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SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

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GOVERNOR

**Charter Schools Division  
2021-22 Preliminary Renewal Analysis  
November 1, 2022**

**School Name:** Altura Preparatory Charter School

**School Address:** 8650 Alameda Blvd NE, Albuquerque, NM 87122

**Head Administrator:** Lissa Hines and Meaghan Hindman

**Governing Board Chair:** Christine Sargent

**Business Manager:** Ashley Woodard

**Authorized Grade Levels:** K-5

**Authorized Enrollment:** 396

**2021-22 End of Year Enrollment:** 188

**Contract Term:** 2018-2023

**Mission:** Altura Preparatory School will prepare students from all backgrounds with the academic skills and personal character to become agents for change, ready to reach high levels of success in middle school, high school, and post-secondary pursuits.

**Educational Program as written in the contract:**

The School's educational program shall be as described below:

- i. Extended School Day Altura Prep's school day is extended, 4 days per week, and one day per week the day is shortened for professional development for teachers.
- ii. Genius Hour Weekly Self-directed learning and project-time for all students to pursue a passion, develop creativity, and apply their learning in other areas.
- iii. 1:1 Blended Learning CSD Preliminary Renewal Part A 8.19.22 Altura Page 2 of 12 Students will be provided access to technology to enhance students' abilities to develop 21st century skills and allow teachers to provide learning opportunities tailored to individual student needs.

- iv. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and REACH Core Values SEL at Altura Prep is built around our REACH core values, which tie into the five key elements of social emotional learning (self-regulation, self-management, social awareness, relationships, and responsible decision-making). We embed our school values of Responsibility, Empathy, Agency, Curiosity, and Humor/Hard Work (REACH) and other essential skills, habits, and mindsets into the school day, through content lessons.
- v. Integrated STEAM Curriculum The school will implement STEAM project-based learning, which will be based on exploration and developing students' curiosity about the world around them. Students will present projects through demonstrations.
- vi. Teacher Specialization Each Altura Prep teacher focuses on teaching one or two specific content areas. Each student has more than one core teacher in a rotation designed to ensure all students have access to ELA, Math, and project-based learning daily.

### **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**

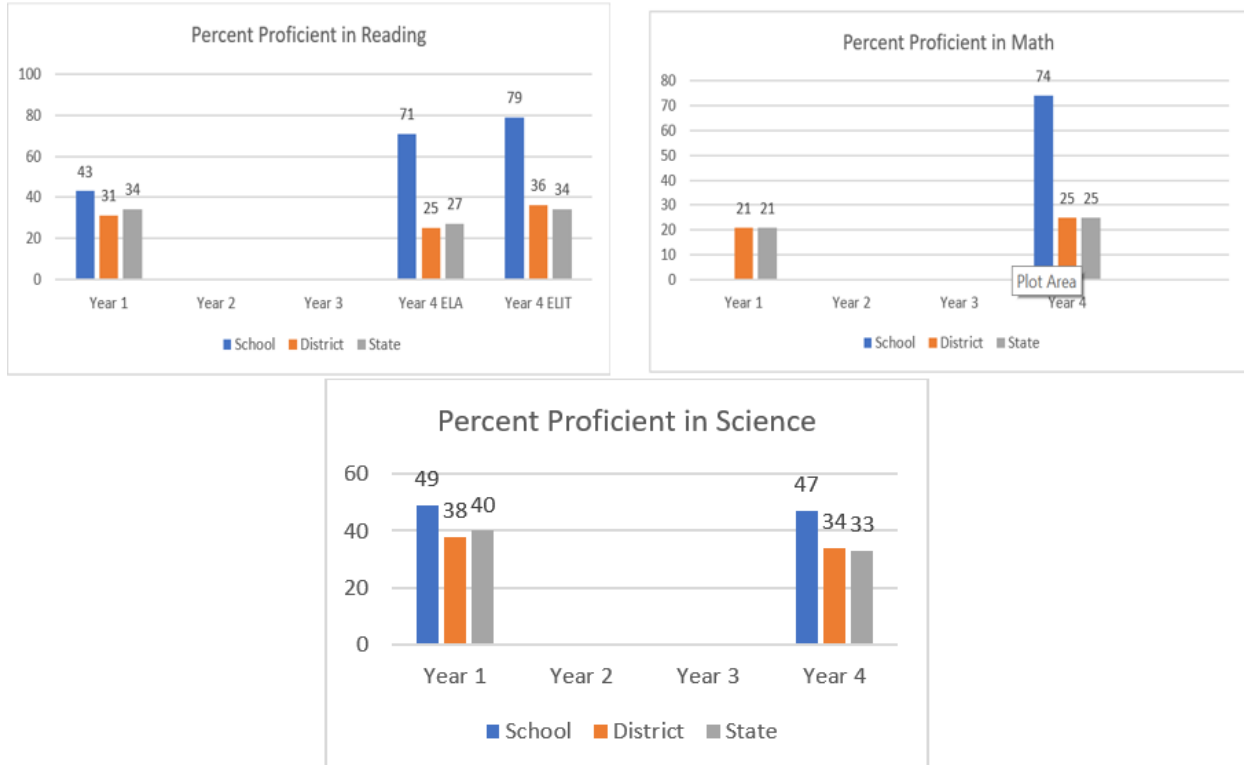
Part A of the Renewal Application is provided by the Charter Schools Division (CSD). All other parts of the application are provided by the school.

