COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT

APPLICATION DETAILS

School Name: Fern Waters Charter School	
Contact Person: Kristin Foss	Contact Email: kristinfoss@fernwaters.org
Application Type: Start Up	Grant Budget: $133,224
Grades Served: 4 – 8	New Seats Created: 60
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:

- The goals match those listed in the CSP rubric. The goals are supported (justified) in other areas of the application. The Art/Music and Career goals are well articulated.
- Goals include a plan to meet or exceed district performance in both proficiency and growth scores, as well as serve comparable (within 5%) student demographics.
- The school will provide extended learning opportunities to students and help solve the over-crowding challenges of the local district by adding additional high-quality seats.
- Executive Summary and Grant Project Goals section give a good context of the school and the goals and objectives the school is striving to achieve. Four grant project goals are articulated that have clear alignment to the mission of the school and high expectations for students.
- Goals focus appropriately on student growth, diversity, and utilizing CSP funds to enrich and support the implementation of the school. Goals have trackable measures and clearly justified purposes. Setting performance goal at state average is sufficiently rigorous given district alternatives have outcomes 20% below state averages.

Weaknesses:

- Section A largely lists (parrots) the goals found in the rubric without providing much more.

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:
- Very strong, clearly supported section particularly given the knowledge/experience base created through Upper Carmen and the fact that the school is already in Year 1.
- The application articulates the research base used to inform the instructional practices at the school and meet the needs of the targeted student population. Research on young adolescents' physical, cognitive, moral, psychological, and social-emotional development are taken into consideration when selecting the curriculum and academic structure. For example, instructional practices will be multi-modal to include kinesthetic, auditory, and visual components and students will be exposed to content several times before applying learned concepts.
- Instructional methods are clearly articulated to include hands-on learning, an emphasis on community, creativity and civic engagement.
- The proposed curriculum are aligned with the Idaho Core Standards.
- The school plans to use 1:1 technology devices to supplement direct instruction with digital content including Math Aide, Prodigy Math, Imagine Math, quill, and Khan Academy.
- The application outlines a strong articulation of curriculum and delivery methods that are research-based with articulated links to cognitive science for core content delivery that utilizes highly-personalized instructional practices, structured mini lessons, science labs, targeted mastery, community connection, problem solving, and hands-on learning, extending CTE content and activities down into middle grades. Looping of teachers and curriculum with mixed grades classrooms, the school presents a robust curriculum offering despite its small size.
- Extended learning, smartboards, web-based learning applications and 1:1 devices enrich and expand student learning opportunities. Clear standards alignment is articulated, and new curricular resources requested through CSP grant also appear standards aligned. Partner with Youth Employment Program and resources for computer programming. Use of many autonomies and flexibilities have clearly been utilized to meet cognitive and social-emotional needs of middle age students.

Weaknesses:
- Specific articulation of standards alignment of proposed CSP curricular purchases would be helpful to the reviewer.

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:
- Strengths and support largely found in prior section.
- Teachers will use summative and formative assessments to monitor student progress and identify students for intervention. The school prioritizes having clear objectives, high expectations, timely feedback and clearly defined measures of success. Teachers will meet with students individually each week and discuss performance and plan for any required interventions, re-teaching, or acceleration. Additionally, the school will utilize community resources to provide additional supports for students and families.
- Application articulates how teachers use a range of data and instructional strategies to support learners, including use of rubrics, repetition until mastery is achieved, system of differentiation, 3 - tiered support system, and weekly data meetings to review student performance and adjust instruction. Assessments used for data collection are identified in Section D.

Weaknesses:
- Lacks the 'how' and details of how teachers will do the things it says they will do. Only one page spent on this important topic.
- Minimal detail is provided on how interventions provided at Tier 2 and 3 will differ from one another.
- Would have liked to seem more articulation on the range of supports across each of the tiered intervention levels.

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:
- Evidence is provided in Executive Summary that this model has had success and some of the same individuals will implement the program here.
- The application identifies that assessment data, including benchmark screening and progress monitoring will be part of an ongoing performance monitoring process. Teachers will use data to drive change in instruction and curriculum to meet student needs.
- School has identified a variety of classroom, interim, and summative assessments to assist with performance management of the school. Use of data to drive instruction is clearly a part of the school's educational model.

Weaknesses:
- Only about 1/2 page for section D. Essentially a list of assessment mechanisms without discussion on the how, when, by whom or specific plans. Needs more detail.
- The application does not clearly articulate the process or system teachers will use to review data and adjust instruction.
- Use of benchmarks not specifically addressed. Benchmark assessments are identified (and each has implied progress benchmarks), but it is not clear if performance benchmarks are adjusted annually, or how data is utilized to inform policy and management decisions. How staff will be trained on assessments was not clear.

