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Charter Schools Division
2021-22 REVISED Preliminary Renewal Analysis
November 8, 2022

School Name: New Mexico Connections Academy

School Address: 130 Siringo Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505

Head Administrator: Sandy Beery

Governing Board Chair: Senator Mark Boitano

Business Manager: Ashley Woodard

Authorized Grade Levels: 4-12

Authorized Enrollment: 2,000

Current Enrollment: 1,297

Current Authorizer: Public Education Commission

Contract Term: 2018-2023

Mission: The mission of New Mexico Connections Academy (NMCA) is to help each 4-12th grade student, throughout the state of New Mexico who needs an alternative to the traditional classroom for a particular time period, maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program, access to high quality NM-certified teachers, and high parental involvement. The mission will also include a school-with-in-a-school model with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Educational Program of School as written in the contract:

- i. NMCA will be a virtual school serving students statewide.

- ii. The primary building blocks of NMCA’s instructional approach will be individualized instruction through a personalized learning plan (PLP) and active parental involvement.
- iii. NMCA will provide a STEM Academy. The STEM Academy will consist of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics courses. Lessons and activities may include but are not limited to field trips, guest speakers, and community service opportunities.

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

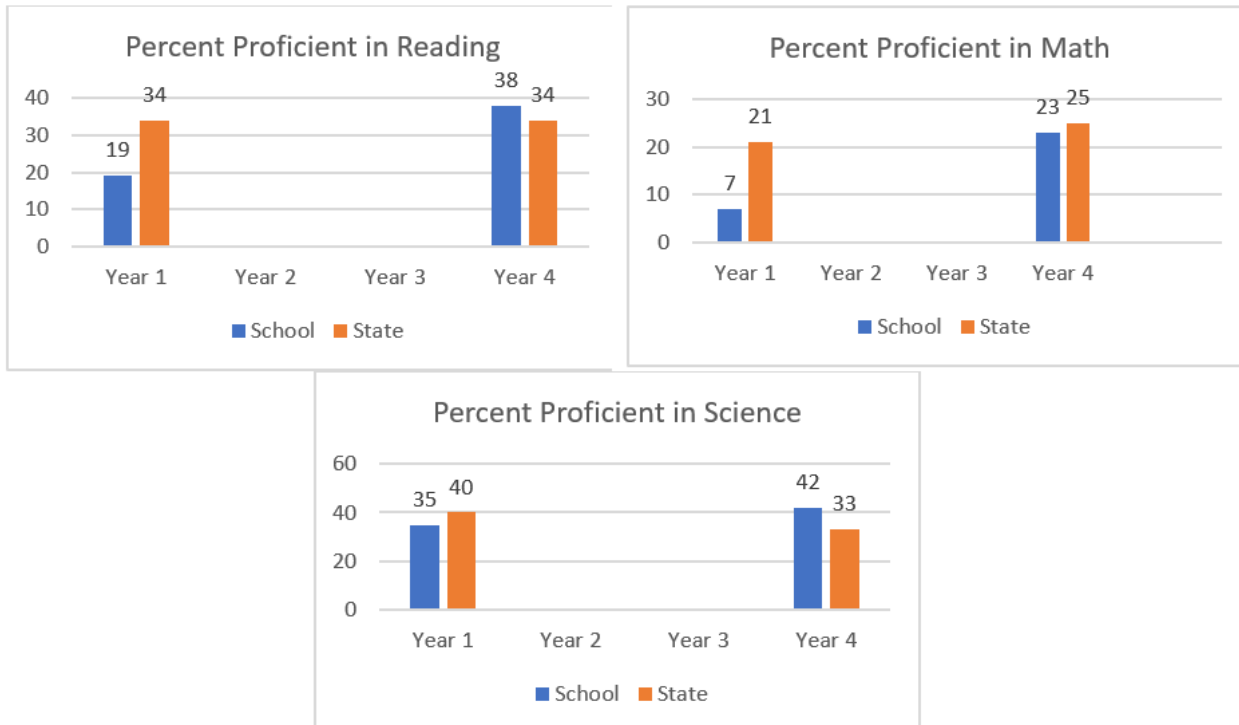
Part A of the Renewal Application is provided by the Charter Schools Division (CSD). All other parts of the application are provided by the school.

