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**Charter Schools Division
Preliminary Analysis of Renewal Application and Site Visit
November 2021**

School Name: Pecos Connections Academy/Pecos Cyber Academy

School Address: 1503 West Pierce Street, Carlsbad, New Mexico 88220

Head Administrator: Dr. Kim Hite-Pope

Governing Board Chair: Kyla Anderson

Business Manager: Gloria Lopez

Authorized Grade Levels: K-12

Authorized Enrollment: 2000

Contract Term: 2021-2022

Mission: The mission of Pecos Cyber Academy (PCA) is to empower all students to embrace learning, achieve their personal best, and build their emotional, social, and physical well-being through a quality virtual learning community.

Statutory Renewal Requirements

According to New Mexico Statutes Annotated (NMSA) 1979, Section 22-8B-12 K., a charter may be suspended, revoked, or not renewed by the chartering authority if the chartering authority determines that the charter school did any of the following:

- (1) committed a material violation of any of the conditions, standards or procedures set forth in the charter contract;
- (2) failed to meet or make substantial progress toward achievement of the department's standards of excellence or student performance standards identified in the charter contract;
- (3) failed to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management;
- (4) for a charter school located on tribal land, failed to comply with ongoing consultations pursuant to the Indian Education Act; or

(5) violated any provision of law from which the charter school was not specifically exempted.

Renewal Application

Parts A and F of the Renewal Application are provided by the Charter Schools Division (CSD). All other parts of the application are provided by the school.

PART A	Data analysis based on accountability and reporting data from current charter contract term
PART B	Progress report on meeting the academic performance, financial compliance and governance responsibilities of the charter school, including achieving the goals, objectives, student performance outcomes, and accountability requirements set forth in the Assessment and Accountability Act and the charter contract.
PART C	Financial Statement A financial statement that discloses the costs of administration, instruction and other spending categories for the charter school that is understandable to the general public that allows comparison of costs to other schools.
PART D	Petitions in support of the charter renewing its charter status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Petition signed by at least 65% of the school’s employees, with certified affidavit: 61 of 73 = 84% • Petition signed by at least 75% of the households whose children are enrolled, with certified affidavit: 1211 represents 89%
PART E	Description of the Charter School Facilities and Assurances that the facilities are in compliance with the requirements of Section 22-8B-4.2 NMSA 1978 <i>N/A (Virtual School)</i>
PART F	Amendment Requests

The CSD team reviewed the school’s Progress Report and conducted a renewal visit on October 12-13, 2021. Ratings are based on the rubric provided on page 14 of the [State Charter Renewal Application](#).

Progress Report (Part B) and Site Visit Evaluation		
Section	Indicator	Rating
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE		
1.a	Department’s Standards of Excellence NM System of School Support and Accountability 2020-2021: <i>No data available for schools</i> 2019-2020: <i>No data available for schools</i> 2018-2019: <i>44</i> Overall NM School Grade 2017-2018: <i>F</i>	<i>Demonstrates Substantial Progress</i>
1.b	Mission-Specific Goals	<i>Not Applicable</i>
FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE		
2.a	Audit <i>Organizational Performance Framework 2a-2e</i>	<i>Meets the Standard</i>
2.b	Board of Finance <i>The school has maintained a board of finance throughout the charter term.</i>	<i>Meets the Standard</i>
CONTRACTUAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, AND GOVERNANCE		
3.a	Comprehensive Educational Program <i>See the narrative below for detail.</i>	<i>Demonstrates Substantial Progress</i>
3.b	Organizational Performance Framework <i>Organizational Performance Framework 1b-1f, 4a-4e, and 5a-5d</i> <i>As a district charter, the school does not operate under the PEC’s Performance Framework. See narrative below for explanation of rating.</i>	<i>Demonstrates Substantial Progress</i>
3.c	Governance Responsibilities <i>Organizational Performance Framework 3a-3c</i>	<i>Meets the Standard</i>

