

AGENDA ITEM: Adding Grade Level to Charter Amendment Request – La Tierra Community School, Inc. – La Tierra Community School

Issue

La Tierra Community School, Inc. (LTCS), a non-profit entity, submitted a complete amendment request to add grades 4-6 to the charter for La Tierra Community School, which currently serves grades K-3.

Background

La Tierra Community School, Inc. was granted a charter in 2011, and opened in August 2011 in Prescott. LTCS has an ADM of 22.5 students. The enrollment cap is 46.

On December 13, 2011, LTCS submitted an administratively complete request to add grades 4-8 to its current charter of K-3. This amendment was held until issues identified in the 1st Year Site Visit (described below) were closed out. The request was deemed Substantively Incomplete on March 3. LTCS submitted a revised request to add only grades 4-6 to its charter on March 12. This was deemed Administratively Complete on March 19, and Substantively Complete on March 28.

The narrative states a rationale for adding these grades as follows: “Our school is the only Expeditionary Learning (EL) elementary school in our tri-city area, and will also be the only EL middle school, feeding into Northpoint Academy, an EL high school located in Prescott. Because our private school already houses grades 4-5, our plan is to add grades 4, 5 and 6 in the 2012-2013 school year and then an additional grade each year thereafter until we are a K-8 school. This rationale for increasing the grade levels served was the initial plan presented in our charter application. Expeditionary Learning will be available to our community K-16 with Prescott College offering EL courses at the higher education level.”

As stated in Board policy, prior to a charter school being placed on an agenda, staff conducts a compliance check as part of the amendment approval process. This included a review of whether La Tierra Community School, Inc. met or demonstrated sufficient progress toward the Board’s level of adequate academic performance (LAAP) based on 2011 academic data.

As a school that is in its first year of operation, prior academic performance data was not available for La Tierra Community School. To provide evidence of making progress towards LAAP, LTCS submitted [data from a Winter 2012 administration of the NWEA MAP](#) assessment for 5 students from 2nd grade and 13 students from 3rd grade, which is consistent with the student population observed at the 1st Year Site Visit in November, 2011. Assessments were administered in Reading, Language Usage, and Mathematics, though not all students took all three assessments. The student progress reports provided by LTCS included percentile rankings of each student’s scores compared to the nationally normed sample. An asterisk (*) indicates that no score in that subject was provided for that student. No analysis of the data was provided by the charter holder. In an effort to determine whether the data submitted provided evidence of improved pupil achievement, Board staff found the following:

NWEA, the publisher of the MAP assessment, published [a comparison of 2011 Arizona standardized assessment results](#) to Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 administrations of the NWEA MAP assessments. This comparison is not directly applicable, as the data provided by LTCS was from the Winter 2012 administration of the NWEA MAP. However, based on the NWEA study, the percentile rankings shown below in boldface indicate a 50% or higher likelihood of scoring at Meets or higher on Arizona standardized assessments, and do not change whether Fall or Spring percentiles from the NWEA study are used for comparison.

Student ID	Grade	Math Percentile	Reading Percentile
1	2	73	94
2	2	84	91
8	2	1	*
9	2	4	1
16	2	30	24

3	3	*	21
4	3	*	*
5	3	3	1
6	3	33	46
7	3	16	8
10	3	3	4
11	3	64	46
12	3	20	43
13	3	82	92
14	3	2	4
15	3	25	32
17	3	92	96
18	3	80	67
# Likely to Meet		6	9
% Likely to Meet		33%	50%
LAAP		76%	61%

These assessment results indicate that students at LTCS are likely to score below the Board’s level of adequate academic performance on the Arizona standardized assessments in Spring 2012.

At the 1st Year Site Visit, conducted by Board staff in November, 2011, several items required follow-up action. Action steps had not been implemented for Performance Management Plan Strategies I (implementing a curriculum that improves student achievement), II (monitoring the integration of the Common Core Standards into instruction), and IV (implementing a professional development plan that supports effective implementation of the curriculum) in Reading and in Math, as included in the approved application. Board staff also noted that in mixed-age K-1 and 2-3 classrooms, there was no evidence that students were being provided a comprehensive program of instruction aligned to Arizona State Standards for each grade level served. All issues noted in the follow-up letter were closed out on February 27, 2012. The charter holder is compliant in all other areas.

Board Options:

Option 1: The Board may approve the addition of grades 4-6 to the charter of La Tierra Community School, Inc. The following language is provided for consideration: I move, based on the information contained in the Board materials and presented today that the Board approve to add grades 4 to 6 to the charter of La Tierra Community School, Inc.

Option 2: The Board may deny the addition of grades 4-6 to the charter of La Tierra Community School, Inc. Staff recommends the following language for consideration: I move, based on the information contained in the Board materials and presented today, that the Board deny the requests to add grades 4-6 to the charter of La Tierra Community School, Inc. for the reasons that:

- As the school is in its first year of operation, no prior academic performance is available to demonstrate eligibility to add grade levels to the charter, and
- The limited academic data and documentation provided by La Tierra Community School, Inc. to support the addition of grade levels to the charter does not provide sufficient evidence that the Charter Holder is providing a learning environment that will result in improved student achievement as measured through AIMS.
- (Other specific reasons the Board may have found during its consideration.)