Part B: Progress Report

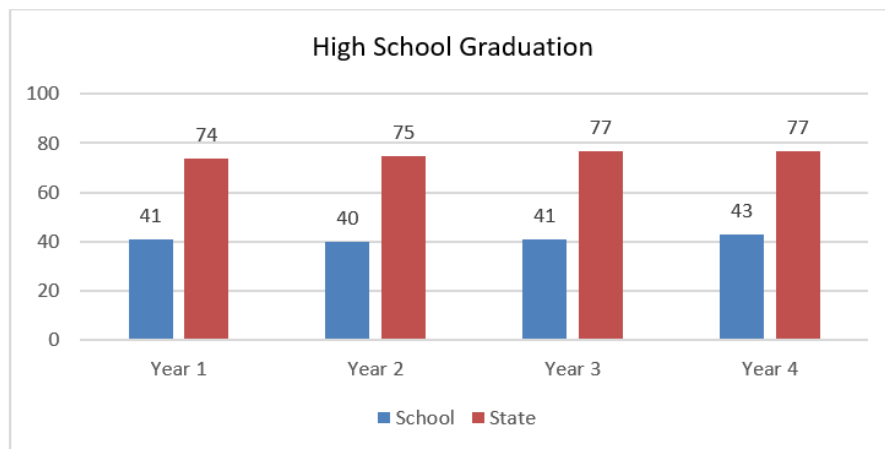
The school’s narratives in Part B are rated **Meets the Standards, Demonstrates Substantial Progress, or Failing to Demonstrate Progress** according to the rubric on pages 6-7 of the 2022 Charter School Renewal Application.

Part B: Progress Report	
Academic Performance	Rating
1.a. Student Outcomes	Failing to Demonstrate Progress
1.b. Mission-Specific Goals	Meets the Standards
Organizational Performance	Rating
2.a. Educational Program	Demonstrates Substantial Progress
2.b. Financial Compliance	Demonstrates Substantial Progress
2.c. Governance Responsibilities	Demonstrates Substantial Progress
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

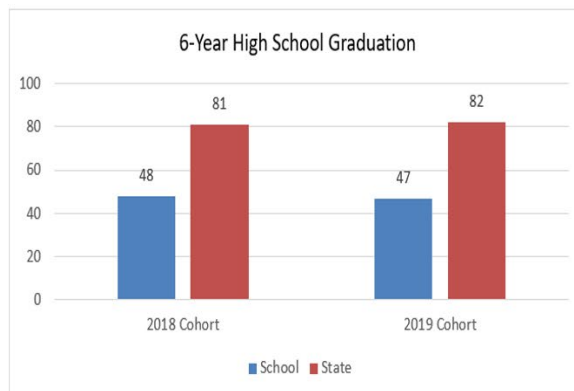
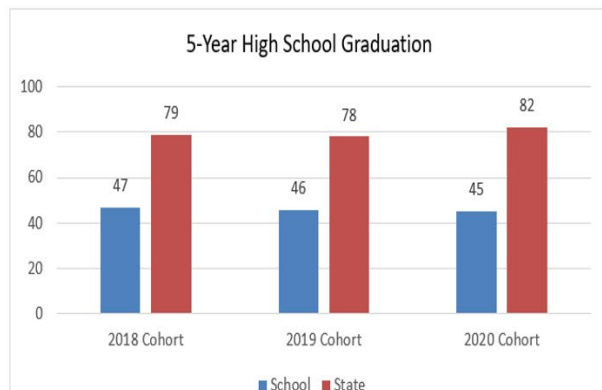


New Mexico Connections Academy (NMCA) has demonstrated growth towards meeting department standards for proficiency rates from 2018-19 to 2021-22. Proficiency rates increased significantly in reading, math and science. The school slightly exceeded the state average in reading and science during the most recent year tested, and fell slightly below in math.



Graduation rates continue to be an area of concern for the school with 4-year rates consistently and significantly below state average each contract year. The school uses a virtual graduation planning tool to assist families and staff with defining and tracking graduation requirements that are tailored to diploma type and post-graduation goals. During the leadership meeting, the school reported that 85% of high-school students are considered off-cohort (credits completed do not align with years in school). NMCA staff creates support for these students, such as credit

recovery plans, check-ins, as well as pulls in additional support to help get students back on track so that they can graduate on time. Five- and 6-year graduation rates are shown below.