Academic Performance

NMPED Accountability Data 2018-2019

	Overall	Reading Proficiency	Math Proficiency	Science Proficiency	English Learner Progress
Pecos Connections Academy	44	27	12	57	N/A
Carlsbad Municipal Schools	51	35	18	46	31
New Mexico	-	34	21	40	29

The NM Vistas data provided is from PCA’s prior contract period with their authorizer, Carlsbad Municipal Schools (CMS). There is no state accountability data for any school during this school’s contract term. However, as indicated in the table above, Pecos Connections Academy (PCA) received an overall score of 44, and while their score is slightly lower than the Carlsbad district, PCA is still considered to be in the top 75% of schools statewide.

According to the 2020-21 CMA annual report, PCA received a rating of *Does Not Meet* for reading proficiency and received a rating of, *Working To Meet* for math proficiency. These ratings were given because of disaggregated TAMELA scores from 2019. Since the current school leader, Dr. Kim Hite-Pope, joined PCA in June 2020, the school has made several impactful changes in processes and short cycle assessment data shows that the school has demonstrated substantial progress during the 2020-21 school year. Leadership at PCA acknowledges the necessity to implement new state assessment goals and has developed both a 30-day and 90-day improvement plan to increase student proficiency. Their goal to increase proficiency by 2% at both the 30-day and 90-day mark, as indicated by Renaissance STAR360 reports and Renaissance Star Test reports, is also in alignment with the schools NM DASH goals for 2021-22.

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, PCA was able to collect math data for 88% of their student population and literacy data for 94% of students.

2020-21 STAR Assessment Data		
Grade	Percent of Students Meeting Reading Benchmark	Percent of Students Meeting Math Benchmark
1	91	90
2	81	80
3	64	73
4	66	65
5	59	59
6	52	62
7	53	64
8	42	51
9	46	51
10	49	54
11	40	54
12	45	61
Total	57	64

Students in Kindergarten took the Early Literacy Enterprise Assessment, and 87% met the benchmark for proficiency.

PCA attributes its improving academic performance to their leadership team's ability to reevaluate how the school supports its teachers and students. PCA leadership has worked to create a robust, ongoing professional development program for its staff, has strategized to create consistent student evaluation strategies, and encourages parent/family involvement. PCA has also implemented evidence-based intervention plans, conducts virtual small support tutoring, and trains teachers monthly MLSS based best practice strategies for progress monitoring as per their improvement plan with their authorizer.

Public Education Commission Performance Framework

Because Pecos Connections Academy was chartered by CMS during their last contract term, they were not evaluated by the PEC performance framework.

Organizational Performance

On November 10, 2021, CSD met with CMS to discuss the relationship between current authorizer and district charter. Superintendent Washburn expressed that the district's largest concern with PCA is that they simply do not have the manpower to provide proper oversight and assessment to a school like PCA. Dr. Washburn made clear that he believes PCA serves a need of students across the state of New Mexico. Furthermore, Superintendent Washburn made clear that when the following annual review ratings were given to PCA, the school was undergoing a transition in leadership and that once Dr. Hite-Pope stepped into her position as head administrator, she worked to resolve the issues identified by CMS. When asked, Superintendent Washburn said he fully endorses PCA as a school worthy of transition to state charter.

Enrollment at PCA is currently managed by their vendor, Connexus via a hyperlink on PCA's website. PCA is currently not at capacity but if they reach capacity, Dr. Hite-Pope understands that if approved as a state charter, the school will need to identify and develop a proper lottery process if they are authorized by the PEC.

In the CMS report, the CMS Director of Special Education stated that PCA "staff could use additional training" in identified areas of concern. Upon review, PCA appears to be making substantial progress in special education oversight. According to PCA's improvement plan, staff have been, and will continue to be trained in the areas identified for this indicator. When asked, Dr. Hite-Pope confirmed professional development/training for staff. CMS also confirmed that after Dr. Hite-Pope took over as head administrator, the school has worked had to address both EL and Special Ed issues for students.

