



Charter School Renewal Recommendation	
Charter School	La Causa Charter School
Date of Site Visit	October 15, 2020

The renewal recommendation is based on a thorough review and analysis of information and data from the following:

- Charter School Performance Summary
- Application for Renewal
- School Site Visit

Charter School Performance Summary		
Rating:	Met the Standard	Did Not Meet the Standard
Educational Performance	X	
Financial Performance	X	
Organizational Performance	X	
Summary Comments:		
<p>La Causa’s mission is to provide innovative, foundational, and culturally rich academic programs focused on fine arts and vocational education, bilingual education and English as a Second Language, while engaging the entire family in their children’s educational experience.</p> <p>Educational Performance: La Causa provides a dual language program with the goal of graduating students who are bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural. Although La Causa has not consistently met its academic performance measures when comparing the school to the district in the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) tests in the areas of math, English Language Arts (ELA), social studies and science; they have outperformed the district in comparison of English Language Learners (ELL) subgroups in the WSAS tests in ELA, social studies and science. The school has struggled to maintain consistency in its math performance and has used the data to address this area by designing curriculum that will bridge English teaching to Spanish to help students develop the skills they need to progress to higher level thinking tasks that require problem-solving and mathematical modeling situations.</p> <p>For the 2019-20 school year, all federal and state requirements to administer academic assessments were suspended, as a result of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver granted by the Department of Education on March 23, 2020 and the Wisconsin Act 185 enacted on April 15, 2020, there were no WSAS assessments this year.</p> <p>La Causa has consistently met its educational performance measures related to attendance, mobility, stability and promotion rates. La Causa continues to maintain an attendance rate between 92% and 93%. They have a low mobility rate and a high stability rate. Enrollment has declined over time and the school acknowledges that it is due to the competitive market on the south side with a new K-12 private school that recently opened in the fall of 2017-18 school year. This decline has impacted the stability rate and overall enrollment of the school. However, La Causa continues to find creative ways to promote its school and educational program. La Causa has recently created a new Family and Community Engagement Specialist position (FACES) that will be responsible for the retention and</p>		

recruitment of students.

Financial Performance:

La Causa continues to demonstrate a strong financial performance and has consistently met 100% of its financial performance measures for each year of the contract term. The school has consistently demonstrated an unmodified opinion, no material weaknesses and no budget deficits for each year as outlined in its annual financial audits. The financial reports raised no concerns and the auditor did not report any concerns related to the school's ability to meet financial obligations.

The budget indicates that the staffing plan is appropriate, given the enrollment. Further, the school specifically recognized the importance of maintaining a strong financial position and appropriate staffing levels.

The Team noted that an area of concern was the declining enrollment amid the increase in the number of schools in the area. However, the school is one of five major programs/services of the organization. Therefore, it is not strictly dependent on the school revenues. The Team also recommends that the school budget be based on the projected enrollment rather than the contracted maximum enrollment due to the decline in enrollment over the years and the competitive market on the south side.

Organizational Performance:

La Causa has had a strong 17-year partnership with Milwaukee Public Schools. The school has consistently met its organizational performance measures in each of the previous four years of its contract. Furthermore, with regard to the one organizational measure that they have been unable to meet (i.e., immunizations), La Causa has indicated it has plans in place to ensure further growth and improvement in this area by having a full-time nurse on site to work with families.

The current Chief Executive Officer has demonstrated a strong and stable leadership for the past 13 years. La Causa is committed to cultivating young people to become biliterate, bilingual and bicultural in Spanish heritage. La Causa has an effective board of directors with diverse backgrounds and experience. The administration, staff and board appear to be aligned and able to achieve strong outcomes.

The organization is committed to providing the best trained, qualified educators that are bilingual to serve its students. La Causa retains its educators in which many of them send their own children to La Causa. The school community shared consistent and positive stories for their satisfaction and love for La Causa Charter School.

La Causa provides numerous opportunities for parents to participate in the education of their children. They have created a welcoming environment for its parents that includes providing a bilingual parent coordinator/family community enrollment specialist. La Causa has invested in family and community engagement specialists to ensure continued strong bonds between the school, family, and larger community. Some of the supports that are provided to parents includes family events to support strategies around literacy, math, and special education and trainings around financial literacy, child/adolescent development, immigration issues and buying a home. La Causa has been responsive not only to the educational needs of students during the pandemic, but also has also monitored the ways in which the pandemic has impacted the social-emotional needs of students and families.