**Part B: Progress Report**

The school’s narratives in Part B are rated **Meets the Standards, Demonstrates Substantial Progress, or Failing to Demonstrate Progress** according to the rubric on pages 6-7 of the 2022 Charter School Renewal Application.

<b>Part B: Progress Report</b>	
<b>Academic Performance</b>	<b>Rating</b>
1.a. Student Outcomes	Meets the Standards
1.b. Mission-Specific Goals	N/A
<b>Organizational Performance</b>	<b>Rating</b>
2.a. Educational Program	Demonstrates Substantial Progress
2.b. Financial Compliance	Demonstrates Substantial Progress
2.c. Governance Responsibilities	Meets the Standards
2.d. Equity and Identity	Demonstrates Substantial Progress
2.e. Tribal Consultation	N/A
2.f. Other Performance Framework Indicators	Demonstrates Substantial Progress

## 1.a. Student Outcomes



In the first year of operation, Altura Prep was a Spotlight school and had an overall standing of 54 according to the NM System of School Support and Accountability; in that school year (2018-2019) the school had a 43% reading proficiency. While the state does not have data for school years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, in the most recent year, Altura Prep's proficiency scores were well above state and district averages.

The school provides evidence in the renewal application that even when state testing was not available, the school continued to utilize school assessments and data to drive decision-making. The importance and use of data was confirmed at both the annual and renewal site visits. Proficiency scores are above district and state averages. The renewal application provides data in Istation (math and reading) and on the NM-MSSA. The Istation results show that in each year of the contract, always 10% or fewer of students were at level one by the end of the year and that the number of level 4 and 5 students consistently increased throughout the year. The NM-MSSA results show the majority of students are on target for their grade level.

There is evidence that leaders and staff were deeply committed to students during the pandemic. The renewal application addresses learning loss and discusses specific steps taken to address deficiencies in outcomes due to online and hybrid learning. Those steps included in-person learning for students with special needs as soon as it was permissible, and in-person one-on-one sessions for all students for assessment data. These individualized approaches to learning were confirmed during the parent, teacher, and Head Administrator (HA) interviews. Parents specifically mentioned that they received personal phone calls 1-2 times a week from teachers during online learning.

**2.a. Educational Program** There is observable evidence as well as documentation to verify that the Educational Program, as delineated in the contract, is being implemented with fidelity. Notably, the specific educational programmatic terms of the contract were lauded by staff, students, and parents as the most innovative and unique components of the school.

