

**Charter Schools Division
Amendment Request Analysis**

School Name: Explore Academy- Las Cruces

Date of Public Education Commission (PEC) Meeting: March 24, 2023

Amendment Request (verbatim)

Explore Academy- Las Cruces requests PEC approval to amend its current enrollment cap:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces is seeking an enrollment cap increase in conjunction with an amendment request to add grades K - 5 to the existing charter contract. The current contract authorizes the school to serve 700 students in grades 6-12. The Governing Board respectfully requests that the enrollment cap be increased to 1,200 to accommodate the addition of six elementary grade levels (K-5).

Enrollment was ~85 students in grades 6-8 during the first year of operation (2021-2022) and increased (more than doubled) to ~180 students in grades 6-9 for this school year (2022-2023). The school expects continued growth as it establishes itself in the Community.

As pointed out last year by CSD, the school did not meet its original projected enrollment during the first year. This is primarily due to the late approval of the new charter school and the need to complete implementation and planning in under six (6) months. Additionally, the school was unable to secure its preferred facility due to the delay in approval. As a result, the school was housed in a temporary facility. The late start and the less-than-ideal facility made recruitment much more difficult than anticipated.

The school has since relocated to 850 N. Telshor Blvd, Las Cruces, NM, literally a few doors down from the temporary facility, for the 2022-2023 school year. The facility was a former community college and was remodeled specifically for the needs of the charter school. The students and staff are very proud of, and happy to be in, this beautiful building. Please note that the school has included all details and data for both amendment requests within the accompanying Grade Level Change Amendment Request document, including the rationale for the change (in both the grade levels served and the enrollment cap increase) and a narrative addressing items 1-7 listed below.

Also, if approved, the school's facility and administration are prepared to cope with the addition of a K-5 program. For a potential soft launch in the fall of 2023, the school's facility is equipped to handle a shift to partially house students in K-5 with adequate separation from its existing 6-10 population. For future expansion, the school is negotiating, pending approval by the PEC, for the long-term use of a nearby site to split the K-5 students from those in grades 6-12 while still maintaining shared use of bus transportation. (If/when that is finalized, the school will submit the appropriate amendment request for school relocation and/or additional square footage.)

CSD Analysis

CSD acknowledges the effort of Explore Academy- Las Cruces to prepare this Enrollment Cap Amendment Request. In the review of this request, several areas of information were considered.

The school submitted a Grade-level Amendment Request to CSD for consideration by the PEC in June of 2022. At that time the following concerns, which relate directly to the current Amendment Request were identified:

School-related Data

- The Commission was not presented with three (3) years of validated, operational data as a part of the June 2022 Amendment Request, as previously required, per PEC policy, to consider a school for expansion. Three (3) years of operational data is not available for this school at this time.

- The school did not meet its projected enrollment during its first year of operation in 2021-2022 with grades. For 2022-2023, the school’s enrollment projection was 250+ students in grades 6-9. Per PED 120-day enrollment data, the enrollment was 175 students, which represents 70% of the projected enrollment. The school has reported a projected enrollment for 2023-2024 of 300 students in grades 6-10.

- As part of the school’s 2021-22 Annual report, the attendance rate of students was identified as a concern and rated “Working to Meet” (Indicator 4.b. The school’s attendance rate as reported in the STARS 2021-22 EOY report was 92%. The target rate is 95%).

Enrollment by District by School

School Year: 2022-2023
 Snapshot Date: 2023-03-01 - 120D



Because of the width of this report export into Excel

DISTRICT NAME	DISTRICT CODE	LOCATION NAME	LOCATION ID	ORG TYPE	SCHOOL TYPE DESC	GRADE 06	GRADE 07	GRADE 08	GRADE 09	GRADE 10	GRADE 11	GRADE 12	TOTAL ENROLLMENT
EXPLORE ACADEMY LAS CRUCES	581	EXPLORE ACADEMY LAS CRUCES	001	Charter	High School	56	52	51	16	0	0	0	175
EXPLORE ACADEMY LAS	Total	1				56	52	51	16	0	0	0	175
Grand Total		1				56	52	51	16	0	0	0	175

Preparation for Implementation

- Impact to Staffing
 - The request does not include any information concerning potential impact to current staff, including but not limited to documented staff support of the proposed amendment.
 - The request does acknowledge the need for additional staff, however specific plans to recruit very in-demand Elementary-level teaching staff and educational support staff are not detailed in the request.

- Impact on Facilities
 - Specific impact on facilities is not specifically addressed in the request.
 - During the 6/2022 PEC meeting, the school reported that an architectural consultation would be required to plan classroom and other space redesign, as well a sprinkler system update, before the facility would be suitable for elementary age children, however the current requests do not include any plans concerning facility impact, improvements or plans.
 - Previous concerns raised by the Commision during the 6/2022 review of the Grade Level Change Amendment Request are also not addressed in this request. Some of those concerns include:
 - Safety of the surrounding area of the school facility; traffic study and safety.
 - The need for detailed plans about adding and or updating a safe, outdoor playspace suitable for smaller children.
 - Maintaining a “small-school feel”, as described by parents in 6/2022 public comment.
- Impact on the Community and School
 - The school’s Amendment Request includes “Preliminary Family Interest by Grade-level” data. It is unclear from the data what percentage of interest is from parents who have other children currently enrolled at Explore- Las Cruces, however based on the schools request, the data was collected from prospective, “families who would enroll their student at Explore Academy”.
 - It can not be determined that data supporting the Amendment Request was solicited from current members of the Explore School Community, including staff, parents and students, and that a majority of those stakeholders support the Amendment.
 - Previous concerns raised by the Commision during the 6/2022 review of the Grade Level Change Amendment Request are also not addressed in this request:
 - Documentation of school and community support specifically addressing the addition of elementary level grades to a shared campus with older students.
- Impact on Operations
- The school reports having the capacity to support increased enrollment, but specifies the intent to meet increased enrollment numbers only through the enrollment of K-5 grade-level students, which requires a separate, approved amendment. As previously noted, the current Enrollment Cap Amendment Request does not include a detailed plan to specifically address facility and safety concerns previously raised by the PEC, as well as a timeline that would align with the requested Fall 2023 implementation of this request should it be approved.

CSD Recommendation

CSD does not recommend approving the changes requested in the amendment at this time.