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:

- Actual evidence with Year 1 enrollment success. Little additional growth needed to meet target of 60.
- Recruitment efforts have included door-to-door information sharing, including targeted low-income neighborhoods, as well as paperwork completion assistance to ensure educationally disadvantaged students have access to FWPCS.
- The school will use the G-Suite for families engagement and communication, in addition to providing opportunities for families to volunteer at the school in a variety of roles.
- The application clearly articulates how parent input was included in the design of the charter school.
- Door-to-door canvasing in low-income areas helped the school open with 57 of its 60 max capacity, well exceeding Year 1 enrollment target and with a waitlist in 3 grades. Sufficient funds are included in the CSP budget for additional marketing and recruitment. School's diversity demographics are within the 5% of the local district.
- Significant planning is evident to engage parents and the new school, including parent input on school design, school safety, enrollment policy, fundraising, and student activities offered. Use of a variety of communications tools with families/community. Annual parent & school climate surveys involve parents/community in school decision-making going forward. Strong use of volunteers and community partnerships (Youth Employment, Lemhi County Historical Society, and Salmon Public Library).

Weaknesses:

- Little discussion related to local support in area of application labeled as addressing this section – had to look to other sections for this.
- If multi-age classroom, unclear why additional students from the waitlist grades could not have been accommodated to fill the 3 remaining seats.

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:
- Clear plans to provide individualized learning and support to Special Education students.
- The school will utilize small class sizes and technology to provide individualized support, in addition to targeted before and after school tutoring. Tiered interventions will be provided. Positive behavior systems will be in place, in addition to a multi-tiered system of support. The school plans to contract with certified special education staff to develop a compliant program.
- The school will also partner with local agencies, including a food bank to provide meal assistance to students.
- Transportation can often be a challenge in a rural area with a student population spanning a wide geographic range so while the school is not planning its own transportation services, they will partner with Lemhi Ride busing and provide in-lieu of compensation for families with transporation needs.
- Application identifies a variety of elements in the educational program that will meaningfully support educationally disadvantaged students and those with disabilities, including targeted tutoring, contracted SPED coordinator/teacher/supports, Homeless student liaison, and spanish language translation for ELL population. A general description of SPED compliance is satisfied. Elimination of barriers to enrollment for SPED and educationally disadvantaged is articulated. A research-based positive behavioral support offering is articulated.
- Funds are budgeted for food service. A layer of transportation reimbursement and support provides meaningful offering for projected student population, and daily and field trip transportation costs are included in the operating budget.

Weaknesses:
- No discussion related to food plans – budget includes funds to keep a food pantry full ($100/week) and explains that plan, but narrative portion of grant does not. No home-to-school bussing; the reimbursement plan is not well explained (had to look to budget to better understand).
- No information was provided on how staff will be trained to effectively implement interventions and strategies to support the learning needs of all students.
- Few details were given to demonstrate an understanding of the legal requirements for serving diverse learners.
- Given the school's projected student population, it is concerning that a more robust food service plan is not in place. The plan to partner with community agencies has promise, however few details on what this partnership will look like and how it will ensure students qualifying for free and reduced lunch receive appropriate levels of assistance.
- It is unclear how staff will receive appropriate training to serve specific educationally disadvantaged groups, including SPED inclusive supports.The current SPED caseload is high for 0.2 FTE SPED staff, and is unclear why the school is not utilizing the 0.4 FTE identified in the operational budget for a student body of 55-60 students.
- While funds are identified for food service, and students will be connected to community resources, a specific school lunch program is not articulated.

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:
- Staffing structure appears adequate. School successfully recruited staff needed for year 1 = actual evidence of ability to find/attract needed staff.
- The school has outlined a conservative staffing plan for administration and teaching staff with shared roles and responsibilities. The school plans to attract staff with competitive compensation and opportunities for innovation, professional growth, and leadership opportunities. All teachers will have individual professional development plans targeted at their specific strengths and needs, as well as frequent observations and feedback.

Weaknesses:
- Little to no information provided regarding retention plan, professional development or evaluation plans; just statements like 'evaluations are recognized as meaningful', that teachers will be provided collaboration and PD opportunities, and that PLPs will exist – no additional details.
- It is unclear if a 0.2 FTE SPED/Counseling will be sufficient to meet the needs of the student population.

