



COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT



APPLICATION DETAILS

School Name: Elevate Academy	
Contact Person: Monica White	Contact Email: mwhite@elevate2c.org
Application Type: Start Up	Grant Budget: \$1,249,899
Grades Served: 6 – 12	New Seats Created: 487
Application Status: Funded	

RUBRIC

A. Grant Project Goals

Identify 3-5 grant project goals and **justify** each goal in terms of its value in supporting the planning and implementation of your proposed school. **All grant spending, including future revisions to your budget, must fit clearly within one of your stated project goals.**

Reviewer Comments – Grant Project Goals

Strengths:

- Project goal number 1 specifically identifies percent of students who will be awarded with two or more industry certifications. This goal is measurable and in alignment with school's vision. The attendance goal is also measurable. One goal specifies an intention to use STAR assessment to measure growth in reading and math, utilizing the assessment's national norms for at-risk youth.
- It is clear what the school design and model is for Elevate through the narrative.
- The STAR Assessment is used for benchmarking and monitoring student growth.
- 5 goals are presented with trackable measures for each. Goals speak to reading and math growth utilizing STAR assessment. Goals align with charter and mission/vision of the school. Goals include CTE opportunities and industry certifications as advanced opportunities for high school students.

Weaknesses:

- Project goals do not address Idaho's required performance criteria for achievement and growth outcomes for EACH subject in Grade 8. Project goals do not address the school's serving a student population within five percent of local demographics, though this information is detailed later in the application.
- There is no vision and mission clearly stated, thus it is difficult to determine if the grant project goals align; although the goals do align with the school design and model stated in the narrative.
- Elevate is using the STAR assessment to determine student growth. The STAR assessment is not a state required performance criteria for achievement and growth.
- One goal states effectiveness will be measured by "awarding a minimum of 80% of students with two or more industry certifications upon graduating within 5 years"; yet another goal stated they will move students toward high school graduation at an "accelerated pace". These two goals are somewhat confusing.
- There is no goal that addresses "serving a student population within five percent of local demographics".
- Grant Project Goals do not seem to provide a framework with which grant spending can be directly aligned. It is not clear how proposed CSP grant expenditures are aligned to these goals. Goals do not include ISAT performance expectations, nor do they include achievement measures (only growth). The justification for selecting these performance goals in relation to activities under this CSP grant application are not clear, as they do not explicitly align to grant activities proposed. Timeline for achieving proposed goals does not align with grant period and many goals are not written to be achievable within the proposed grant period.

B. Educational Philosophy, Instructional Practices, and Curriculum

Fully *describe and justify* the design of the academic program in terms of the educational philosophy, instructional practices, and curriculum that will be utilized to meet the school's performance objectives. Be sure to include key design elements, references supporting its validity and alignment to state and federal requirements, and rationale for why this education model was chosen and how it will produce strong outcomes for the unique community and student population the school will be located within.

Reviewer Comments - Educational Philosophy, Instructional Practices, and Curriculum**Strengths:**

- Application indicates that school has built curriculum by cross-walking Idaho state content standards and career technical standards. School's founders interviewed local business leaders in order to justify intervention focus on reading and writing, in addition to industry certifications. General descriptions of differentiation for diverse, underachieving readers is provided. Student curriculum is delivered through Infinite Campus learning management system, and one-to-one technology is in place to ensure access to programming.
- The philosophy, instructional practices and curriculum are easily understood. A continuum of academic coursework is clearly articulated for grade levels and the schedule for the instructional day is the same for all grade levels and well defined in the grant application.
- Elevate engaged a curriculum designer to align curriculum with Idaho standards connected to graduation requirements as well as CTE standards; making connections through real-life and hands-on activities. Curriculum is designed and delivered for students to manage and monitor progress through curriculum cycles that were developed around the CTE course a student is studying. Mastery-based learning is emphasized.
- All students receive grade level content, then individual needs are met through small group and individual interventions.
- Experience working with this population by the two leaders has led to the school model and design.
- Leaders worked with local business professionals to determine what the needs were within the work force. Interviews helped to inform plans and curriculum decisions for the school and its targeted population.
- Students have access to core curriculum materials and some intervention materials through Infinite Campus; they submit work through google documents and use google calendar to schedule their day. Each student has access to an individual Chrome Book. Specialized technology is provided when CTE courses require it. Benchmark, monitoring and mandated assessments are administered through technology.
- The applicant presents a compelling educational program with clear, research-based philosophy and instructional approach. Behavioral expectations, enrichment program, and other relevant factors are clearly articulated between the grant application and the attached charter document. The curriculum approach presented is relevant and engaging, with high expectations for all high school students. The educational program is a good match to the needs of the targeted student demographic. Educational program addresses soft skills and other desirable characteristics needed for career success. Inclusive model incorporates a broad variety of supports for students, included extra reading support. Specialized technology is presented that aligns with the academic program and student needs. Alignment to standards is clearly articulated.