La Tierra Community School

Monthly Meeting of the Board of Directors

Tuesday, November 8, 2011

Present: Anita Fernández, Chuck Dorsey, Jamie Bjune

Via phone: Dave DenHartog

Absent: Jen Hawley

Staff: Charles Mentken

Guests: Nancy Baker, Jordana DeZeeuw Spencer, Claudina Douglas

- I. Call to Order: Anita Fernández facilitating
- II. Community Forum: No one present
- III. Decide on Board Agenda: One correction to agenda item VII., 4. – Changed to Vote to approve an exemption to USFRCS.
- IV. Approval of 10-4-11 minutes: Jamie moved to approve the minutes from 10-4-11; Anita seconded; Approved 4-0-0.
- V. AZCSP Award Update: La Tierra Community School has been awarded \$230k for this year and is eligible for that amount for two additional years. Anita distributed copies of the grant proposal
- VI. Director's Report: Charles gave the Director's Report. Claudina reported on the school's financials.
- VII. Board Business and Related Actions
 1. Update and consider facilities options for 2012-2013: The Board discussed 3 options for acquiring a new facility. Discuss fundraising for the 4-5 classroom/sublease: 4-5 parents are meeting to discuss fundraising tomorrow.
 2. Vote to approve amending LTCS's charter to add grades 4-8: Anita moved to approve an amendment of the charter to include grades 4-8; Chuck seconded; Approved 3-0-0.
 3. Vote to approve an exemption to USFRCS: Jamie moved to approve a request for an exemption to USFRCS; Anita seconded; Approved 3-0-0.
 4. Board membership:
 - Dave DenHartog submitted a letter of resignation from the board due to a conflict of interest with his role as the EL representative. Anita moved to accept Dave's resignation; Jamie seconded; Approved 3-0-0.
 - Anita recommended Jordana DeZeeuw Spencer as a board member. Chuck seconded. Approved 3-0-0.
- VIII. Motion to adjourn: Anita moved to adjourn. Chuck seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Narrative for La Tierra Community School – Amendment for Additional Grades

Rationale For Increase in Grade Levels Served

La Tierra Community School currently serves grades K-3 through the public charter and grades 4-5 through our private school. The vision of La Tierra Community School has been to build out to include grades K-8 (all under the public charter) over the next three years. Our school is the only Expeditionary Learning (EL) elementary school in our tri-city area, and will also be the only EL middle school, feeding into Northpoint Academy, an EL high school located in Prescott. Because our private school already houses grades 4-5, our plan is to add grades 4, 5 and 6 in the 2012-2013 school year and then an additional grade each year there after until we are a K-8 school. *At this time, we are only submitting amendment samples for 4-6 grade.*

This rationale for increasing the grade levels served was the initial plan presented in our charter application. Expeditionary Learning will be available to our community K-16 with Prescott College offering EL courses at the higher education level. La Tierra Community School has been awarded the Arizona Charter School Incentive Program grant, ensuring that the additional grade levels added over the next three years will have the support of these grant funds for supplies, marketing, technology and professional development for teachers.

How Additional Grades Support Mission, Educational Philosophy and Method of Instruction

Creating a high quality public K-8 school has been a part of La Tierra Community School's vision from its initial development. With a complete elementary and a complete middle school students will experience the EL model in its entirety and be fully prepared to be successful in high school. Through the EL model, teachers use standards to create engaging pedagogy that is active and authentic. Having a complete elementary and middle school following this model will ensure that students get the full benefit prior to starting their secondary experience. Also, with a solid base and consistent attention to rigor, students should excel in the next stage of their education and be better prepared for the challenges of higher education. Undoubtedly, expanding the grades offered from K-3 to K-6 in 2012-13 and then K-8 by 2014-2015, La Tierra Community School will be meeting the needs and desires of students and families along with satisfying the mission of the school.

Mastery of Coursework and Grade Level Promotion

Advancing to the next grade level is a measured, accurate process at La Tierra Community School. Students must meet the **curricular long-term learning targets** (which are aligned with standards) in order for promotion to be recommended.

For example, during a semester Language Arts class, there will be between five to ten long-term learning targets that students will be expected to master. Under each long-term

learning target there are supporting targets that help teachers frame their daily lessons and allow for both summative and formative assessment. Each target is aligned to Common Core Language Arts standards and all assessments measure whether a student has met the “Accomplished” level of achievement. Grades are matched with standards instead of delineating by “type” of assessment like a test, quiz, or performance. Progress reports will state whether students have fallen into one of the following categories within each learning target:

Exemplary (EX) = STUDENT GOES BEYOND THE TARGET DISPLAYING EXCELLENCE

Accomplished (ACC) = STUDENT CONSISTENTLY MEETS THE TARGET

Developing (DEV) = STUDENT SHOWS PROGRESS TOWARDS MEETING THE TARGET BUT EVIDENCE IS INCONSISTENT

Beginning (BEG) = STUDENT HAS PROVIDED LITTLE OR NO EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS TOWARD TARGET

Incomplete (INC) = STUDENT HAS NOT PROVIDED ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO MAKE AN ASSESSMENT

At the end of the semester, all long-term target final scores are averaged. The score must fall in the “Accomplished” level of achievement in order for the student to get a passing grade. The use of standards to assess students is done in all content areas.