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:
- Very affordable facilities. Revenue and expenditure assumptions appear accurate and reasonable. 5% contingency built in. Budget balances absent requested grant funds.
- FWPC's small size, multi-grade classes and blended staff positions will enable the school's small budget to meet the needs of the program. The 3-year budget is conservative and includes mostly reasonable assumptions.
- The CSP budget clearly explains how the grant funds will be spent to enhance the school's programming with a focus on special education, curriculum, supplies, technology and marketing.
- The forecasted facilities costs are well below 20% of the school's annual budget.
- Narrative and proposed CSP expenditures align with grant goals, and spending is identified by school year. Key personnel are identified. A suitable facility has been secured and remodeled, with a low rent cost to the school and sufficient classrooms and support rooms to support the educational programming and specific support services. Purposely selected furnishings will be bought with CSP funds to replace or supplement used items already donated. A potential for future purchase of the facility is being considered. The school's budget contains resources for SPED staffing and support staff, and the grant budget identifies purchase of ADA furnishings and SPED curriculum.

Weaknesses:
- 30-60 day 'cash on hand' targets are not included. With grant support and 5% contingency should be able to address.
- The budget narrative did not include a plan for grant project goal implementation that included key personnel and target dates for completion of the activities.
- Operating budget only has a contingency of 5% with no established reserves; the school should be establishing a growing unrestricted reserve to offer financial sustainability to the school. The budget assumptions and sustainability of the operating budget are not fully articulated. Unclear why the Operating budget submitted was not revised to reflect actual student numbers for Year 1 of 57 students. The project plan of when items activities and purchasing will be completed is not entirely clear. Current allocation for SPED staffing may present too high of a caseload.

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 develop to maintain board strength going forward.

Reviewer Comments – Board Capacity and Governance Structure

Strengths:

- Materials indicate a strong, well-rounded board. Board has successfully governed through opening in July 2019 with sound finances and plans. ISBA membership for board training and policy support.
- The school board is comprised of community members with accounting, business,and nursing backgrounds, as well as members who are bilingual.
- The school will fund continuous professional development opportunities for board members and the board is a member of the Idaho School Boards Association. Additionally, the governing board will annually review and update all policies and bylaws.
- Board members collectively represent a capable skillset, and future recruitment according to skill is articulated. A board handbook exists with roles and responsibilities, and is reviewed annually. A regular board self-assessment is identified. PD for the board is identified and included in the budget, and board association membership.

Weaknesses:

- Not clear if there are Board Policies – a 'handbook is referenced'. Section speaks more to corporate organization (non-profit act) than outlining the items listed in the rubric.
- There are gaps in expertise on the governing board and the application did not acknowledge these gaps or provide a plan for remediation.
- Other than mention of financial policies in the risk attachment, the application does not articulate a list of board policies that exists or will be developed. It is not fully clear the process(es) by which the board will monitor school performance.

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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:
- School has a strong, experienced, well-educated leader that has successfully worked to deliver a comparable education model at Upper Carmen. Given 60-student size, organizational structure is small and easy to identify clear roles.
- The school will be led by a school leader and business manager. The school will use distributive leadership practices to supplement leadership support.
- The identified half-time administrator has a doctorate in leadership and previous experience launching and managing a high-performing charter middle school, demonstrating depth and diversity of skill to successfully launch and run the school. Administrator, Business Manager and board work together to address compliance, operations, finance, and legal.

Weaknesses:
- The application identifies that the school leader will be evaluated, however a comprehensive plan and system for evaluating performance was not included.
- It is unclear if a 0.12 business manager will be sufficient to manage the finances of the school. Additional staff may also be needed to ensure sufficient time and expertise related to Data management/ISEE.
- It is unclear what process and/or tools will be utilized to evaluate the performance of the school leader. Specific risks and operational challenges faced by the school, with corresponding responses, are not directly articulated.

Overall comments

Reviewer Comments
- The school is already having success. The leader is experienced with the model and the school's founders have access to the experts at Upper Carmen. The 60-student size at capacity is highly attainable. A highly favorable facilities plan is in place. Year 1 enrollment evidences the need in the community.
- The application details an academic program rooted in brain research and targeted to meet the unique needs of adolescents. Student performance will be closely monitored through assessments and weekly meetings with teachers and a plan for tiered interventions was provided. The school has a focus on high expectations and clear objectives for all students.
- The school submitted a conservative budget with low facility costs. The staffing plan proposes a distribution of leadership and teaching roles across limited staff.
- Given the high percentage of economically disadvantaged students that the school plans to serve, a more robust food service plan may be required to adequately meet the needs of students. Additionally, low staffing allocations (0.2) for special education may prevent the school from adequately meeting the needs of students with disabilities.
- The application represents a compelling rural educational model that is highly personalized. The school has demonstrated demand, opening larger than anticipated and with waitlists in three grades.
- Several elements were not directly addressed or did not have sufficient detail to meet the "strong evidence" score on the grant rubric. Points were given if gaps in information were found to be addressed in other supporting documents submitted with the application.

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