

Dear Community,

There has been a lot of buzz in the news lately about charter schools. We realize that charter schools are in a strange position. On the one hand, your tax money goes to support us – just as it does for the district schools. On the other hand – while the district School Board is elected by you, our Board (called the Governing Council) is not. We believe that because of this we have an obligation to reach out to you with a policy we are calling “active transparency”. We would like to share with you a few general facts about our school and show you how you can get more information and how you can have a voice in what happens at our school.

First– despite all the national rhetoric – charter schools in the state of New Mexico are totally public. They cannot be managed by a for-profit company. Our teachers are state employees and must be certified just the same as district teachers, they have ERA retirement, school insurance etc. There is no tuition charge to attend. We cannot pick and choose our students – there is a blind lottery held every year. We provide all our students with the support that they need – without prejudice. Our students must take the same standardized tests as the district students. We are ranked using the same rubric as all public schools.

So – what is different? Well – the most important aspect of a charter school is that it must have a charter. A charter is granted based on an application to the state, (that must be renewed every five years), that shows what the focus of the school is, why the community benefits from the creation of the school, and how the school plans to balance its unique angle on education with the requirements of the state.

Aldo Leopold Charter School (ALCS) in Silver City is a charter school with grades 6th-12th for students to gain knowledge and meet the state standards through experiential education. Our vision is that students graduate using the skills, perspectives, and information they gain at school to enhance their own lives and to advance social, economic, and environmental sustainability. The Gila National forest is one of the learning labs used by ALCS students. High School students challenge themselves every year by going on four-day backpacking trip in the Gila Wilderness, away from cell phones, computers and other daily luxuries that teenagers have come to expect. They go with experienced and trained school personnel in first aid, orienteering, backpacking, and several are trained as Wilderness First Responders. Our middle school also spends time in the great outdoors every Wednesday, and occasionally they have a camping trip or two to places like the City of Rocks State Park. Our mission at ALCS is to provide an engaging and challenging educational program emphasizing direct experience, inquiry learning, stimulation of the creative process, and stewardship of our community and natural environment.

If this sounds interesting to you and your children, please visit our website to find the next lottery date. We are still accepting applications for students in all grades. Our website is <http://www.aldocs.org/pages/ALCS> . Our phone number is 575 538-2547. Our director is Wayne Sherwood wsherwood@aldocs.org . We also have two public meetings per month, the Governing council, which is like our school board and the School Advisory Council, which is composed of parents, teachers and students. The dates and times for the meetings can found on the school calendar on the school website. We welcome your feedback

Thank you, Wayne Sherwood, Director ALCS