Regarding protecting the rights of English learner (ELs), CSD's assessment is that in the past, there was confusion about how to identify EL students and very little guidance from their previous authorizer. That has now been resolved. PCA now understands that only students new to New Mexico public schools are administered the Language Usage Survey (LUS) and that the status of students transferring from other NM public schools is checked in STARS. The Language and Culture division has indicated that PCA has no issues regarding serving English Learners. CMS confirmed that after Dr. Hite-Pope took over as head administrator, the school has worked had to address both EL and Special Ed issues for students.

Attendance tracking is threefold at PCA: it is monitored by parents, teachers and learning coaches, and progress completion. Parent attendance adds assurance to a student's attendance accountability system but is not the only way that student's attendance is tracked. Teachers/learning coaches can track a student's attendance during live lessons and can also check-in during a student's self-directed time via the Connexus portal where they are able to track keystrokes as well as "pop in" to a student's chat feature at any time to check-in/monitor student progress. Student attendance is also measured by whether a student has completed their daily/weekly curriculum

goals. If a student does not fulfill their daily/weekly progress goals, they will be marked absent. According to CMS’s annual report, PCA dramatically improved their chronic absence rate from SY19-20 to SY20-21.

In 2019-20, 1224 out of 1280 students (96%) at PCA were identified as “intending to return.” The figure for student return for 2020-21 was 1988. As of the most recent STARS data for 40th day reporting, PCA has 1887 students, which means they’ve lost 99 students and despite this loss, they are still well above CMS’s 85% enrollment retention standard and the PEC’s performance framework requires that schools maintain 70% of enrollment from year to year.

Financial Performance

Pecos Connections Academy (PCA) 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 since the school opened in 2017 and at no time since opening has the school moved from quarterly reporting status.

PCA opened in 2017, serving students from K-8, adding a grade a year. 2021 was the first year the school served K-12. In that time the school membership went from 364 in 2017 to 1,988 in 2021.

The school received one audit finding in FY 2020.

Audit Year	Findings	Repeat Findings	Material Weaknesses	Significant Deficiencies
FY 2020	1	0	0	0

The school has been able to prioritize spending in the classroom at an average of 90%, which is attributed to the fact that PCA is a 100% on-line instruction, therefore, does not need to rent classroom space. The Student enrollment size is also a contributing factor to supporting high classroom spending percentages.

General Fund (11000) data as reported in OBMS - Fourth Quarter		Contract Years					
		Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Budgeted	
		General Fund - 11000- Amounts (in whole dollars)					
		2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	
Enrollment							
	120D Student membership	548	973	1280	1988	1977	
	40D program units from final funded run	980,425	1,560,002	2,262,197	3,481,991	3,369,138	
Function	Function Name	Description of Expenditures					
1000	Direct Instruction	Classroom teachers, educational assistants, instructional coaches, textbooks, classroom technology	2,579,592	4,491,450	7,695,181	13,189,866	12,849,360
2100	Student Support	Attendance, social worker, guidance, health, psychological, speech & occupational therapy services	684,670	891,899	1,104,864	1,180,017	2,128,960
2200	Instructional Support	Library, instruction related technology	49,800	126,156	72,089	71,512	328,370
2300	Central Administration	Governance council, Office of Superintendent, community relations	143,908	170,050	170,213	282,194	287,525
2400	School Administration	Office of the Principal	77,165	149,616	187,912	486,703	509,750
2500	Central Services	Business management, administrative support, admin technology	183,228	231,829	363,274	407,996	397,719
2600	Maintenance & Operations	Building operations, maintenance, equipment upkeep, security & safety	139,673	91,890	109,348	136,203	150,000
2700-5900	All Other Function Codes	Transportation, food service & capital outlay					
Total		3,858,036	6,152,889	9,702,881	15,754,493	16,651,684	
Total State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) Funding		3,955,320	6,407,062	10,203,017	15,480,984	15,751,684	
Carryover(Shortfall)		97,284	254,173	500,135	(273,509)		
How Funds Were Spent in Percentages of Total							
Classroom	86%	90%	91%	92%	92%	92%	
Administration	10%	9%	7%	7%	7%	7%	
Other	4%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	

The PED Operating Budget Management System (OBMS) showed the school regularly submits grant fund requests for reimbursements (RfRs). In 2020-21 the school received two federal grants with reimbursements totaling just over \$380,000.

