



September 8, 2009

Madame Chair and PEC Commissioners:

I am submitting my recommendations for the fourteen of the sixteen charter school applications that the Charter Schools Division (CSD) received on July 1, 2009. My recommendations are based on the application, the staff's analyses, and the responses that we received from the applicant during the public input process. Two of the applicants, Sage Academy in Albuquerque and the Gallup Montessori School, have requested that their applications be withdrawn for consideration during this approval cycle.

I wanted to remind the Public Education Commission (PEC) and the public that this process began even before January 1, 2009 when the CSD received the first letters of intent. Our staff, along with the commission, began a continuous improvement process immediately after last year's decision. The CSD conducted surveys of all the applicants, readers, commissioners, and other stakeholders involved in the process. We shared our information with you and, based on the data, we worked toward improving a process that would be transparent and would lead to the submission of quality charter school applications. As a result of this continuous improvement process, the CSD took the following steps with approval of and guidance from the PEC:

- developed a new charter school application that would be user-friendly for both applicants and reviewers
- included in the Application Kit the evaluation tool that would be used to analyze the applications
- posted the Application Kit on both the PED and PEC websites
- partnered with the New Mexico Coalition of Charter Schools (NMCCS) to provide monthly technical-assistance workshops to all prospective applicants who submitted a letter of intent that included a final technical review conducted by the NMCCS staff
- held five technical assistance workshops on specific areas of the application that were attended by many of the applicants
- encouraged applicants to contact the review coordinator to seek resources or clarification between January 1 and July 1
- reviewed applications from July 7 to August 14 utilizing CSD staff, PED experts, and external readers
- sent a letter from the PEC chairperson to district superintendents and presidents of each school board inviting them to the public input meetings
- conducted an interview with each applicant to clarify and verify information from July 29 to August 5

- sent the preliminary analyses from the CSD staff to both the PEC and the applicants
- conducted five days of community input meetings in each of the districts where the applicant proposed the charter school

The final recommendations that I present to you are based on countless hours of collecting data on each application. I can assure you that my recommendations are based on the merits of each application. Each application is unique and was evaluated on its own merits. No comparisons were made or should be made with other applications. Ultimately, the recommendation for each application is based on whether the application met the requirements outlined in both statute and rules published by the department that govern the charter application process. The overriding question on each application was whether the application was complete and aligned with the mission of the proposed school. Throughout the process we communicated that there would be no “rewrites.” Although the applicant would have the opportunity to clarify and verify concerns and additional questions generated from the initial application, if an applicant went beyond the clarification and verification and submitted new material, or contradictory information, this information was not considered in my evaluation and ultimate recommendation. In addition, my recommendation is centered on the belief that the charter school seeking state authorization should be a quality school for the children of New Mexico. I and the CSD staff do not take this responsibility lightly.

With the schools that I have submitted for approval, I have recommended as a condition that the school would resubmit both school and student performance goals. These goals were present in all the applications, but I want to make sure that these critical areas are consistently articulated in a specific and measurable format, i.e., SMART Goals, in the charter that will become the contract. These resubmitted goals would be approved by the CSD Staff to insure that the contracts are consistent with the applications submitted by the schools.

Finally, my recommendations reflect the evaluation of the application and should not be viewed as a reflection of the applicant or their ideas. Although it is difficult to separate the application from the passion and commitment that the applicants might have concerning their ideas, my recommendation is based on whether the application articulated fully the process to bring a vision into reality. Children and parents must be assured that the charter schools you authorize are held to a high standard of public accountability.

Sincerely,

Dr. Don Duran  
Assistant Secretary of Education  
NMPED-Charter Schools Division

cc: Charter School Applicants  
CSD Staff