Weaknesses:

- Specific examples of curricula would help to illustrate alignment of course curricula to state and federal CTE guidelines, as well as state standards. Curricular choices are not justified through the use of published research or data-based anecdotal evidence about previous implementation.
- Application does not speak to how school will utilize autonomies and flexibilities granted to charter schools under state statute to create programs that meet the unique needs of the school's anticipated demographics.



- Intervention resources were not identified. ***This was addressed in the next section using STAR 360 intervention.
- Behavior expectations were not specifically addressed but the Power 100 curriculum is utilized for personal development.
- No research has been cited for what works with this population in this section. ***This was addressed in the next section – research cited in "Visible Learning" best practices applying to at-risk students.
- The arts were not identified in the core academic curriculum.
- Behavioral expectations could have been more explicitly addressed in the application, though more detail was found in the attached charter document. The development and implementation of the Problem-based curricular approach could use more articulation as it is unclear how curricular resources will be chosen or how projects are planned/delivered.

C. Teaching and Learning

Fully ***describe and justify*** the design of the instructional strategy in terms of the educational philosophy, instructional practices, and curriculum that will be utilized to meet the school's performance objectives. Be sure to include key design elements, references supporting its validity and alignment to state and federal requirements, and rationale for why this strategy was chosen and how it will produce strong outcomes for the unique community and student population the school will serve.

Reviewer Comments – Teaching and Learning

Strengths:

- Instructional practices and curriculum – specifically Visible Learning and the "learning hook" process – are presented with sufficient detail and are in alignment with proposed educational program.
- Explains how the school will use classroom and/or standardized assessments to determine the needs of individual students and to drive and differentiate instruction.
- Identifies the range of differentiation and intervention structures (RTI and Multi-Tiered System of Supports), tools, and approaches in your design and explains how teachers will use these systems to respond to the needs of individual students.
- Ways in which the school is set up to both accelerate and meet individual needs as well as the personnel and approaches were identified.
- A clear research-based philosophy of how students learn underpins the instructional approach. Scaffolding of lessons for mastery is clearly described through use of the "Learning Hook" and "Cognitive Conflict". Several systems for intervention and tiers of support are identified, both in the grant application and the charter document.

Weaknesses:

- Links to research basis for Visible Learning would strengthen this section of the application.
- Explanation of the SOLO taxonomy would be helpful.
- Section could be more clearly articulated with specific steps, but all elements are present. Specific instructional delivery methods were not presented in this section, but are presented elsewhere within the application.

D. Student Academic Achievement Standards

As an independently governed public school, charter schools need to ensure plans, systems, and tools for strong oversight and monitoring in the areas of academic performance. In this section, persuade the reader that your school will have rigorous goals and adequate oversight to ensure quality implementation, operation, and accountability.

Reviewer Comments – Student Academic Achievement Standards**Strengths:**

- Multiple forms of assessment are used by school personnel. Teachers and administrators are formally trained on administration and collection of data, and classroom teachers receive training on formative assessment to drive daily instruction. Analysis of STAR data led to a decision to beef up reading intervention programs and hire additional staff for one-on-one work with most at-risk students. This is a strong and specific example of the use of data to drive budgetary and policy decisions.
- Multiple measures are utilized that include data from ISAT, STAR benchmark assessments for reading and math, mastery and skills-based classroom assessments with industry specific exams for CTE courses. Teachers receive training on formative assessments that drive instruction.
- Quarterly benchmark assessments of the STAR test to monitor growth toward goals are used. Teachers are responsible for analyzing the data, constructing intervention strategies and applying specific curriculum to meet student specific needs. Teachers are aware to check for inconsistencies in the data based on what they know about students.
- ISAT and the STAR assessment data is cross-walked to ensure measurements correlate. Data is presented to the board of directors in June in order to make any budget adjustments in order to better meet student needs.
- CTE exams are given at the completion of a student's specific program of study during the final two years of high school. This data is compared to state-wide data to ensure students are meeting high level expectations.
- Effective practice to utilize STAR as interim assessment for progress monitoring. Utilizing state tool to set benchmarks. Examples given of how data is used for budget/policy decisions.