- The school maintains a 7-hour school day versus the district's 6.4-hour school day (extended learning).
- Focus groups verified the one-hour enrichment class called "inquiry" when students are given a choice in what they can research and pursue (Genius Hour). Students and teachers did not specifically refer to this as "Genius Hour," however, all confirmed that students were given this enrichment time based on personal choice.
- The HA focus group and classroom observations confirmed the use of the blended learning model. Headphones and audiobooks are used to accommodate students' unique learning needs. All students had access to electronic devices that were used frequently to enhance lessons.
- All focus groups and classroom observations verified the strong dedication to REACH and to supporting students' social and emotional learning. The renewal application explained and observations confirmed that students participate in morning mindfulness and in Friday circles to discuss the core values. The school focuses on a monthly value, "kindness," "fairness," etc. These core values manifest during lessons as students are listening attentively, respecting their peers, and showing curiosity about class content.
- STEAM is a regular class for all students and teacher and student focus groups verified this provided enrichment is for all students. Classroom observations revealed student work as they went through the scientific method. Teacher focus groups included "STEAM" teachers who spoke about specific projects that students were completing in class.
- Teacher Specialization, as described in the contract and the renewal application, was verified and lauded during the teacher focus groups as one of the most innovative and positive components of the school. Teachers explained that specialization greatly enhanced their lesson development and delivery. Veteran, and former private-school teachers explained that it was the best system that they had experienced. Teachers and parents also discussed the many benefits of students switching classes at an early age and at having more than just one teacher. Parents said that this helped prepare students for middle and high school and that students learned more because of the diversity of teachers that their children were exposed to at an early age.
- While the two-administrator component is not specifically mentioned in the contract terms, it was apparent that the dual-leadership is an appreciated and fundamental element of the school's success. Teachers explained that both leaders were readily available to help because they were not stretched as thin as a single administrator might be. Veteran teachers also stated that the leaders at the school were so much more involved than administrators at traditional public schools. Parents stated that both leaders were equally helpful and the governing board stated that the leaders' strengths were complementary.

While all the educational programmatic components of the contract are evident and verifiable, the component of the contract that the school does not receive a *demonstrated record of meeting* is the mission itself.

The first part of the mission states that it will prepare students from “all backgrounds with the academic skills and personal character to become agents for change.” Regarding preparing “students from all backgrounds,” the school does serve (as stated in the renewal application and again in focus groups) students from 17 different zip codes. However, the school’s student demographics are notably different from the district and state. Particularly, the school does not have high numbers of students identified in the consolidated Yazzie vs. Martinez lawsuit, namely, low-income, Native American, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities. When asked about recruitment efforts to ensure that more students in need had access to the commendable and successful program at Altura Prep, the school leaders and governing board members stated that they use social media to target zip codes for recruiting, but lamented the fact that NM law did not allow charters a lottery preference. It appeared that the board did not fully understand that “targeted recruitment” was permissible and encouraged and was different from “lottery preference.” In the Bloomwell Group research used and provided by the school regarding evidence of effective recruitment strategies, it shows that “digital marketing” is 19% effective. The leaders of the school talked about how Covid slowed/ended their “community outreach” activities (20% effective). The research provided also shows other effective recruitment strategies, though less so than the aforementioned. A more comprehensive and vigorous effort to attract and serve students from all backgrounds, especially those most in need of such a successful program was presented in the original charter application, but is not currently implemented by the school. As the school’s enrollment trend over the charter term shows, the school has increasingly enrolled more white students and fewer economically disadvantaged students, and fewer students with disabilities and English learners.

In the second part of the mission, the school intends for students to have personal character and to be agents for change; however, in the narrative provided by the school in Part B, the school leaves out the “agents for change” component and when all focus groups were questioned about this element, it appeared that it was not an essential part of the school community. The HA and Teacher focus groups discussed “kindness day,” and some “community outreach;” however, the HA focus group confirmed that this component is not executed in a structured or robust way.

Finally, the school’s mission states that it will prepare students to be ready to reach high levels of success in middle school, high school, and post-secondary pursuits. It is evident that high expectations and high levels of achievement are encouraged and achieved at the Altura Prep; all focus groups confirm that students are well-prepared academically and socially. Currently, the school does not formally collect data regarding student performance after graduation from the K-5 school. When asked about this possibility, the HA’s stated that they just had their first fifth grade class graduate and that they did not have a plan to follow Altura Preparatory students once they left beyond the informal check in with families who still had other children at the school. The school has yet to establish a more formal process for assessing whether or not students are successful once leaving Altura Prep.

