Edkey, Inc. – Sequoia Ranch School - Entity ID 81052
Schools: Children First Academy – Tempe
Children First Academy – Phoenix
Sequoia Pathway Academy

Renewal Executive Summary

Sources of Evidence for this Document

Pursuant to A.R.S. 15-183.I, a charter may be renewed for successive periods of twenty years. The Arizona State Board for Charter Schools (Board) has established a process for the renewal of a charter that is based on affirmative evidence in three areas:

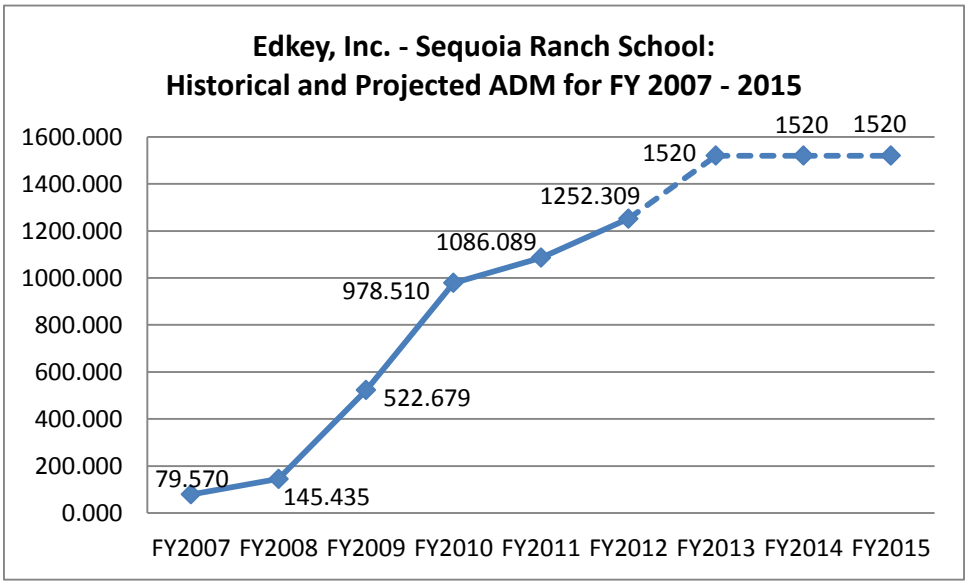
I. Success of the academic program, including academic achievement
II. Viability of the organization, including fiscal management and compliance
III. Adherence to the terms of the charter, including contract and legal compliance

Evaluation of the charter holder's success in these three areas is based on a variety of information that will serve as sources of evidence in determining renewal of a charter. These sources include, but are not limited to:

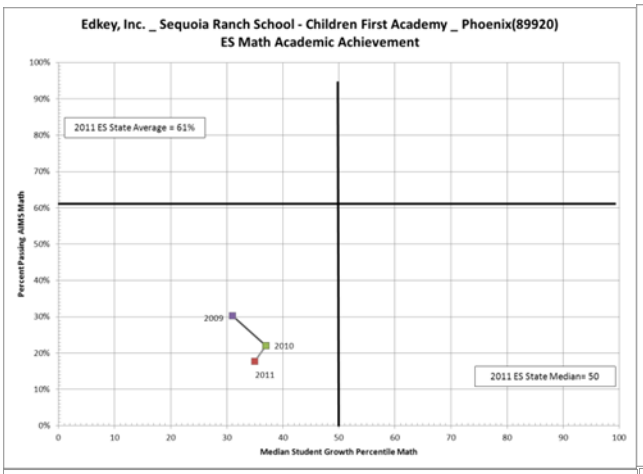
- Pupil achievement data
- Independent financial audits
- Five-year interval summary reviews
- Site visit reports
- Monitoring reports
- Application package for renewal