Weaknesses:

- Seemingly heavy reliance on STAR assessments, given quarterly, is not necessarily a weakness. However, attention should be given to developing a robust set of assessments that allow instruction to be adjusted on a more immediate basis.
- Industry-specific CTE exams are administered at the completion of students' two-year immersion and focus. Might additional formative assessments strengthen the CTE experience?
- The performance of teachers, based on the data, was not identified.
- It was not clear to me what the practice of teacher reflection and use of data would be from the grant application itself, but I found reference to it within the charter document in one of the attachments that describes use of 5th day for teacher data review and instructional planning.



E. Student Demand and Community/Local Support

Schools funded under the CSP subgrant must ensure they are in tune with their communities' needs and priorities. In this section schools will document their vitality and long-term sustainability through demonstrating their dedication to developing and maintaining community partnerships and connections.

Reviewer Comments – Student Demand and Community/Local Support**Strengths:**

- School was fully enrolled in August 2019 (first day of school) and maintains a wait list of over 175 students, demonstrating strong demand for its program.
- Co-founders are seasoned local educational leaders, and have garnered considerable funding and business partnerships – especially in connection with its CTE vision and mission.
- School maintains its own Career Technical Advisory Committee, with broad representation from the local business community.
- Parental roles in the life of the school are presented as a complex reality, especially in connection with a school model focused on at-risk education. Multiple opportunities for connecting with parents are mentioned.
- Current student demographics well explained through both narrative and Table 1.
- The school began fully enrolled with a wait-list of 175 students.
- Elevate has impressive partnerships with local businesses. Many have contributed financially to the school either in funding or equipment. Community partners serve on an advisory committee and there is a parent advisory committee that meets quarterly. Some parents have become involved in Friday extension projects. Teachers communicate with parents on a weekly basis. Students showcase block work on a quarterly basis to both families and community members.
- Future parent surveys will help provide information to the school and provide ways in which parents can become involved at a deeper and more meaningful way.
- Opening at full enrollment with a long wait list demonstrates high demand for the educational model. Exceptional networking and partnering with community organizations is demonstrated. Parent advisory committee to engage parents.

Weaknesses:

- Although it is evident that Elevate is a treasured gem in its community, there was no sound strategy mentioned for marketing and branding. No specific strategies were mentioned for student recruiting except for the fact that the need is there according to a report that showed projected increase in at-risk populations by another organization and students on the wait-list. Nothing was mentioned in this section in regard to dedicated budget for marketing and outreach; although there is a funding for this in the budget.
- There is dedicated funding in the budget for recruitment, yet no specific strategies.
- Specific strategies for recruitment was not specifically articulated, but a recruitment plan was found in the attached charter document and initial educationally disadvantaged representation in student population confirms there was sufficiently broad engagement of educationally disadvantaged and underserved students. Likewise, support for English Language Learners was not presented in the grant application, but sufficient info was found in the attached charter document.

F. Effectively Serving All Students

Charter schools are obligated to take specific actions to ensure an open, fair, non-selective method of attracting and enrolling students, and all charter schools need to be ready to serve the group of students that choose to attend. In this section, describe your plan to offer a continuum of services for all types of students, including those that are educationally disadvantaged (such as low-income, special education, English learners, homeless, migrant and other at-risk students) and gifted and talented.

Reviewer Comments – Effectively Serving All Students**Strengths:**

- The school has secured specialists to help meet the needs of its student population, including a full-time special education teacher, three behavior intervention specialists, a full-time counselor, and English as a new language instructor.
- The school has partnered with a mental wellness organization to bring full-time counseling resources to students.
- The school provides full breakfast and lunch to every student, while also managing student transportation for its student population.
- The school holds an in-take meeting for every student as part of the enrollment process that focuses on individual academic and basic needs. The school uses IDAPA code in order to define at-risk youth, the school's focus.
- Appropriate staff is hired to meet the needs of students (special education teacher specializing in trauma and behavior, intervention specialist, full time counselor, ELL instructor, safety aids and consultants to facilitate reading and tiered intervention times). Budgetary decisions are based on meeting the needs of Elevate's students.
- Elevate has elected to provide every student a full breakfast and lunch for the first year ensuring all students will have access.
- Strong evidence of a transportation plan (4 bus routes, sports bus, handicap bus, and school day excursions).
- Articulation of state's at-risk definition. Shows thoughtful approach to student needs that create a supportive learning environment, in terms of provision of showers, laundry, barber, mental wellness and other basic needs. Bus routes provided, along with sports/extra-curricular bus, to demonstrate support for students' transportation needs.