Portfolios:

There will be a portfolio system established at La Tierra Community School. Every two years students will participate in a “passage” opportunity where they will use their portfolio to share their academic, social, and emotional growth using physical evidence and reflection. The presentation of the portfolio typically will happen towards the end of the school year and will be shared with a variety of community members. Participating in this process and meeting the established criteria at a high level, also contribute to the decision as to promotion or retention.

Every effort will be made through on-going assessments and interventions to respond effectively to student needs. If a student has met the standards, at an “Accomplished” or above category, promotion will be recommended. If that has not happened, several options will be considered.

These options include but are not limited to:

Retention in the current grade level

Intense remediation in the standards that were not met at the “Accomplished” level (this could happen both during the school year and when school is not in session)

In regards to keeping students on track and at or above grade level, La Tierra Community School aims to identify goals which are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound, and in accordance with AZ LEARNS requirements

Standards Integration Strategy:

Teaching staff will build their curriculum (Learning Expeditions) using a digital Learning Expedition Planner that utilizes an on-line template. The template chronicles a semester worth of planning that expects teachers to consider what they want students to achieve. Teachers then plan backwards, scaffolding the learning down to individual lessons. Some of what is included in the digital plan is a description of the Guiding Questions, Long-Term Learning Targets, Supporting Targets, Project / Product Timelines, Assessment Plans, and specific Lesson Plans. The targets are directly linked to the **State Standards (now Common Core)**. An administrator has access to all on-line plans and teachers can also choose to share their plans with anyone on the staff---knowing that some teachers will be working together on similar curriculum. The director will have the responsibility to make sure that teacher's curriculum is aligned with the state standards.

Included in the on-line template:

- Learning Expedition Narrative
- Guiding Questions
- Long-Term Targets aligned with AZ/Common Core Standards
- Supporting Targets aligned with AZ/Common Core Standards
- Literacy Practices
- Math Knowledge, Reasoning and Skills
- Technology Integration
- Project / Product Timelines
- Assessment Plans
- Experts Being Used
- Service and Adventure
- Lesson Plans
- Calendar

The La Tierra Community School Director, along with the ELS School Designer, will provide consistent, periodic feedback on the Learning Expedition plans and the coverage of state standards. The Director will also analyze the quarter and semester academic classroom results, evaluating the extent of which the learning expedition and lesson plans were successful at meeting the established standards.

Student Monitoring Strategy:

The LTCS teachers will be using a standards based assessment approach. The teachers will establish long-term targets that will help guide instruction and frame assessment. The grading and reporting will be directly linked to the level at which students meet the long-term targets / academic expectations.

Forming supporting targets and assessing those targets in multiple ways will help guide instruction. Formative assessments will provide feedback and give direction. Summative assessments will help distinguish status at which students have mastered the target. Both formative and summative assessments provide valuable information to assist in planning.

LTCS will utilize DIBELS and N.W.E.A. MAPS testing (or an equivalent measure) to help measure student growth in reading, writing, and math. Students will take the DIBELS test twice and the MAPS tests three times during the school year. MAPS testing, which is aligned with Arizona State Standards (along with national standards) gives a detailed benchmark regarding student achievement and growth.

As students build their portfolios and then share their work with family members during student-led conferences, a level of meta-cognition will be established that allows students to fully understand their academic standing, grade-level expectations, and areas for growth. A variety of pieces of evidence, that includes norm-referenced tests, will help parents, students, and the teacher monitor progress and establish appropriate goals and plans.

Changes in Staffing

All additional staffing necessary with the addition of grade levels will comply with the Highly Qualified Federal Guidelines. La Tierra Community School prefers that all of our teachers are both Highly Qualified and Certified in AZ or a reciprocal state. Because of the school's affiliation with Prescott College's teacher preparation program, a steady stream of highly qualified, Expeditionary Learning trained teachers are available to apply for positions at La Tierra Community School.

**La Tierra Community School
Timeline for Implementation of Additional Grade Levels**

La Tierra Community School is committed to slow, smart growth for the development of a high quality K-8 school. In that regard, grades 4-6 will be added to the current K-3 charter, in the 2012-2013 school year transitioning the current 4-5 private school to public (while following state law regarding the admission of students and the lottery system) and adding 6th grade to begin the building of the middle school. In 2013-2014, 7th grade will be added and in 2014-2015 8th grade will be added completing the growth of the school. *At this time, we are only submitting amendment samples for grades 4-6.*

School Year	Grade Level(s) Added
2012-2013	4, 5, 6
2013-2014	7
2014-2015	8



March 8, 2012

Dear ASBCS Representative,

La Tierra Community School would like to request that our amendment submission be included on the April 2012 regular agenda for the Board's consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require more information.

Sincerely,

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