

CSD Analysis of Amendment Request

For Explore Academy -Las Cruces 5/15/22

Charter History:

Explore Academy Las Cruces is authorized to serve 700 students in grades 6-12. It is in its first year of operation with a charter term ending in 2026.

The application was submitted in June 2019, on August 22, 2019 the Public Education Commission voted to deny the charter application. The school appealed the decision to the Secretary, who upheld the PEC's decision. So the school appealed to the District Court. In January 2021, the Court reversed the decision of the Secretary of Education and remanded the case back with the directive to grant the school a full five-year term.

As a result, the school had a truncated implementation year in 2021 but successfully met all requirements to open in the fall of 2021. The school resides at the 900 block of Telshore Blvd, in a building that has an e-occupancy certificate, but limited outdoor space for students. It is considered a temporary space, however, plans are to move into a different facility with capacity to serve more students.

Mission

The mission of Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) is to provide all students, regardless of background, with a personalized educational experience through the power of student choice, allowing each student to create a personalized and engaging educational pathway in preparation for college.

Enrollment

The school had a projected enrollment in 2021-22 of 240 students in grades 6-8, but the 40th day STARS report indicates the school had 94 students, by 80th day 88 students were enrolled. On the 120th day, the count was 87 students. The 80th day breakdown by grade is as follows: 6th had 29; Grade 7 had 35 and Grade 8 had 24 students.

Charter Performance

The Charter Schools Division visited the school in the fall, and again this spring. At this point, there is limited performance data to report. No audit reports exist and no state assessment data has been published.

The school shared iMSSA data with the site visit team, comparing Beginning of Year (BOY) and Middle of Year (MOY). Results were as follows, where ratings are “On Target” “Near Target” and “Needs Support”.

Grade/Assessment	Number Up in a Rating	Number Down in a Rating	Up/Down Trend (overall growth)
6th Reading	3	3	0
6th Language Usage	3	3	+2
6th Math	8	1	+7
7th Reading	3	3	0
7th Language Usage	6	3	+3
7th Math	10	4	+6
8th Reading	1	3	-2
8th Language Usage	3	0	+3
8th Math	3	2	+1

Amendment Plan

The school proposes an expansion to serve elementary grades by school year 2023-24, with current authorization to phase-in grades 9-12, this amendment would allow the school to become a K-12 school, growing by up to 4 grade levels in one year.

During the site visit the school reported it has 9 teachers on staff, this is after experiencing a RIF earlier in the year as enrollment did not materialize as planned. The amendment plan is to increase by 23 additional staff (see p2 of amendment) in the first year of elementary phase-in. The school intends to phase in Kindergarten, Grades 1 and 2, as well as the HS grade for 2023-24, Grade 10. The proposal includes the addition of 335 students for Grades K-5. Although the school has not submitted a CAP increase, the school anticipates it will sometime in the future (see p 8). The school describes outreach to families and describes significant interest but provides little details and no figures, although up to seven children of staff members may be interested.

The school provided meaningful information on staff training to support the expansion (p3), curricular planning in alignment with the Explore model of thematic, “flavor”-based instruction (p6), and mastery-based learning expectations. The school provides substantial curriculum

examples (p20-103) with images and instructional materials, organized by grade and subject level. The examples do not include alignment with NM Standards and Benchmarks, however plans are to have that prepared by August 2023 (p6).

The school provides floor plans of the facility it is in the process of “purchasing”; it is unclear how it is being purchased and who is involved in the purchase of the new building. Does the school have its own foundation? The school states that an amendment request for relocation is forthcoming (p8).

PEC Amendment Criteria with CSD rating

The PEC’s consideration to approve or deny a *Grade Level Change to Contract Amendment Request* considers the following factors, which will be weighed to determine if the applicant has the capacity to implement the requested expansion and ensure continued success in all applicable performance measures. Because the school is in its first year, information is limited.

<p>Has the applicant adequately met its mission;</p>	<p>Evidence of students having choices to access a personalized educational experience (course selection and flavors) personalized learning experiences, based on site visit, suggest the school meets this criteria.</p>
<p>Is the applicant’s academic performance stable or improving;</p>	<p>Limited information on interim assessments suggests overall student academic performance is improving.</p>
<p>Has the applicant demonstrated financial stability and good financial management (this will include a review of the financial audits for the past 3 years);</p>	<p>Audit information for the past three years is not available; the school’s budget was reduced this year when less than half the projected enrollment materialized, creating some financial instability.</p>
<p>Has the applicant adequately met its organizational performance requirements;</p>	<p>Information still pending end of the year reports. Working to meet.</p>

<p>Has the applicant demonstrated community need, support, and satisfaction; and</p>	<p>Information on need or support for expansion not verifiable, although suggested by the applicant.</p>
<p>Has the applicant demonstrated capacity to successfully implement the requested expansion?</p>	<p>The school is less than one year of operation, and is still “working to meet” this indicator.</p>

The amendment specifies the School’s Grade Level Change to Contract amendment request eligibility criteria as follows:

- The school must confer with the PEC to convert to the 2019 contract template within 30 days of a vote on this request;
- The school’s governing board is in compliance with all reporting requirements; and
- In the prior three (3) years, the school has:
 - o Received no lower than a “C” letter grade on the state report card (applicable for SY18 and prior) AND received no lower than the top 75% academic designation on the NM System of School Support and Accountability (applicable for SY19 and forward);
 - o Received an overall academic tier rating of Tier 1 or Tier 2 on the school’s PEC approved Academic Performance Framework, for years in which a PEC Tier Level is available; And
 - o Has not had its board of finance revoked.
- If the fiscal year has started or will start prior to the request being considered by the PEC, the amendment request will be effective only in the subsequent fiscal year

Not all criteria has been met.