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**Charter Schools Division
Final Renewal Recommendation
November 4, 2024**

School Name: Las Montañas Charter High School

School Address: 1405 S. Solano Drive Las Cruces, NM 88001

Head Administrator: Caz Martinez

Governing Board Chair: Patricia Gonzales

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 without conditions.

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	Demonstrates Substantial Progress*
1.b. Mission-Specific Goals	Demonstrates Substantial Progress
Organizational Performance	Rating
2.a. Educational Program	Meets the Standards
2.b. Financial Compliance	Demonstrates Substantial Progress
2.c. Governance Responsibilities	Meets the Standards
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

While Las Montañas Charter High School’s team acknowledges low proficiencies and graduation rates, they have identified areas of growth and significant adult actions taken to improve student outcomes. The school serves a student population with considerable challenges, including high poverty rates, severe credit deficits, and chronic absenteeism. The school leadership and staff make a huge effort to serve the students holistically, making sure all of their physical, social, emotional needs are met as necessary to academic progress.

School leadership and staff responded to the Covid-dip by augmenting Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programming, adding a counselor and Student Success Advisor (SSA), and promoting in-person learning as soon as it was safely possible. Chronic absenteeism rose sharply after covid, which had profound effects on academic outcomes. The school cited data which revealed a huge difference between remote and in-person proficiency gains, prompting them to boost efforts to encourage students to participate on campus and provide more engaging, relevant programming.

The school’s Vistas score improved from 23 to 51, and they received a designation of Excellence in English Learning Progress. They have utilized CSI grant funding to address absenteeism. For

example, to increase student engagement, the school has hired a contractor to facilitate PLCs on Project-Based Learning and integrating content standards with CTE. The school has made other enhancements to their Educational Program in response to student needs, increasing engagement, and improving attendance, which is further described in “2.a. Educational Program.”

The rating of Demonstrates Substantial Progress appropriately captures the tremendous efforts the school is making to meet the needs of their students, and the upward trend of student outcomes revealed in their Vistas scores.

1.b. Mission-specific Goals

Las Montañas has two mission-specific goals, both centered around their Student Learning Communities (SLC), a cornerstone of their SEL program. Goal One is focused on grades 9-11. Out of the three years of available mission goal data, they met the goal once, and were just shy of meeting the goal the other two years. Chronic absenteeism affected outcomes; therefore, leadership analyzed performance data, prompting them to make meaningful changes to SLC for grades 9-11. The second goal is focused on the seniors, which aims to prepare them for life beyond high school. The second goal earned Meets or Exceeds every year.

The rating of Demonstrates Substantial Progress reflects the school’s mixed performance on mission goals, yet active efforts were made to improve the SLC student outcomes. During site visits, CSD has observed a robust, student-responsive SLC program that is continuously evolving to meet student needs.

2.a. Educational Program

The school’s renewal application clearly addressed all components of their Educational Program, which has been consistently verified during CSD site visits throughout the charter term. The program includes HSRN (High School Redesign Network), with an emphasis on building strong student-staff relationships and making meaningful connections to real world problem-solving, occupations, and more. They have further expanded their offerings to reach students by offering redesigned CTE Pathways, Project/Work-Based Learning, OSHA certifications, and more. Connections with the Las Cruces community are abundant, including the very successful Workforce partnership and collaboration with the city’s Revitalization Project.

Professional Development and PLCs include work with TNTP (The New Teacher Project) and Student Learning Communities (SLC) which provide students with a solid SEL foundation. Moreover, the school successfully utilizes an Early Warning System (EWS) aligned with MLSS.

This application component is deserving of Meets as the Educational Program is continuously evolving to meet student needs. The leadership and staff embrace a culture of continuous improvement and lifelong learning, to the tremendous benefit of their students, who verified in student focus groups the significant gains they are making at Las Montañas in terms of credits, SEL, and future opportunities. A unique and extraordinary aspect of the school is that students are exposed to numerous experiences that help them not only envision a bright future for themselves, but also offers a concrete pathway to get there.

2.b. Financial Compliance

The school has had struggles with financial performance over the course of this charter term, as evidenced by their performance framework ratings. The school had a financial corrective action plan, which has been satisfactorily completed and closed. While the application acknowledges deficiencies, the school has taken responsibility and shows clear evidence of adult actions to rectify the issues. For example, they have hired a new business manager who operates in-house, enlisted assistance from a financial advisor, part-time business specialist, and they are making ongoing efforts to improve their financial standing. They have worked closely with the auditors and feel confident that the next audit outcomes will reveal significant improvement. The 2023-24 ratings in the financial framework demonstrate improvement.

Therefore, Financial Compliance is deserving of a rating of Demonstrates Substantial Progress.

2.c. Governance Responsibilities

The Governing Board has consistently had full membership, completed all training hours, and reported changes on time. When CSD has met with the Governing Board, we have witnessed a very engaged, functional board who is highly dedicated to the success of the school and students. This category Meets the Standards.

2.d. Equity and Identity

Equity and Identity is another strong component of the application that has been confirmed during CSD site visits. Over the course of the charter term, the school has built and upheld an excellent approach to serving diverse student needs with equity and heart. They have a fully functioning Equity Council, use culturally and linguistically responsive teaching methods, and deliver strong SEL programming through the Student Learning Communities. Las Montañas understands that a student's basic needs must be met in order for them to access learning; therefore, the school offers free breakfast and lunch for all students, clothing, backpacks, hygiene items, and more. For students with housing insecurity, the school partners with community providers to address housing needs. The school has a strong emphasis on building relationships and cultivating a welcoming culture, which has been evident during every CSD site visit. Moreover, with small class sizes, differentiation, and one-on-one interventions, the school is fully supporting the needs of English Language Learners, students with IEPs, and any student who struggles.

The school's performance on Equity and Identity not only Meets the Standards, but could serve as a model for other schools.

2.e. Tribal Consultation

N/A

2.f. Other Performance Indicators

The application team adequately addressed Performance Framework ratings that did not meet the standard or earned repeated “Working to Meet”. This section 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

September 16, 2024

CSD Team: Cheryl Rowe (lead), Lucy Valenzuela

Remote CSD Team: Dr. Brigette Russell, Martica Davis, Ken Norris

School Leadership: Caz Martinez, Matt Sandoval, Dave Estrada, Antoinette Cisneros, Claudia Salas, Jairo de la Cruz

Governing Board: Michael Davis, Jaime Quezada