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**Charter Schools Division
Final Renewal Recommendation
Revised December 1, 2023**

School Name: Explore Academy- Albuquerque

School Address: 5100 Masthead NE, Albuquerque, NM 87110

Head Administrator: Justin Baiardo

Governing Board Chair: Patrick Molina

Contract Term: 2019–2024

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:

- (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.

CSD Renewal Recommendation

The Charter Schools Division (CSD) recommends Explore Academy be renewed with a charter contract term of five years, without conditions.

Part B: Progress Report

The schools' narratives in Part B are rated Meets Standard, Demonstrates Substantial Progress, or Failing to Demonstrate Progress according to the rubric on pages 6-7 of the 2023 Charter School Renewal Application.

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

1.a. Student Outcomes

For 2021-2022, Explore Academy received a designation as a Spotlight school, performing in the top 25% of New Mexico schools. Proficiency rates for reading, math, and science at Explore Academy were 56%, 47%, and 54%, respectively, compared to statewide proficiencies of 34%, 25%, and 33% per New Mexico Vistas Data (10/25/2023).

The PED released 2022-23 [Vistas](#) data publicly in November 2023. The overall Vistas score is provided below, as well as the school's 2022-23 proficiency and growth rates compared with the district where the school is located and statewide data. Although the school's growth in math performance has decreased, the school has maintained the spotlight designation.

2022-23 NMVistas Score: 77

2022-23 Designation: Spotlight

2021-22 NMVistas Score: 61

2021-22 Designation: Spotlight

2022-23 PED Accountability Data	Proficiency			Growth	
	ELA	Math	Science	ELA	Math
Explore Academy	61%	45%	53%	5%	-2%
Albuquerque Public Schools	40%	25%	35%	4%	0%
New Mexico Statewide	38%	24%	34%	4%	0%

Graduation Rates			
EXABQ	4-year	5-year	6-year
2021-22	74% cohort 2021	74% cohort 2020	78% cohort 2019
2022-23	68% cohort 2022	79% cohort 2021	78% cohort 2020

Source: NMVistas.org

1.b. Mission-specific Goals

The school has received an overall rating of “Meets Standards” by the Charter Schools Division for its Mission-specific goal during each year of the current charter contract. The school has been rated as Exceeds Standard or Meets Standard during the most recent three years.

2.a. Educational Program

Explore Academy is fully implementing its educational program, as evidenced by focus group discussions and the observable seminar-based learning, choice-based learning, daily academic flex periods, and daily professional collaboration between adults. Parental involvement and engagement are also evidenced by parent membership on the School Governing Board, stakeholder reports of active parent organizations and regular volunteer opportunities, and various parent communication mediums, including a PowerSchool-based parent portal, Google Classroom, Remind® family communication system, and school newsletters, the “WolfPup Post” and “The Weekly Howl”.

Explore Albuquerque provided notable evidence consistent with the education program described in their contract, and explained in [Part B](#) of the school’s renewal application. It was evident that the specific educational programmatic terms described in the contract directly contribute to an overall positive school culture. Staff, students, and parents describe the “Choice-Based Philosophy” as an aspect of the school that contributes to high student engagement.

The school’s “Choice Based Philosophy” offered at Explore Albuquerque provides a personalized educational experience for students. Students were observed in seminar style classes engaging in student-led learning on both K-5 and 6-12 campuses. The school also offers a “Flex” period in which students on the upper campus were observed working on their coursework

independently or socializing with their peers, many students noted that this aspect of the school provides a great opportunity to build relationships. During Flex time some students may be engaging in “Structured Flex” where if they are needing support with a particular class or skill they will be in a separate space getting individualized attention and support; these sessions are offered by educational assistants. The school also utilizes structured flex to provide students with IEPs more focused and individualized learning time.

The community at Explore is very invested and supportive of the educational program, staff, and mission of the school. It was evident across student and parent focus groups, that families are pleased with the amount of choice and academic rigor the school offers. Parents especially at the Elementary school feel that their child is getting the individual attention and support they need to be successful by teachers and administration. During the teacher focus groups, they stated that the extensive course catalog offers a wide range of courses for students to pick from and attributes to student excitement about attending and actively participating in school.

It was evident that the Elementary school is still developing their “Flex” program and figuring out how to best utilize this time to meet their specific student needs. One period observed during the visit over 70 students were left with one EA, to work on handwriting skills. In the upper school focus groups there was an expressed dichotomy between the rigorous college preparatory aspect of the school and some of the higher needs of students that attend Explore Albuquerque. Explore’s graduation rate falls slightly below the district and state for the 4-year consistently across the charter term.

