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Charter Schools Division Amendment Request Analysis

School Name: Albuquerque School of Excellence

Date of Public Education Commission (PEC) Meeting: November 15, 2024

Amendment Requests: Albuquerque School of Excellence requests PEC approval to amend:

- **Enrollment cap increase:** increase student enrollment cap from 1199 to 2300
- **Additional square footage:** The school respectfully requests PEC approval to amend the terms of its contract to include the construction of an additional K-12 school within APS geographic boundaries.
- **Separate facilities:** Allow school to open a new K-12 site at 5200 Sequoia Rd NW, Albuquerque, NM 87120

CSD Analysis:

Albuquerque School of Excellence is requesting to open a separate (second) facility, additional square footage and an enrollment cap increase. The school has been a Spotlight school every year that Vistas ratings have been available, and has been recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School (2022) and Nationally Distinguished School (2023). With the success of their academic programs, they have attracted numerous applicants to their school lottery and have a number of students on a waitlist. According to the school, their current waiting list is around 440 students. Their amendment application states, *"Last year, ASE received over 1200 applications for only 280 available seats, showing clear demand for our specialized programs."* This means

they had to turn away over 920 students last year (which could easily fill another school). While many schools are experiencing declining enrollment, the demand at ASE has grown annually, as they have successfully addressed the challenges of covid learning losses, post-covid social-emotional learning needs, and ensured consistent, high-quality instruction as evidenced by math, reading and science proficiency rates that have outperformed district and state, and have increased every year that data has been available. The school has also outlined a robust, detailed plan for MLSS interventions, so that every student can equitably access the curriculum, receive support, and optimize their potential. It is worth noting that ASE has also exceeded their mission goal every year of the term. Providing wider access to their high-quality education is a goal of the school.

Financially the school has been fairly sound, except they received ratings of Does Not Meet for performance indicator 2.b. for each year of the charter term. As delineated in the renewal recommendation, the Does Not Meet ratings were due to having at least one significant deficiency or material weakness finding in each fiscal year. There was never more than one of these more serious findings in any single year, however, and never more than two findings total for any single year. The head administrator and governing council finance committee chair have put processes in place to avoid such findings in future. For example, the school implemented a policy that no purchases would be made after June 15 each year to ensure that all purchases are complete by the end of the fiscal year in order to avoid audit findings such as the one they received. The school has also put into place processes to ensure that all grant funds are expended each year, as the school received a Working to Meet rating on this indicator one year. The school has a grants coordinator who oversees all state and federal grants and monitors expenditures.

The school has applied for the CSP Replication Grant and the Charter School Growth Fund Scale Grant to fund the new campus. To supplement the amendment request, Albuquerque School of Excellence submitted a five-year financial projection which includes estimates of potential enrollment, revenue, and expenditures. Concept and marketing plans have also been developed, projecting timelines for key deliverables as they plan the second campus. This demonstrates that the school has put a great deal of thought and consideration into the development of the new school. Moreover, ASE has consistently maintained a full governing board, completed all training hours for the past 3 years, and has active finance and audit committees. Fiscal and governing board responsibility are important considerations given the scale of this amendment request.

The school has identified a specific location for the school: 5200 Sequoia Road NW in Albuquerque. Their research reveals that this location is desirable for several reasons: 1) the school already has 107 students who commute from the area; 2) the lottery does not ask for student addresses, however, it is possible that some students were turned away who reside closer to the second proposed school site; 3) the location does not currently have a high-achieving STEM school that serves students through 12th grade; 4) ASE outperforms all of the other schools in the area, as evidenced by the supplemental comparison provided of index scores for schools within a five-mile radius of the proposed site.

ASE's governing board has unanimously approved the proposed amendments.

CSD Recommendation:

At a time when student enrollment trends are declining across the state, and schools struggle to retain students and quality staff, it seems like a less-than-ideal time for a proposal such as this. CSD has been recently notified that NMPED leadership may include an additional step that would require the secretary to approve a new facility. However, given the exceptional track record of the school and the demand for it among families, CSD recommends that the PEC approve the amendments for Albuquerque School of Excellence's request for a separate (second) facility at 5200 Sequoia Rd. NW in Albuquerque, which would include an enrollment cap increase to 2300 students and additional square footage.