Application for Renewal

Met the Standard	Did Not Meet the Standard
<p>The Application for Renewal provides <i>clear, concise and compelling information</i> in the areas of Educational, Financial and Organizational Performance. The school has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Included ample evidence of increased student achievement or shown continuous improvement; <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provided credible examples and documented evidence of its financial performance; and <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Illustrated sufficiently and convincingly that it is organizationally sound. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The school's plans for continued success are clearly and effectively outlined with full details, descriptions, and explanations. 	<p>The Application for Renewal <i>does not provide clear, concise and compelling information</i> in the areas of Educational, Financial and Organizational Performance. The school did not satisfactorily address application components. Responses lack details. Descriptions and/or examples are underdeveloped. The school provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient evidence of increased student achievement or continuous improvement; <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear examples and evidence of its financial performance; and <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate evidence that it is organizationally sound. <input type="checkbox"/> The school's plans for continued success are unclear and not fully described or developed.
<p>La Causa has met all components of its application for renewal based on the above criteria.</p>	

Summary Comments:

La Causa was established as a non-instrumentality charter school in 2003 with Milwaukee Public Schools with the vision focused on entrepreneurship. This vision has since evolved over time to offer a dual language program with the goal of students to become bilingual, biliterate and bicultural. La Causa provides a robust program in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics (STEAM). Starting in kindergarten, students are introduced to STEAM through Project Lead the Way - Launch to Project Lead the Way - Gateway. As students develop and grow, students continue their progression and engage in courses such as financial literacy, art, music specifically geared to the Hispanic cultural roots, computer science, coding, video production, and robotics.

La Causa has demonstrated commitment to its partnership with Milwaukee Public Schools. The application provided evidence of growth, achievement and also set forth specific ideas and plans for moving forward to improve in areas of concern. La Causa provides a rich educational experience for all of their students.

The application included ample evidence of increased student achievement and continuous improvement. La Causa has "Exceeded Expectations" on the state report card for three consecutive years of the contract term. They continue to close the achievement gaps for English Language Learners. More than fifty percent of La Causa's students are English Language Learners. As a result, the school has demonstrated growth for English Language Learners, each year, from fall to spring on the universal screener.

The application provided credible examples and documented evidence of its financial performance. La Causa continues to embrace fiscal management best practices. They strive to balance expenditures that maximize resources and tools for students and staff. La Causa supplements its budget using grants and donations to invest additional resources for its students. As La Causa's enrollment has been declining, the school is proactively seeking ways to compete with the growing number of schools on the south side of Milwaukee. Even with the decline in enrollment, La Causa has been able to achieve a balanced budget and carryover of funds each year.

The application provided sound and organized plans moving forward with continued success for both virtual and in-person learning models. La Causa is a well-established organization in the community. There is stability in leadership and educational staff. The school is part of a broader social services organization that has deep roots in the community.

La Causa has a bilingual parent coordinator (family and community enrollment specialist) that is responsible for developing strategies and programs to recruit and retain students and families. La Causa has a number of community partners that have had a positive impact on students. Some of these partnerships have helped in providing outdoor recreation areas to support student's health and physical education programming. Partners have supported student travel and provided students with programming that prepares them for college and a future career.

The school's plans for continued success are clearly and effectively outlined with full details, descriptions, and explanations. La Causa is committed to providing a dual language program to students in grades K4 through 8. The program is in the beginning stages for students in K4 through third grade, growing a grade level each year. La Causa's goal is to achieve high academic performance and language proficiency in reading in both English and Spanish. Students who are identified as English Language Learners will make at least one and a half year's proficiency growth in one year's time.

School Site Visit

Met the Standard	Did Not Meet the Standard
<p>Charter school site visit provided excellent further evidence that the school is meeting performance standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> School presentations clearly and effectively communicated information from its Application for Renewal. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> School sufficiently addressed any issues/concerns raised by the MPS Charter School Contract Review Team members. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> School (if appropriate) provided sufficient supplementary information to further clarify performance results and ratings. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Samples of student work and classroom visits reflect strongly and positively the school's teaching and learning practices. 	<p>Charter school site visit did not provide compelling evidence that the school is meeting performance standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> School presentations insufficiently communicated information from its Application for Renewal. <input type="checkbox"/> School did not adequately address issues/concerns raised by the MPS Charter School Contract Review Team members. <input type="checkbox"/> School did not provide ample supplementary information to clarify performance results and ratings. <input type="checkbox"/> Samples of student work and classroom visits did not necessarily positively reflect the school's teaching and learning practices.
<p>La Causa has met all components of its school site visit based on the above criteria.</p>	

Summary Comments:

The school presentations clearly and effectively communicated information from its application for renewal. It was evident that school staff values relationships with students. The parent and student testimony all spoke to the strong positive relationships within the school community. The presentation provided further evidence of the rich culture and community that the school's educational program illustrates. There were a number of video testimonies from staff, students, parents, and alumni that spoke to the strong community at La Causa and the importance of being bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural.

Parents spoke to the importance of maintaining the native language while learning a second language. There are a number of staff members that are parents of children attending the school as well. This shows the strong connection to the culture of the school community. There are a number of clubs and after school activities that students have the opportunity to be involved in. Unfortunately, many of these clubs are on hold due to the number of hours students are online through the virtual platform.

The school sufficiently addressed any concerns raised relating to difficult issues such as student academic performance, enrollment and providing services to special education and English Language Learner students in a virtual environment. The decline in enrollment is a concern. However, the school is addressing the competitive market to recruit and retain students. Not only does La Causa offer a dual language program, they also provide STEAM through Project Lead the Way. This allows students

to stay connected to their culture and provide opportunities in career pathways in the future.