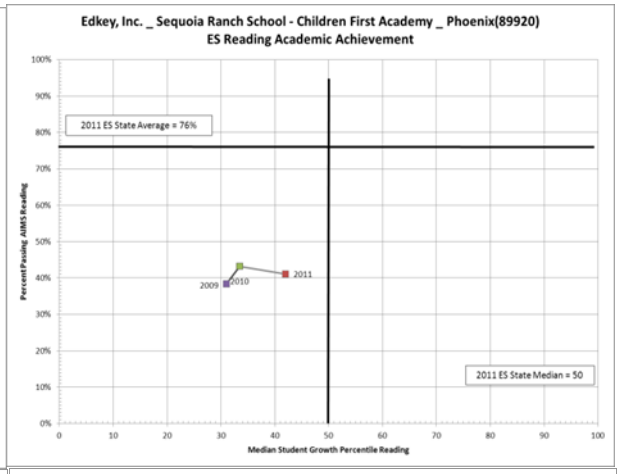
Profile

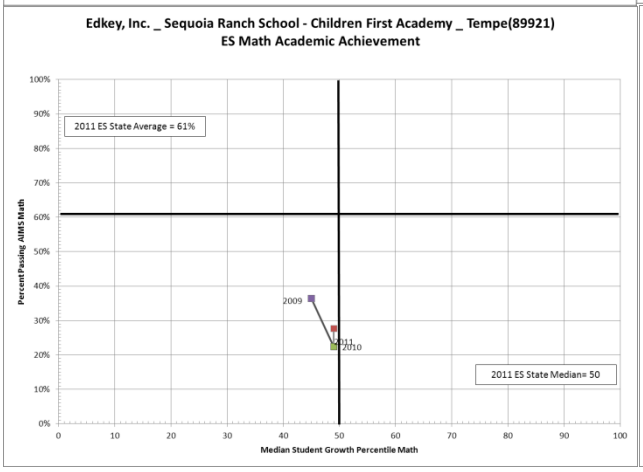
Edkey, Inc. – Sequoia Ranch School operates three schools: one school serves grades K-7, one school serves grades K-8, and one school serves grades K-12. A fourth school site in Mayer served grades K-12 but was closed on June 30, 2012 due to low enrollment. The graph below shows the charter holder's actual 100th day average daily membership (ADM) for fiscal years 2007-2011 and the fiscal year 2012 ADM or estimated count as of June 11, 2012 and projected ADM through 2015. Projections were provided by the charter holder as part of the submitted Renewal Budget Plan.

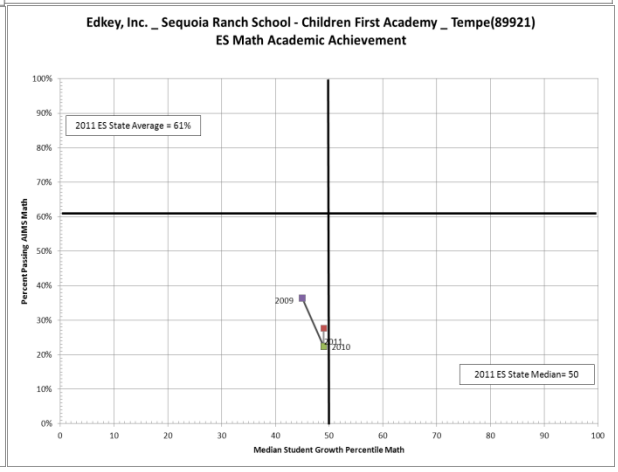


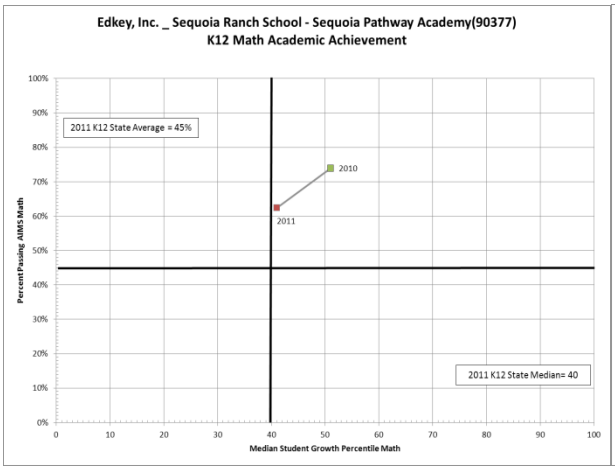
Graphs displaying the academic achievement for the past five years, if available, are provided below and on the next page.