The school's leadership team reported an upward trend towards their number of students reaching course completion; data to support this be provided in the school response to the preliminary report. Given the virtual nature of NMCA, educational staff and leadership can look at data in multiple ways, which is then used to tailor student support on an individualized basis. For example, staff can see whether a student is on track, their percentage of work complete, how much time was spent doing work, and whether students are engaging.

NMCA uses STAR 360 as their interim assessment tool. The school considers itself to be "data rich" because data is easily accessible and integrated into the learning platform. Teachers can access it in real-time to determine the need to support students school-wide, by grade level, and on an individual basis. It also informs department-level decisions regarding instructional strategy and direction. Parents, educational staff, and leadership confirmed that families have immediate and constant access to their student's curricular data. However, the school is currently working with its Learning Coach Specialist to figure out how to best present interim data to parents in a meaningful and helpful way.

NMCA received a score of "working to meet," for state testing participation rates and fell "below standard" for student participation for EL ACCESS testing participation rates last year. During a focus group with the school's EL coordinator, it was reported that there were state-wide technological errors with the Widow website for the EL ACCESS test, which made administering the test more difficult. The errors resulted in NMPED extending the testing window, which in turn, caused overlap with state standardized testing, making participation more difficult. Both the leadership and EL coordinator also reported that families, most notably families in the Gallup area, were uncomfortable with bringing their families to testing sites because of the pandemic. According to PED Accountability data, only 41% of ELs were tested on the ACCESS in 2021-22. The school test coordinator states that the rate is 55%, which is still far below the required 95%.

1.b. Mission Specific Goals

Based on data provided by the school, NMCA met its mission goal for grades 4-8 and grades 9-12 for SY18-19. In SY19-20, SY20-21, and SY21-22, the school exceeded its goal for grades 4-8 and met its goal for grades 9-12.

2.a. Educational Program

There is observable evidence as well as documentation to verify that most of NMCA's Educational Program, as delineated in the contract, is being implemented with fidelity.

NMCA is a virtual school serving students across the state of New Mexico. The sentiment across stakeholder groups is that NMCA provides a viable, high quality alternative educational platform for students who are in need. The leadership team reported that during the pandemic, students and families were provided with stability because the school is virtual by design. The school has been able to support off-cohort students and has systems in place to help these students to get back on track. The school is also able to provide a wide variety of courses because they are virtual (AP, science, CTE, etc).

Given the school's virtual nature, educational staff can individualize instructional strategies. During the teacher focus group, teachers reported that they have immediate access to student information, including attendance, participation, assessment, and grades. Teachers track their students' progress, which informs how they individualize as-needed interventions. Teachers reported that the school's Special Education Department is one of NMCA's biggest strengths and student support assets. The school has a large special ed population and as a result, students have multiple layers of support, and depending on student-need as outlined in a child's IEP, may be given an alternative curriculum. Students also receive one-on-one support through interventionist teachers. The school also has a full time EL Teacher who helps support the 42 EL students enrolled at the end of SY 2021-22. She also helps support parents who do not speak English. Teachers have reported demonstrated improvements between general education and specialized education teachers.

High parent engagement is a part of the school's educational program. Families must appoint each student with a learning coach; this can be a parent or parent-appointed adult, who agrees to take on the responsibility to support their student with online learning. Last year CSD reviewed the parent orientation video. The leadership team reported that the school is always working towards increasing family engagement and social connections for students and families.

The school has not implemented the "school within a school" model for the STEM Academy as described in both the mission and educational program. Leadership reports that data they have collected indicate that the "school within a school" model will not provide students with a higher quality STEM education than the school is currently providing. The model, which in a traditional district school gives the "school within a school" more autonomy vis-à-vis the district in terms of curriculum, budgeting, etc., but according to school leadership, has no real benefit in the context of a charter school, which already has this autonomy and is not under a district, only creates additional administrative structures within the school.