Weaknesses:

- Descriptions of comprehensive academic and behavioral strategies to identify and support students lacks specificity. While the school employs the specialists described above, it is not clear how remaining "general education" staff are trained to effectively meet the behavioral needs of a largely at-risk student population.
- Although the school has hired specialists in various areas, the proposal does not address how general education staff is trained in order to support students in the classroom. ***This was mentioned on page 25, #5.
- The proposal does not address federal, state or local funding after year one for its food service plan nor does it address compliance or sustainability. ***Page 25, #6 does address the fact there is a food service director that manages the food service program.
- ELL was not addressed in the grant application, but sufficient information found in attached charter application to demonstrate meeting selection criteria for this student group. Budgetary allocations to SPED and nutrition are not sufficiently detailed in either the grant application, the operating budget or other attachments. General language is used throughout this section and lacks sufficient programmatic detail; reviewer had to rely mostly on info found in attached charter application.

G. Staffing and Professional Development Plan

Describe the approach to staffing, inclusive of ratios, positions, etc. required for effective implementation of the chosen education model. Further, describe the process in which all staff will be supported in their ongoing professional development.

Reviewer Comments – Staffing and Professional Development Plan**Strengths:**

- The school utilizes one Friday per month for dedicated staff development. Areas of focus for the first year include the school's instructional and operational systems, curriculum review, and academic requirements.
- The school appears to have recruited certified staff to teach within the CTE field, which is described as a big challenge.
- Mentoring for inexperienced teachers is provided by more experienced colleagues, and CTE staff will engage in a state-level mentoring program for CTE teachers.
- Over 200 applicants for teaching traditional subjects is impressive. Working with industry partners to find highly qualified people to teach CTE courses.
- Professional development activities are well explained.
- Mentoring for new teachers (with experienced teachers) and CTE teachers (through SDE) is mentioned.
- Initial PD is aligned with the school's charter.
- The application demonstrates success at recruiting quality staff, noting overall difficulties and bridging gap with additional PD. Articulation of coaching for instructional staff. Staff retreat and PD on educational model core elements is included.

Weaknesses:

- Description of the professional development calendar could be strengthened by detailing activities, a sequence of focus areas, or model agendas, for the first six months to a year. While this planning will undoubtedly evolve based on unanticipated needs, this level of planning and transparency is helpful in reflecting a deep knowledge of the anticipated arc of professional development necessary in school start-up.
- Coaching and feedback in the proposal is weak.
- Supporting and encouraging innovation was not provided in the proposal.
- Staffing structure is not presented; high-level organizational plan in attached charter document, but does not outline staff (only leadership). School's staff recruitment plan is not articulated in application or in attachments. PD content is not fully detailed, and not explicit about SPED, ELL, Behavior, and other program elements. General language is used regarding PD content, schedule, and coaching, when more detail would be helpful. Operational budget has a high amount of purchased services, but it is unclear how much of this is for PD-related expenditures. Note: tuition for certifications appears to be included in the proposed grant program, and this is usually considered an ineligible expense by the federal program.

H. Financial Management and Monitoring Plan

As independently governed public schools, charters are fully responsible for ensuring quality financial management practices and ongoing financial stability. In this section, explain your school's plan to be compliant, strategic, and responsible with finances and business services.

Reviewer Comments – Financial Management and Monitoring Plan**Strengths:**

- The school has secured financing through a non-profit specializing in school facilities in order to build a state-of-the-art educational facility that meets the unique needs of its Career Technical Education focus.
- The school's CFO is a seasoned school finance officer within the state. The application states the importance of that individual's role in fostering financial acumen at the board level.
- Recognized CFO with a strong sense of policies and procedures for fiscal accounting is part of the staff.
- Financial management staff was identified and appears qualified. Additional revenue sources are identified. Facility was achieved, and specific location provided. Proposed CSP budget includes allocation to increase support for SPED instructional needs and to support strong attendance. Sufficient enrollment already demonstrated. Budget priorities shifted to address additional reading resources and support needed, demonstrating ability to mitigate risks that arise.

