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January 18, 2016

David Abbey, Director
Legislative Finance Committee
325 Don Gaspar, Suite 101
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Director Abbey:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft report: *Performance, Cost and Governance of Selected Charter Schools*. Please accept our compliments to your staff for their professionalism and collaborative approach throughout the evaluation process. As always, the Public Education Department (PED) is committed to continuous quality improvement, best practices, and improving outcomes for all New Mexico students.

To that end, we appreciate committee staff evaluating components of charter schools in New Mexico. Charter schools represent an opportunity to better engage students and provide new, specialized educational opportunities. Charter schools should also represent a high-quality educational opportunity available to all students. Much like our traditional public schools, this is not consistently the case across the state. We agree with the LFC's finding that charter school performance is similar to public school performance. The Charter Schools Division's (CSD) strategic plan aims to ensure that charters provide better, more consistent quality for New Mexico students. Through the strategic plan the CSD has begun to:

- Create systems to implement *targeted*, high-quality evaluation of academic, organizational, and financial performance to increase the effectiveness and quality of existing charter schools, including focused site visits
- Provide site-specific support for charters including trainings and other resources to enable schools to become more successful.
- Assist with the continued development and implementation of effective and high quality charter school authorizing practices.

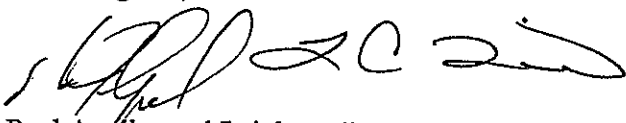
These and other items in CSD's strategic plan are in line with the report's recommendation that the PED create a strategic plan to address PEC authorizations; including decreasing state-

- Findings regarding size adjustments at charter schools compare charters with all public schools. A more fair comparison would be comparing charter schools that qualify for size adjustment with district schools that qualify for the same subsidy because of their shared lack of administrative capacity. A comparison of these two groups will show that district schools receive more in per student allocations in small school size adjustments.
- The draft report makes the finding that reading and math SBA scores declined at most selected charter schools between FY13 and FY14 without immediately mentioning that statewide proficiency rates for math and reading made a similar decrease. PED feels that delaying the release of the statewide contextual data allows this finding to be misinterpreted.
- The report makes several findings related to the distribution of level I, II and III licensed teachers and the average experience of teachers in charter schools versus traditional district schools and does not connect with previous findings LFC reports have made stating that licensure level and experience do not have significant impact on student performance. This important context from previous LFC studies would illuminate these findings as being descriptive and not holding much value regarding student performance.

Finally, the PED agrees with several findings of the report that are also addressed in the strategic plan of the Charter Schools Division, including the charge for the department to provide opportunities for charter schools to share with non-charter schools their best practices. We look forward to facilitating these conversations, but believe that districts are able to engage in these conversations on their own in meaningful ways prior to any PED intervention.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft report. We look forward to working with the LFC to improve the educational outcomes for New Mexico's more than 330,000 students.

Warm regards,



Paul Aguilar and Leighann Lenti
Deputy Secretaries of Finance and Operations and Policy and Program

HS/mp

cc: Leighann Lenti, Deputy Secretary of Policy and Program
Matt Montaño, Director, Educator Quality Division
Matthew Pahl, Policy Director