did consider offering competitive team sports, but when students were polled as to whether EVCA should develop a sports program, the students overwhelmingly rejected the concept. EVCA students opined that if EVCA had its own program, the students would not be competing in the same class as they would if they participate in local districts' programs.

Other student programs mentioned by CSD are not "school sponsored" but are allowed and encouraged by permitting students' use of the facility. The "bible club" listed by CSD is a program offered in Albuquerque Public Schools as well as Moriarty Public Schools. EVCA complies with the Equal Access Act, 20 U.S.C. §§4071-4073. EVCA recognizes that public funds are used to pay for the facility in which it is located and has developed a facilities use policy to ensure local community groups have access to the building when such use does not interfere with the educational program.

Many students made comments comparing EVCA to "public schools," and appear to believe that the quality of their classical experience at EVCA rises far above the experience of students attending other public schools. Parents echoed this belief, one parent mentioned they felt they were getting a private education for free. A few students in focus groups had attended a district school in the past, but the vast majority of students were formerly home schooled.

Response: CSD's comment about students and parents comparing EVCA to a quote "public school" end quote, harkens back to CSD's not-so-subtle comments about Hillsdale College. EVCA points out that even legislators and public school officials do not understand the distinction between a charter school and a private school. If students and parents are not 100% clear about the distinctions, it is certainly understandable.

The school recognizes the social and emotional needs of students, allowing them to take their own "mental health day" if needed. Students talked about feeling safe, accepting others, and being free to express an opinion or values different from their classmates without fear of retaliation or bullying. The site visit team observed courteous and positive behavior among students throughout the two day visit. During COVID, some students experienced COVID-related social and emotional issues, including struggling with isolation. The school initiated targeted support and many of these issues were resolved. One student said she believed that her brother, who was then a student at EVCA, was alive today because of this effort.





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When asked about diverse cultures being welcomed, students said all students feel culturally welcome. In at least one student focus group, student responses focused on global cultures more than on local diversity. EVCA's part B addressed school demographics comparing the zip codes their students reside in as opposed to the Moriarty-Edgewood district overall. The schools data showed White and Hispanic residents were close to equal. The charter schools division relies on STARS data to compile this data because it codifies enrolled student population. EVCA compared to the two other public schools in Edgewood showed white students for those schools at 58% compared to EVCA at 67% and Hispanic student populations at 46% v. EVCA at 31%.

The school does not provide food services nor transportation. According to the parents who participated in the parent focus group, most of whom were also employed at the school, stated that they often coordinate carpools for students in the area through the school's Facebook page.

**Response:** The statement that most of the parents in the focus group are employed by the school is incorrect. In fact, none of the parents in the focus group are, or were, employed by the school. EVCA can provide names of the focus group parents and CSD can compare those names with the EVCA staff roster.

Parents feel strongly connected to the school and mentioned experiences their children had in a traditional school prior to enrolling in EVCA that include bullying, lack of teacher involvement/attention to individual learning needs (including special education). Parents had no concerns about the safety of students at EVCA. Parents are in general highly involved in the school. While volunteering isn't a formal requirement, parents appear to understand there is an expectation to become part of the learning community.

One comment made suggested that the unofficial expectation for parents to participate at the school, drive children to school and provide their own food was a way to "weed out" certain others from attending.

**Response:** EVCA intentionally chose not to offer food and transportation services, and this is memorialized in its Charter Contract. When conducting a cost analysis to provide these services, school officials determined that diverting capital and operational funding to these programs significantly impacted the school's ability to implement its academic program as described and promised in its Charter Contract.

EVCA does wish to inform the PEC that any student that desires to enroll in the school and expresses concerns over food availability or transportation is offered information about programs and organizations that assist with food and transportation. EVCA has a family run Facebook page that assists with carpools as they are able, and EVCA participates in a "backpack program," which assists families with not only school lunches, but weekly groceries for their home as well.

As to the CSD's report of "a" comment that "suggested" some improper reason for not providing food and transportation services, EVCA responds by stating said individual is entitled to his/her/their opinion, but if not supported by fact, opinions are just opinions. Such statement of beliefs has no place in a report that is purportedly based on facts and data; a report that should reveal the ability of the PEC's staff to sort out unreliable information when assessing whether this school is performing according to the terms of its Charter Contract.

Further, EVCA would like to point to the obvious, charter schools are schools of choice. Families make choices to have students attend charter schools, presumable because the school offers something the neighborhood public school does not. Charter schools that are, for example, based on flamingo dance, focused on the arts, media arts, STEM or STEAM programs, serve very specific student interests and result in other students



# Estancia Valley Classical Academy

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[exercising their school choice elsewhere.](#)

Discipline is handled in class by the teacher or, when necessary, by the Dean. During classes, teachers sometimes use strategies like positive peer pressure such as not allowing anyone in the class to earn extra points on an examination. School staff attribute the low number of disciplinary issues and the calm school climate to having clear expectations for student behavior. When infractions occur, there is a discussion between students and, typically, the Dean of Students, who will help them see why their misbehavior was wrong and a consequence could be given (usually detention). Parents appreciate the way in which the Dean handles discipline, including notifying parents immediately when their children misbehave.