**2.b. Financial Compliance** The school has made great progress in reducing the number of audit findings during the contract term. By making quick management decisions to choose a business management firm that best suits their needs and by making the necessary policy changes and process improvements to ensure findings are not repeated. The two audit findings in FY21 are the result of the same problem, the lack of adequate timing of funding to support the school's considerable growth from the prior year.

This school has experienced several financial challenges in its short life, including but not limited to: delayed grant reimbursement requests, a delayed SEG advance request, the timing of SEG funding after doubling in size in FY21, and the need to seek another school site location. The change in school site location had a significant impact on maintenance and operations expenses. From FY20 to FY22 combined expenses for rent, utilities, and insurance rose by 70%. Except for maintenance and operations expenses, the rest of the administrative support expenses have remained steady and decreased in percentage as the enrollment grows and resources are spent in direct instruction, student, and instructional support.

### **2.c. Governance Responsibilities**

The Governing Board has always had six members and the school has always been in compliance with training requirements. During the Governing Board focus groups during the annual and renewal site visits it was clear that the Governing Board is committed to the school, its staff, and its students. The two members in the most recent focus group discussed the frequent meetings on academics, finance, and diversity.

### **2.d. Equity and Identity**

The renewal application describes various methods of ensuring a commitment to equity and identity, including: annually reviewing student demographics as a way of reflecting on whether the school is attracting/serving students from all backgrounds; providing all communication in both English and Spanish; providing transportation to the school from the neighborhood where the school was formerly located; holding teachers accountable for discrepancies in student outcomes among subgroups; and ensuring that all students have access to the same opportunities. The renewal application and teacher, student, and HA focus groups confirmed that all students participate in enrichment activities that are often accessible only to gifted students in traditional schools. Several focus groups acknowledged this inclusion as one of the more powerful strategies at the school.

To comply with the Martinez-Yazzie mandate to provide culturally and linguistically relevant (CLR) instruction and to support and validate students' cultures, identities, and sense of belonging, the school has submitted its CLR Readiness Assessment but has not yet submitted a CLR Inventory or Framework for implementation of CLR objectives.

The school has an equity council and the focus groups stated that the council has read *Conversations about Race* and were just having their first meeting after the renewal site visit. The Equity Council is made up of three staff and three parents. The CSD acknowledges the challenges in establishing an advisory group in a small charter school, however the directive from the PED to develop and utilize an Equity Council as a response to the Martinez and Yazzie

lawsuit was communicated to public schools in New Mexico in 2019, and while the school itself purports to serve a diverse population, it has yet to fully establish an Equity Council that demonstrates the school’s commitment to diversifying and adequately serving students who would most benefit from an innovative program like Altura Prep’s.

The application does not mention a specific plan to serve English Learners and when asked about serving ELs in the teacher focus group, the response was that what was good for ELs was administered to all students. A specific plan should include details about increasing EL students’ proficiency in Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing in English as well as intentional instructional strategies for identified EL’s.

Finally, it is recommended by the Center for Learner Equity that school leaders tackle the national and ubiquitous criticism of charter schools not being inclusive enough by developing and publishing “affirmative language related to the school’s commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.” There is evidence that Altura Prep leadership takes several steps to ensure diversity; however, at this point, the diversity of the school’s student population is limited. One recruitment flyer shared with CSD states “diversity makes us stronger together.” The CSD recommends in the 2021 Lottery FAQ sheet that all obstacles that could be conceived by a family as potentially exclusionary, be removed. Altura Preparatory’s lottery enrollment form asks, “How did you hear about us?” Therefore, the school’s lottery process does not follow guidelines and feedback provided by the CSD, for ensuring all information collected prior to enrollment is limited.

**2.f. Other Performance Framework Indicators**

The school has earned three (3) repeat ratings of working to meet standard, and four (4) does not meet standard ratings over the course of their contract term. Of these ratings, 2a, 2b, 2c, and 2f were covered in the above financial section. The school gave satisfactory responses for previous ratings for indicators 1c and 1d, both of which have received meets standard for SY2020-21 and SY2021-22.

Unrated Sections of Application	
Part D: Petitions of Support	Submitted as Required
Part E: Facilities	Submitted as Required
Part F: Change in Authorizer	N/A