2.b. Financial Compliance

Explore Academy has a structured workflow for managing its finances to ensure transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility. The business manager works closely with the school to incorporate enrollment projections into their financial planning. Once verified, the business manager updates the financials based on the new data to adjust the School Equalization Guarantee (SEG) calculations. If the school receives adverse audit findings, they take immediate steps to rectify the issues, addressing internal controls and enhancing the school’s financial practices. The business managers review and test internal controls on a monthly basis and conduct a monthly financial close to ensure accuracy.

2.c. Governance Responsibilities

Explore Academy had two untimely notifications of governing board membership changes during the current charter term, and this is addressed in the renewal application. The board has maintained the required minimum of five members during the charter term. All board members have completed all required training hours each year of the charter contract except one.

2.d. Equity and Identity

The school has been rated as Meets Standard for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 for performance framework indicators related to Equity and Identity, and Student Rights, specifically Rights of English Language Learners (1d) and Rights of All Students, representing an improvement since the first two years of the charter term. Additionally, the school has been rated as Meets

Standard for each year of the charter term, relative to the Rights of Students with Disabilities (1c).

As evidenced by information from the renewal application and stakeholder conversations, the school demonstrates the ability to protect the rights of all students through the delivery of culturally responsive learning to its students and related professional development to its staff. During the renewal site visit, diverse instructional materials, classroom libraries, and student cultural representations and expressions were observed throughout the school. Additionally, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) materials and direct delivery of instruction regarding self-regulation strategies were observed throughout the elementary school. Middle-high school students reported strong adult/teacher relationships, frequent opportunities to foster strong peer-to-peer relationships throughout the day, and collaborative “flex periods” also support their social-emotional learning.

Explore Academy currently has an active Equity Council that includes staff, school administration, students, and parents.

2.e. Tribal Consultation

The school does not fall under the Indian Education Act (NMSA 22-23A) or the 6.35.2 NMAC definition of a “historically defined Indian-impacted” school.

2.f. Other Performance Indicators

The school was rated Working to Meet standard on indicator 1.d. Rights of English Learners for the first two years of the contract term, but improved processes to earn a rating of Meets Standard for the third and fourth years of the term.

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

Multi-Year Performance Framework Ratings

Explore Academy	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Organizational and Financial Performance				
1a Mission and Educational Program	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
1b State Assessment Requirements	Meets Standard	Not Reviewed	Meets Standard	Pending
1c Rights of Students with Disabilities	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
1d Rights of English Learners	Working to Meet Standard	Working to Meet Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
1e Meeting Program Requirements	Meets Standard	Assurances	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
1f NM DASH Plan	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2a Financial Reporting and Compliance	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Working to Meet Standard
2b Accounting Principles	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard
2c Responsive to Audit Findings	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
2d Managing Grant Funds	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
2e Staffing for Fiscal Management	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Working to Meet Standard
2f Internal Controls	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
3a Governance Requirements	Working to Meet Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
3b Nepotism, Conflict of Interest	Working to Meet Standard	Assurances	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
3c Reporting Requirements	Meets Standard	Assurances	Meets Standard	Working to Meet Standard
4a Rights of All Students	Working to Meet Standard	Assurances	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
4b Attendance and Retention	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Working to Meet Standard
4c Staff Credentialing	Meets Standard	Working to Meet Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
4d Employee Rights	Working to Meet Standard	Assurances	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
4e Background Checks, Ethics	Meets Standard	Assurances	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
5a Facilities	Meets Standard	Assurances	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
5b Transportation	N/A	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
5c Health and Safety	Working to Meet Standard	Assurances	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
5d Handling Information	Working to Meet Standard	Assurances	Meets Standard	Meets Standard

Source: CSD Internal Monitoring

Site Visit Participants

CSD (in person): Martica Davis (lead), Corina Chavez, Kristen LaVolpa, Reid Wessels; **CSD (remote):** Kimberly Gonzalez

School Administration: Justin Baiardo, Founder and Head Administrator; Elisha Baiardo, Director of Operations; Sam Gonzales, Compliance Manager; Karen Woerner, Director of Compliance; Melissa Hernandez, Director of Assessment; Danielle Knee, Director of Special Education; Lisa Hughes- ELE Principal; Jake Kolander- MHS Principal; Katie Rarick, Business Manager; Josh Padilla

School Governing Board: Martha Barrera, Vice-chair; Dotty McKinney, Secretary