As a potential replacement for the STEM academy, leadership reported that CTE is gaining traction in the virtual world, and as a result, will make more sense as a viable option for students. NMCA is currently working to figure out what a successful CTE program will look like so that it works for all students at NMCA. The leadership team mentioned in-person classes, partnerships with community colleges, and providing students with a wider selection of CTE-based electives as possibilities under consideration for a robust CTE program. However those

programmatic elements are not currently in place and the school has submitted no amendments to the contract to eliminate the STEM academy as part of the education program.

The school has three contracts with Pearson, LLC, to provide services in the following areas:

- Bundled Services: student information system (SIS), gradebook, curriculum, platform for live lesson, PD, and support provided as requested by NMCA;
- IT Support and Technology: laptops for students (some students opt to use their own; NMCA pays only for computers provided by vendor) and all technical support required by students and school staff;
- Special Education consulting and ancillary services.

2.b. Financial Compliance

The school received a few audit findings in the significant deficiency category early in the contract term, which have not been repeated. The most recent finding fell in the category of other matters, for which the school has provided an appropriate corrective action plan.

Since FY19, an average of 89% of operating funds were spent in instruction and support. Included in the 89% were payments made to Connections Education LLC, under three contracts. The contracts are expensed under the categories of other contact services, computer rental and specialist services. The total amount paid to Connections Education LLC, from FY19 to FY22 under the categories mentioned, is approximately \$20M.

Talks about purchasing office space began the summer of 2019. In July 2020, working with a commercial realtor, the school purchased a 9,000 square foot office space in Santa Fe. After tenants moved out in September 2021, the school began to renovate the space and moved in around December 2021. NMCA maintained a robust cash balance in the early part of the contract term, which decreased by half after the building purchase and renovations were complete. The school occupies 8,000 square feet of the office and intends to lease out the remaining 1,000 square feet.

Significant enrollment growth occurred between FY20 and FY21. School leaders conservatively project no more than a 4% increase annually in the next two years. About 25% of instruction and instruction support FTEs are funded by grants and half of grant funded FTEs in FY22 were paid under COVID relief funds.

2.c. Governance Responsibilities

NMCA has met all the compliance requirements of its governance responsibilities over the course of the current charter term. The school's governing council has maintained board members, and while there were discrepancies in previous years regarding training hours for one Governing Council member, it was determined that the school has met the annual training requirements and has followed all reporting requirements to the Public Education Department. Of concern, is evidence in board meeting minutes, that Pearson representatives regularly attend the governing council meetings, including closed sessions. The head administrator and governing board members state that this is to answer questions on an as-needed basis.

2.d. Equity and Identity

NMCA reports that it continuously works to improve the engagement of some targeted populations that have typically been underserved. Demographics by ethnicity reflect percentages of students that are representative of the state. Demographics by subgroup reflect that while the school’s population of students with disabilities matches the state, the school’s EL percentages are well below the state average.

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, Inventory, and Framework for implementation of CLR objectives.

The school has an established equity council, which has recommended creating smaller class sizes, adding additional grade-level advisers, and adding additional counselors, as well as a social worker, to their staff. The school has implemented these changes and hired a Learning Coach Support Specialist, to help support parents in their role. NMCA is currently consulting PED to verify that they have met the requirements of the Black Education Act. The school plans to have their next Equity Council meeting by December 10, where they will look at short cycle data, stakeholder survey data, student SEL data, and 2021-22 summative proficiency data to specific areas of concern.

Across stakeholder groups, staff, students, and families all expressed that they feel supported, heard, and welcome at school.

2.f. Other Performance Framework Indicators

The school has earned five (5) repeat ratings of working to meet standard and seven (7) does not meet standard ratings over the course of their contract term. Of these ratings, 2a was covered in the above financial section. The school has provided a satisfactory explanation for all indicators with Does Not Meet Standard or repeated Working to Meet Standard ratings.

Indicator 4.b. Attendance and Retention: Assessment participation continues to present challenges for the school. The state target for assessment participation is 95%. The school’s participation rate in 2021-22 for ELA was 84%, math 85%, science 84%, and ACCESS EL proficiency 41% (according to PED Accountability; the school’s DTC indicated that the ACCESS rate was actually 55%).

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