Weaknesses:

- Budget narrative could include additional specifics regarding professional development intended to accelerate learning for educationally disadvantaged and at-risk students.
- This section was weak overall. The operating budget provided is too high level and does not include sufficient detail to address the elements of the selection criteria. As a result, it is difficult to determine assumptions and if they are reasonable. Proposed grant expenditures do not seem to align with specific grant project goals. The operating budget only seems to achieve 51 days cash on hand, when 60 days is best practice. Staff for implementing grant are not identified, and target dates for completion of activities aren't clear. Proposed budget seems to go beyond 24 month period of implementation that the applicant is limited to. No evidence is presented in narrative of facility plan, and facility agreement attached does not clearly articulate amount of annual rent/lease to determine if costs are feasible. Some facility detail in attached charter document, but no confirmation if desired facility elements to deliver the educational program were achieved. Without a staffing plan or more detail in the operating budget, it is difficult to determine if sufficient resources are allocated, though seems implied across application and the fact that a large portion of the school is educationally disadvantaged that the school is investing in this population.

I. Board Capacity and Governance Structure

A competent, trained governing board is essential to the success of a public charter school. In this section the school will demonstrate how it has developed a strong governing board with a diverse set of skills. Board members should understand their roles and responsibilities and have in place a transition plan and ongoing professional development to maintain board strength going forward.

Reviewer Comments – Board Capacity and Governance Structure**Strengths:**

- The school's governing board provides a breadth of relevant knowledge and expertise, as well as considerable professional alignment to the school's CTE focus and at-risk student population.
- Initial board training on board responsibilities, strategic planning and school finance has taken place, and a plan for annual needs assessment and training is in scope.
- Board consists of a diverse group of professionals. Board is working with a professional trainer to support professional development based on need and self-evaluation reflections.
- Board-specific training was identified. Financial Policies identified in risk attachment and other policies articulated in various parts and attachments of application. Conflict of Interest form/process presented. Diversity of experience represented in board members.

Weaknesses:

- Application is missing a comprehensive copy of board policies, per requirement #2.
- Detailed specifics of the board's training – received to date and planned for its initial year of operation – would add strength to the application.
- Process for monitoring academic, financial, and operational performance could be more clear, and a list of current/future board policies would be helpful to confirm a comprehensive oversight structure is in place that will ensure appropriate compliance/performance management.

J. School Leadership and Management

This section should describe the intended leadership structure of your school and demonstrate a strong leadership and staffing plan that ensures high-quality implementation and sustainability of the school.

Reviewer Comments – School Leadership and Management**Strengths:**

- The school's leadership team is diversified, and appears to include sufficient expertise to manage charter-specific compliance, operations, finance, and legal matters.
- The school's Annual Performance Report describes a comprehensive set of data to be reported by Idaho's Public Charter School Commission in service of transparent, data-driven information about school quality.
- Strong leadership and/or expertise throughout all levels of the school.
- Application articulates in several points the risks around reading performance challenges for incoming students, as indicated by baseline assessments, and a thoughtful response has been presented/implemented. School leadership is experienced and demonstrates the ability to operate the school strategically.

Weaknesses:

- A comprehensive process for the board's evaluation of school leadership is not described in the application.
- Protocols were not clear for board evaluation of Monica White. Organizational plan was not clear in application, but was somewhat pieced together through Org chart in attached charter document and staffing identified in other areas of the application. Specific risks and mitigation could have been more directly and thoroughly presented in this section.

Overall comments

Reviewer Comments

- Application offers strong evidence of demand for a school focused on Career and Technical Education for the area's at-risk student population. The vision of the school is articulated, and the framework for supporting that vision (teaching strategies, curriculum, staffing approach, etc.) are generally described.
- The school is strongly enrolled during its first year of operation, and enrollment trends make it likely that the school will operate independent of CSP grant funds by the end of the grant period.
- The school's leadership team is relatively experienced, and its founding board represents the necessary diversity of experience to operate effectively.
- Much of the narrative within the application is relatively general and descriptive. Details regarding, or examples of, core instructional practices, assessment cycles, schedules and professional development would add strength and credibility to the application.
- Elevate Academy is serving the needs of a population that deserves such an opportunity as the one provided by the school.
- The model is innovative and compelling and there is research presented that demonstrates its suitability for the target student population as well as the current and future needs of students as they develop postsecondary and workforce readiness. Strong attention to serving educationally disadvantaged and disengaged students.
- Language in application narrative was too general in many places, and reviewer had to work hard combing through the documents and attachments to find relevant information regarding several elements. More specifics in the application narrative would have been helpful.