Governance

According to CSD’s records, governing board members at PCA are consistently in compliance with completing their annual quota for governing board training hours.

Board Members	FY20	FY21
Stacy Doyal	8	
Paul Perez	8	
Greg Brown	16	
Kim Hite-Pope	10	
Tamara Piburn	10	
Kayla Anderson	8	8
Vivian Cullen		12
Brandy Tillian		10
Danielle Johnston		12
Jennifer Sears		10

Black shading indicates that the member did not serve a full year in that fiscal year; yellow indicates that the member did not complete all required training hours during that fiscal year. Training requirements are 8 hours per year for returning board members, and 10 hours for new members. Exemptions are noted in years marked by an asterisk.

PCA was also found to be in violation of the Open Meetings Act (OMA) during March, April, and May of 2020 due to a possible rolling quorum. This was in part because charter board members and audit committee members may not have been sufficiently trained on New Mexico Open Meetings Act (OMA). Carlsbad Municipal Schools (CMS) recommended that PCA board members participate in New Mexico School Boards Association Law Conference in June 2021. PCA stated its commitment to ensure transparency in the conduct of its governing council meetings and has demonstrated progress in complying with by creating both an OMA and IPRA improvement plan, complete with SMART goals, to rectify the governance issue. On January 26th, 2021, all PCA governing board council members were provided virtual OPA and IPRA training by the NMAG office. The PCA governing council also intends to properly onboard any future governing board members with OMA and IPRA training. PCA has designated a records custodian within PCA’s administrative team as well as created an online request document as action steps to ensure that going forward, the public is able to request public records pursuant to IPRA.

Comprehensive Educational Program

PCA is an online school serving 1988 students across the state of New Mexico. PCA attributes its teaching methods, measures of student achievement, professional development for teachers, learning programs, parental/community involvement, the school’s evolving equity plan, and social and emotional student development to its ability to create a close-knit feel for families, staff, and students in the virtual world.

PCA is unique in that their virtual curriculum model, while asynchronous in structure, allows for daily synchronous support through tutoring, live lessons, and additional support for students in need.

Furthermore, live lessons are often co-taught so that teachers can switch off in terms of teaching, classroom management, and differentiation for students as needed. Lessons are also recorded so that students go back, and review materials as needed and can make up work if they miss a day. For example, during a student focus group, one student, who has a rigorous athletic career outside of school, said they appreciate the flexibility of PCA because they can work on schoolwork while on the road between meets but can also “pop-in” for tutoring support with teachers whenever they need. Similarly, during another focus group, a parent mentioned that their child, who suffers from health concerns, can access work and school at any time, whether it be in between doctors’ visits, or when the child is feeling healthy enough to engage in schoolwork. Regardless of the situation, one thing was made clear across stakeholder groups: PCA makes school possible for a large population of students, both with or without unique circumstances, in New Mexico.

While students at PCA can learn at their own pace, they are still tethered to teachers, parents, and their progress tracker to maintain accountability. Students can move as quickly or slowly through weekly assigned work and are given a wide variety of opportunity for support as needed. PCA staff rally together through a Connexus portal where admin, teachers, learning coaches, and support staff, can read notes, review special ed information, and maintain communication and contact about students in a similar way to what you’d see in a brick-and-mortar school building. Through student focus groups and general classroom observation, it was made clear that students are provided a rigorous curriculum that is balanced with scaffolding, student accountability, and community support.