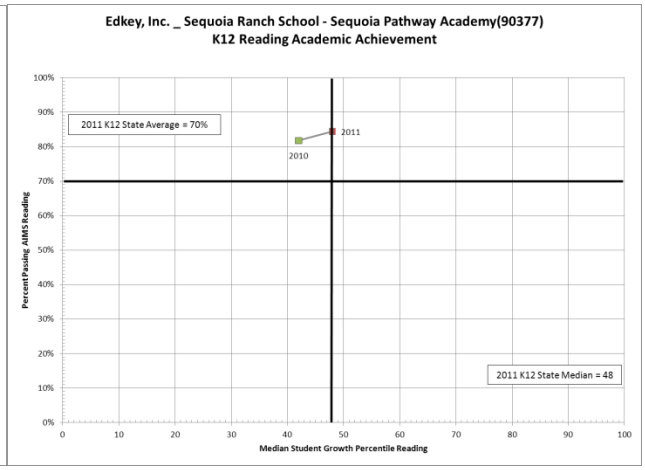












I. Success of the Academic Program

The academic performance of the school(s) operated by the charter holder did not meet or demonstrate sufficient progress toward the Board's level of adequate academic performance. Therefore, the charter holder was required to submit a Performance Management Plan in the academic section of the renewal application and to complete the Renewal Budget Plan.

On May 18, the charter holder submitted a PMP narrative and templates. Academic oversight documentation was not submitted.

A leadership team discussion took place on June 20 at the administrative office with Ron Neil (Charter Representative), Patric Greer (Business Manager/Charter Representative), Curtis Cardine (Assistant Superintendent), Tamara Becker (Assistant Superintendent), Brad Miles (Assistant Superintendent), Jevon Lewis (Principal, Children First Academy Tempe), Donna Driggers (Principal, Children First Academy Phoenix), Rachael Lay (K-6 Principal, Sequoia Pathway Academy), and Jonathan Gentile (7-12 Principal, Sequoia Pathway Academy).

The charter holder submitted two PMPs: one for the Children First Academies (CFA), because both schools serve the same grades and similar populations, and one for Sequoia Pathway Academy. Because, at the time the renewal application was submitted, the charter holder intended to close the school in Mayer, a PMP was not submitted for the school.

Children First Academy-Phoenix and Children First Academy-Tempe were existing schools in Maricopa County Regional School District 509 (Thomas J Pappas Schools) and acquired by the charter holder prior to the 2008-2009 school year. The charter holder has been operating the schools since that time. The discussion with the leadership team confirmed information in the narrative regarding the challenges of serving a predominantly homeless population as well as the teacher and principal turnover that has occurred at the schools in the past three years. The organization has developed a leadership program which identifies teachers in the organization that exhibit leadership potential and then pays for their academic coursework to become qualified as a principal. The current principals have completed the program.

The leadership team discussion also provided additional information that was not included in the PMP. Previously, both schools operated as independent sites. However, now the schools will be doing more collaborative work including aligning curriculum as well as instructional and assessment practices and participating in common professional development. The schools will also be doing site-based Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in order to focus on lesson planning and discuss benchmark and teacher-developed formative assessment data. Both schools are sharing an art and music teacher in order to have common planning time for the PLC work.

Children First Academy-Phoenix will be implementing Response to Intervention which it had not been doing before the current principal started in November. For increasing reading achievement, teachers at both schools will be trained before school starts on how to do running records to measure reading fluency and comprehension to determine interventions. The schools have identical calendars and will both be using a structured lesson plan format. The schools have reviewed the 2012 data and, according to the leadership team, the results confirmed the benchmark data collected at the schools.

Sequoia Pathway Academy started as a new school site in August, 2009, and has operated for three years. Although Sequoia Pathway Academy's academic performance meets the Board's level of adequate academic performance, the charter holder chose to submit a PMP. The leadership team confirmed that information included in the action plan is part of a long term plan for the school so the budget portion of the templates includes limited additional expenditures. The team stated that Sequoia Pathway Academy has enrolled approximately 900 students for next year.

