

# New charter school approved in Las Cruces: Explore Academy



*Editor's note: This version correctly states that Explore Academy Las Vegas is in Nevada.*

LAS CRUCES – During the Public Education Commission meeting on Friday, the commission unanimously adopted a new contract presented for Explore Academy Las Cruces.

Explore Academy Las Cruces will be the third in the Southwest after Explore Academy Albuquerque, which opened in 2014, and Explore Academy Las Vegas in Nevada, which opened in 2020. The Explore Academy network aims to prepare students for college in part by giving students choices in their educational path.

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"We strongly advocate for choice," Explore Academy Las Cruces Principal Karen Casedy said. "We just feel that students are more successful when they become engaged with the content, as well as their community and are more successful when they have those choices."

Students may have two options for an English class at Explore Academy, Casedy said — one that focuses on fantasy writing and another that focuses on multicultural writing.

The model is intended to empower students by giving them choices in their education. For upper grade levels, students may choose majors that certain teachers specialize in such as forensics, engineering, physics, law, psychology, etc.

Explore Academy also offers dual enrollment. Casedy said the goal is that students graduate with at least one course from a community college.

Unlike schools that follow a semester or year-long class schedule, Explore Academy offers quarterly or monthly learning modules so students learn in short class seminars rather than one class that is the same all year.



The Las Cruces location, at 910 N Telshor Blvd., is projected to open its doors to students on Aug. 5, 2021, initially serving grades 6–8. Casedy said the school will hopefully expand the number of grades, eventually serving elementary through high school students.

"In Albuquerque, we're in our first year of having an elementary school this coming school year," Casedy said, who is currently the vice principal at Explore Academy Albuquerque. "Our vision is every year to add a grade, maybe two, (it) just depends on the enrollment."

Casedy said the school is aiming for an enrollment of 150 to 250 students for the 2021-22 academic year. Enrollment is currently open on the school's website.

The charter school is also looking to hire 10 teachers, two for each academic area.

**Education:** [Gadsden awards Santa Teresa High grad a job and scholarship in teacher training program](#)

Casedy explained that there's been a student waitlist for a couple of years, which is due to the school's application and denial for a charter in 2018.

Explore Academy first applied for a charter for a Las Cruces location in 2018 but was denied by the PEC, a decision the academy appealed, according to the school's website. A district court approved the charter on Jan. 5, 2021.

"We've been established in Albuquerque now for seven years, and the model has been very successful," Casedy said. "We know, the model works. We've had several years of tweaking and practice. Now, we're ready to come to Las Cruces and open it up."

Casedy said she started out as a science teacher at Explore Academy Albuquerque for two years before switching to the vice principal position in 2018.

"Our goal is not only for students to be successful through the this element of choice, it's just also for them to have a sense of community, and a sense of belonging," Casedy said. "That's something that we have achieved with our Albuquerque campus ... We just would like to see (that) here as well."

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