

## School Response to the CSD Analysis for the Amendment Request to add grades K-5 at Explore Academy - Las Cruces

<p>Alignment to NM Standards and Benchmarks</p>	<p>The CSD analysis indicates that “the examples do not include alignment with NM Standards and Benchmarks, however plans are to have that prepared by August 2023”. That is inaccurate. Each of the 13 curriculum samples provided are aligned with the NM Content and Benchmark Standards, including the NM CCSS for Math and ELA, as well as the NM STEM Ready Science Standards. The reference to being prepared by August 2023 does not reference standards alignment, but rather the development of the thematic, flavored curriculum created by teachers that is a core component of the Explore Learning Model.</p>
<p>Facility</p>	<p>The CSD analysis mentions the history regarding the denial of the initial application and the subsequent appeals. For those commissioners who were not on the PEC at the time, please know that the new charter school application was denied based primarily on the fact that the school had not secured a specific facility at the time of the application. However, that is not an expectation at that point in the process, which is why the court overturned the decision.</p> <p>The CSD analysis references the fact that the current facility is a temporary location with “limited outdoor space”. It was established during the implementation and contract process that 900 N. Telshor was a temporary building as the school had limited time to secure a facility due to late approval and the expedited time frame to open the school. Also, there is indeed a very large parking lot area that is used for outdoor activities such as lunch and PE.</p> <p>There were several questions asked by CSD in the analysis regarding the purchase of another facility which the school is relocating to, regardless of the outcome of this request.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Does the school have a foundation?</b> Yes, the school has a foundation and the school provided an MOU and conflict of interest statements to CSD, all of which are attached to the current charter. And more recently, two months ago, the school responded to a request from CSD to confirm membership of the foundation’s board. Lastly, there were changes to the foundation board directors recently. This was reviewed and approved by the school’s Governing Board at their May meeting. An amendment request to formally advise the PEC and CSD of that change has been submitted.</li> <li>● <b>Who is involved in the purchase? How is it being purchased?</b> The Explore Academy Las Cruces Foundation has purchased a facility located one block from the current site. The School is going to lease the building from the Foundation for its existing students, but the new site has room to expand to 700, the enrollment cap. This site has been approved by the PSFA and a school location amendment has been submitted to the PEC via the CSD.</li> </ul>
<p>Enrollment</p>	<p>The CSD analysis outlines a high projected enrollment that the school did not meet. This is true, however, the factors that contributed to this are not mentioned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Late nature of the final approval and the expedited implementation as a result</li> <li>● Limited recruitment efforts due to the pandemic</li> <li>● Had to keep enrollment low due to the actual capacity of the temporary building</li> <li>● Limited number of classrooms in the temporary facility meant that the school was unable to recruit as expected due to the commitment to low class sizes which is part of the educational program in the charter contract and had been promised to families and teachers</li> <li>● The school had hoped to move into a permanent facility on or before the middle of the first year of operations but when those plans fell through, we realized we would not be able to drastically increase enrollment.</li> </ul>

<p>Finances</p>	<p>The CSD analysis mentions that the budget was reduced due to low enrollment; this is indeed true based on the challenges outlined above. However, it should be noted that the school handled this appropriately by adjusting the budget and, unfortunately, making the very difficult decision to conduct a RIF.</p> <p>The financial instability experienced by the school was primarily due to the delay in receiving the awarded CSP grant money, in the amount of over \$570K. This was intended to support the start-up and was not made available to the school until January.</p>
<p>Organizational Performance</p>	<p>While it is true that ratings are still pending due to end of year reports and updates from PED bureaus, this is true of all schools. Explore Academy - Las Cruces is definitely on track for "Meets Standard" rather than the "Working to Meet" rating indicated in the analysis. In the <a href="#">preliminary report</a> provided by the CSD, all areas are green except for two (2) indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Attendance goals were rated as "Working to Meet" because the school showed 93%, which is below the target of 95%. Given the pandemic during the school's first year of operations, this is an excellent rate of attendance.</li> <li>● The "Meeting Reporting Requirements" was rated as "Working to Meet" due to a notation that the school is "in the process of establishing an Equity Council". This is not accurate. The school has an Equity Council that has met several times during the first year, in partnership with another school. The Explore Academy - Las Cruces principal, a teacher, a community member, and a parent all served on this council and participated in healthy discussions, including the Black Education Act requirements and the definition of 'racial aggression'. The school does intend to <i>increase</i> the membership of the Equity Council for 2022-2023.</li> </ul> <p>An error appeared for the Transportation indicator in the preliminary report, which the site visit team has since revised. CSD rated this as "Not Applicable". However, the school does provide bus transportation to and from school via a contracted provider. <i>In fact, Explore Academy - Las Cruces is the ONLY charter school in the city that provides school transportation.</i></p>
<p>Amendment Eligibility Criteria</p>	<p>The last page of the CSD analysis lists amendment eligibility criteria, as listed in the policy and the request form, which are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 2019 version of the contract</li> <li>● Governing Board in compliance</li> <li>● In the prior 3 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Received no lower than a "C" or no lower than top 75%</li> <li>○ Overall Tier 1 or 2</li> <li>○ Not had board of finance revoked</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>The CSD Analysis ends with "not all criteria has been met". While that is technically true, the school does meet the first two criteria and the prior 3 year academic criteria has (a) not been available for any schools and (b) not been used by this commission to determine approval of prior requests of the same type.</p>