Due to the organization's shift to site-based PLCs, the school teams will focus on developing formative assessments. Teachers at the school have been developing their own assessments for the past three years but the common planning time will allow them to develop assessments in common. According to the leadership team, the goal for the organization is to move toward total performance assessments.

The information gleaned during the discussion supported the Performance Management Plan narrative and templates submitted.

Required submissions for the Academic Performance Section and the Renewal Budget Plan, as well as the applicable evaluation instrument and checklist, are included in the charter holder's portfolio. The evaluation instrument completed by staff identifies whether the required information provided included a Full Description, a Partial Description, or a Very Limited Description. The checklist completed by staff identifies whether the required elements of the Detailed Business Plan were addressed.

II. Viability of the Organization

The charter holder meets the standards specified in the *Renewal Application Instructions*. Therefore, the charter holder was not required to submit the charter holder's Financial Sustainability portion of the Detailed Business Plan Section.

III. Adherence to the Terms of the Charter

A. Compliance Matters Requiring Board or Other Agency Action[1]

Over the past six years, there were no items to report.

B. Other Compliance Matters[2]

In March 2011, ADE Exceptional Student Services notified the charter holder of noncompliance in some areas with regard to specific regulations for Part B, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Arizona Revised Statutes. The compliance issues were reported by ADE as resolved in March 2012.

In August 2011, the Arizona Department of Education notified the charter holder that they failed to submit compliance activities for NCLB Cycle 2 Monitoring Compliance Activities. The issue was reported by ADE as resolved in December 2011.

The fiscal year 2008 audit identified an issue that required a corrective action plan (CAP). Specifically, the audit indicated that based on the schedules provided by the charter holder, it could not be determined whether base salaries for teachers have supplanted Classroom Site Fund (CSF) monies. The charter holder submitted a satisfactory CAP.

Additionally, the fiscal year 2007 audit identified an issue that required a CAP. Specifically, the audit indicated that the charter holder received $328,162 in restricted cash donations from Sequoia Choice Schools, LLLP with purpose restrictions equivalent to the restrictions on CSF funds. A.R.S. §15-977 does not permit one charter holder to transfer CSF funds to another charter holder. The charter holder submitted a satisfactory CAP.

For the previous five fiscal years, the charter holder has failed to submit its Annual Financial Report, Budget and annual audit for one or more years.

C. Charter Holder's Organizational Membership

Because the organizational membership on file with the Board was consistent with the information on file with the Arizona Corporation Commission, the charter holder was not required to submit the charter holder's Organizational Membership portion of the Detailed Business Plan Section.

[1] For more information about the areas of compliance reviewed for this section, please see the "Renewal Guide".
[2] For more information about the areas of compliance reviewed for this section, please see the "Renewal Guide".

Board Options

Option 1: The Board may approve the renewal. Staff recommends the following language for consideration: Renewal is based on consideration of academic, fiscal and contractual compliance of the charter holder. In this case, there is a record of academic performance below the Board's level of adequate academic performance, which has been addressed by the charter holder through the inclusion of a performance management plan as part of the renewal application package and can be incorporated in the charter contract. There is also a record of past contractual noncompliance which has been reviewed. With that taken into consideration as well as all information provided to the Board for consideration of this renewal application package and during its discussion with representatives of the charter holder, I move to approve the request for charter renewal and grant a renewal contract to Edkey, Inc. – Sequoia Ranch School that incorporates the performance management plan.

Option 2: The Board may deny the renewal. The following language is provided for consideration: Based upon a review of the information provided by the representatives of the charter holder and the contents of the application package which includes the academic performance, the fiscal compliance, and legal and contractual compliance of the charter holder over the charter term, I move to deny the request for charter renewal and to not grant a renewal contract for Edkey, Inc. – Sequoia Ranch School. Specifically, the charter holder, during the term of the contract, failed to meet the obligations of the contract or failed to comply with state law when it:

1. Failed to provide a learning environment that improved pupil achievement in accordance with A.R.S. § 15-181(A).
2. Other specific reasons the Board may have found during its consideration including…