The school provided samples of student work and classroom visits that reflected strongly and positively the school's teaching and learning practices. The Team had the opportunity to visit the virtual classrooms. The classes were well structured and organized. The classes, even in the virtual realm, reflected the school's teaching and learning practices. Students were engaged and actively participated throughout. The classes effectively used breakout rooms for additional small group instruction. The team was able to see and hear students' work and students actively participating in lessons through effective use of technology. The kindergarten English literacy class was learning the alphabet in Spanish and American Sign Language.

During the focus groups, students spoke of how they saw La Causa as a safe school and appreciated the relationships with their teachers. Some of the student testimonials are below:

What I like best about my school is that no matter what area we are living in, they keep us safe, they make sure that we have a safe environment, especially with so much going on, they make us feel comfortable and give us a hope for the future.

I feel supported at my school because a lot of teachers have been here for more than five years, they make you feel at home, like part of the family, teachers share their backgrounds and their life experiences.

Charter School Review Team Renewal Recommendation

X	Full-Term Term of 5 Years	<p>To be eligible, schools must be in the last year of the contract term and have achieved the following: <i>There is a strong and compelling record of evidence that the school met or exceeded the performance standards in the areas of Educational Performance, Financial Performance, and Organizational Performance.</i></p> <p><u>Guidelines for Recommending Five-Year Renewal:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Team determines that a school primarily merits <i>Met the Standard</i> ratings in the performance areas. • A school that receives mixed ratings may be recommended for a full five-year renewal term if sufficient additional evidence obtained from the school's Application for Renewal and School Site Visit make this a credible recommendation.
	Short-Term Term of 3 Years	<p>To be eligible, schools must be in the last year of the contract term and have achieved the following: <i>There is a strong and compelling record of evidence that the school met or exceeded a considerable number of the performance standards in the areas of Educational Performance, Financial Performance, and Organizational Performance and/or shows continuous, meaningful improvement toward meeting the performance standards.</i></p> <p><u>Guidelines for Recommending Three-Year Renewal:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Team determines that a school primarily merits <i>Met the Standard</i> ratings or demonstrates continuous and meaningful improvement in the performance areas. • A school that receives mixed ratings may be recommended for a three-year renewal term if evidence obtained from the school's Application for Renewal and School Site Visit make this a credible recommendation.
	Non-Renewal / Revocation	<p><i>The school does not apply for renewal or the school's educational, financial, and/or organizational performance results do not meet defined standards and are deemed unsatisfactory. This would result in a recommendation for non-renewal/revocation.</i></p> <p><u>Guidelines for Recommending Non-Renewal / Revocation:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school receives a <i>Did Not Meet the Standard</i> in all three areas of performance. • A school that receives mixed ratings may be recommended for non-renewal/revocation if evidence obtained from the school's Performance Summary, Application for Renewal, and School Site Visit make this a credible recommendation.

Summary Comments:

The Charter School Review Team recommends a full-term charter contract renewal for La Causa. The school demonstrated strong and compelling evidence that the school met or exceeded the performance standards in the areas of educational, financial and organizational performance.

La Causa is a strong partner with Milwaukee Public Schools for seventeen years. La Causa is deeply committed to its mission and vision. This is a unique and much needed program offered by MPS to serve this community. La Causa is organizationally and financially sound and has met a large majority of its academic performance measures. La Causa has exceeded expectations on the state report card and continue to strengthen test schools, especially with English Language Learners and closing the achievement gap as demonstrated on the academic performance as well as the state report card.

La Causa is a well-established program in Milwaukee, bilingualism and biliteracy is an important goal for our city. La Causa supports the students and families in this endeavor. Staff and parent testimonials refer to a strong sense of family in the organization. The leadership is focused on maintaining its values while growing and strengthening their dual-language and FAST programs.

The review of the data, classroom observations and presentation by La Causa made it clear that La Causa is a well-run and effective organization, providing students a quality education. The goal of students becoming biliterate, bilingual and bicultural was evident throughout the classroom visits.

The main concern of the Charter School Review Team is the declining enrollment and the Team acknowledges that this is a trend in this area and is not unique to La Causa. As a large organization they are able to absorb this loss, currently. However, it will be important to monitor these trends over time and for the school to continue its recruiting efforts. La Causa has a unique program that not only recognizes Hispanic culture, it also has a robust STEAM program to build student interest in future careers.

Lastly, the testimony provided by students and families confirmed that this is an important and vital program for Milwaukee. The students, families and staff care deeply for the school. They feel safe and feel it is more than just a school. It is a community and a family. In fact, some of the staff enroll their own children at La Causa. The board, administration and staff all show equal commitment to the program and their families. They all believe in its mission and are committed to growth and success at La Causa.

MPS Charter School Review Team Members

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Signature: *Bridget Schock* Date: October 15, 2020
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