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**Charter Schools Division
Renewal Analysis and Recommendation
November 1, 2024**

School Name: Aldo Leopold Charter School

School Address: 410 W, 10th St. Silver City, NM 88061

Head Administrator: Hannah Wecks

Governing Board Chair: Alexandra Tager

Contract Term: 2020–2025

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.

Preliminary Renewal Recommendation

The Charter Schools Division (CSD) recommends renewal for five years with the following condition:

Due to repeated audit findings and sub-par financial ratings on the performance framework over the charter term, Aldo Leopold Charter School “failed to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management.” Therefore, school leadership and the governing board will provide a financial report and finance committee minutes to CSD quarterly, beginning in July 2025 (with final quarter FY24 information). The school leadership and governing board will improve financial systems and will continue to show consistent improvement on financial indicators and audit results over the next charter term.

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 2024 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	Failing to Demonstrate 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

** Results from 2023-24 Vistas data, scheduled to be released in November 2024, could change this rating in the final recommendation.*

1.a. Student Outcomes

Aldo Leopold Charter School has been designated a Spotlight school for two years, earning additional distinctions of Excellence in 2022-3 in English Language Arts and College and Career Readiness. ALCS students have outperformed the district and state in English Language Arts and Science each year of the charter term. The school cites their experiential, outdoor programming as responsible for high science proficiencies. ALCS math proficiencies are closer to the district and state; however, the school’s MAPs data shows growth over time from 6th grade to 12th in

math. After covid, Aldo started giving MAPs three times per year, using data to inform instruction, and adopted Illustrative Mathematics.

1.b. Mission-specific Goals

The school met their mission-specific goals all three years data was available.

2.a. Educational Program

Aldo Leopold Charter School has a unique educational program that meets the needs of a wide variety of student needs and learning styles. The experiential, hands-on learning has resulted in high engagement and proficiencies for most students. As part of the Youth Conservation Corps, students frequently participate in outdoor learning opportunities, serving the community through environmental restoration/stewardship (trails, water, etc.) and city beautification projects (murals). After which, they are encouraged to reflect on their experiences. Students also participate in hiking and backpacking expeditions, developing leadership skills and building confidence. Students, parents, and teachers agree that the experiential learning focus of the school is tremendously rewarding and engaging. Even students who didn't like hiking when they first enrolled said they quickly grew to love it, as the hikes foster feelings of inclusivity and connection to the community and nature. Relevant professional development also occurs for staff, so they are prepared to lead excursions and handle emergencies that may arise in the wilderness.

The CSD has confirmed on site visits and through student, parent, and community input that the school goes above-and-beyond to Meet the Standards of their educational program.

2.b. Financial Compliance

Financial compliance at the school has been improving, but this is an area that still needs attention. While the total number of audit findings has declined each year, issues of repeat audit findings and significant deficiencies persist. The consistently poor financial ratings on the performance framework reflect this. Indicator 2.b., Accounting Principles, has been rated Does Not Meet every year of the contract due to significant deficiencies. For three out of four years, indicator 2.c. Responsive to Audit Findings, has been rated Does Not Meet due to repeat findings; last year the rating improved to Working to Meet. Indicator 2.a. Financial Reporting and Compliance has been inconsistent, though last year they met the standard.

The school has a new contracted business manager, as well as an on-site school employee who will assume the role of business manager after a period of training. The repeated significant deficiencies and material weakness findings indicate a lack of governing board and management oversight/monitoring, and a failure to ensure effective internal controls for the first four years of the contract term. A statement that is repeated in every year of ALCS's audits: "Management failed to implement adequate controls to resolve the finding and will work toward corrective action during FY__ (every year of term)." The school has implemented a new system of internal controls.

Interviews at the renewal site visit indicate recent improvements in financial management, but the performance framework and audit data to confirm this will not be available for another year. Therefore, the overall financial performance for the charter term is Failing to Demonstrate Progress.

2.c. Governance Responsibilities

ALCS has maintained a full board for the duration of the contract. However, there have been repeated issues with meeting reporting requirements (see 3.c. on the performance framework). The application cites adult actions to improve reporting, such as better communication and clarified roles. The board has improved over the charter term in terms of meeting training requirements.

The rating for this section is Demonstrates Substantial Progress.

2.d. Equity and Identity

The school provides equitable outdoor education opportunities that help students develop stronger identity and confidence through nature and service expeditions. The school has even hired an expert on Outdoor Equity who provides professional development and assists with outdoor programs. In addition, the teachers incorporate in their lessons multiple languages, cultures, perspectives, restorative practices, Social-Emotional Learning, and hands-on learning, effectively honoring and meeting the needs of diverse learners. Aldo has an active Equity Council which includes student, parent, and community voices. Culturally responsive teaching has been observed during site visits; for example, in one class, a teacher integrated the students' cultures in the lesson, in a skillful, sensitive way that was very respectful of the students' backgrounds.

The school has also met compliance requirements such as anti-racism training through the Black Education Division.

ALCS earns Meets the Standards for the Equity and Identity category.

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

Performance framework indicators have been adequately explained in the application, citing adult actions taken to remedy issues.

The school received a letter of determination from the Office of Special Education which resulted in a Special Education Corrective Action Plan. The CAP was issued due to untimely reporting and unreliable data. The school has responded by hiring a new Special Education Director, who has created processes to ensure timeliness and accuracy. The SPED student

percentage is growing, this year it is estimated at 35-40%, so a third Special Education Teacher has also been hired this year.

Financial indicators are addressed in 2.b. Financial Compliance.

This section is rated Demonstrates Substantial Progress.

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

Renewal Site Visit Attendees

October 15, 2024

CSD Team: Cheryl Rowe (Lead), Dr. Brigette Russell and Lucy Valenzuela

Remote CSD Team: Martica Davis, Kenneth Norris, Betty Seeley and Director Corina Chavez

School Leadership: Hannah Wecks, Cheryl Head, Alison Hennegan, Fiona Bailey, Jackie Riley and Maya Chaney

Governing Board: Alex MacKenzie (Vice Chair)