



COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT



APPLICATION DETAILS

School Name: Cardinal Academy	
Contact Person: Emily Bergstrom	Contact Email: ebergstrom@cardinalacademycharter.org
Application Type: Start Up	Grant Budget: \$376,085
Grades Served: 9-12	New Seats Created: 120
Application Status: Funded	

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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:

- Goals are explicit and measurable for the targeted student demographic.
- The applicant's goals are well-aligned with the vision of the school, to provide high-quality educational opportunities for pregnant and parenting teens and young adults, 14 to 21 years of age. The three SMART goals set solid targets for:
 - 1) Attendance at school, as core to academic and programmatic success;
 - 2) Completion of at least one college level course or Career Technical Education industry certification;
 - 3) Meeting and exceeding standards in reading and literacy; and,
 - 4) Serving a diverse student demographic which mirrors the primary attendance area of the school.
- The goals outlined in the application are tailored to the unique needs of the student population and will support the school in providing a strong academic program with wrap-around services.

Weaknesses:

- Although the paragraph above the goals does not explicitly state vision and mission of the school; it is evident by this evaluator that the word "envisions" implies this to be the vision/mission statement.
- None of the project grant goals addressed Idaho's required performance criteria for achievement and growth outcomes in mathematics.

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:**

- The Layered Curriculum Model lends itself to differentiation and grouping flexibility as well as individualized instruction.
- The educational model also allows student choice, decision making power and responsibility in becoming leaders of their own learning academically as well as socially and emotionally while at the same time being highly supported by staff.
- "Opportunity Fridays" allow students access for enrichment openings, often with community partnerships.
- Curriculum materials align with the Idaho State Achievement Standards and the Idaho Work Force Readiness Standards. Coursework allows foundational skills to be built and applicable knowledge and understanding activities that may lead to future job opportunities.
- One-to-one computers, access to home wireless setup, and flexible scheduling help to ensure every student educational entry into opportunities for success.
- The school's educational philosophy is guided by three principles:
 - 1) Pregnant and parenting students engage in rigorous and relevant educational experiences they help to create.
 - 2) Students are provided with basic essential support and a consistent, judgment-free environment.
 - 3) School culture is values-driven and rooted in relationships.
- In order to bring this philosophy to life, the school will utilize small class sizes to facilitate relationship development, and the Layered Curriculum instructional model. This model allows teachers to customize lessons, differentiate by offering varied starting points and a variety of means of achieving lesson objectives. Every student's progress will be driven by and monitored using an ILP.
- Block scheduling provides more extended learning time for subjects.
- Opportunity Fridays will facilitate enrichment classes with community partners.
- The application indicates that the school has built curriculum by cross-walking Idaho State Workplace Skills and Career Readiness standards. Examples of this curricula, as well as strong rationale for its use, is described for American government, history, College Preparatory Mathematics, English Language Arts and Science, Business Education, Family and Consumer Science. Additionally, the school will offer a Certified Nurse Assistant course to equip students for immediate employment.
- The school will utilize flexible scheduling, a vibrant Career Technical Education program and block scheduling to maximize educational opportunities for students who may be working during traditional school hours.
- In general, the application alludes strongly to how the 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.
- The application clearly articulates the Layered Curriculum approach which provides ample opportunities for differentiation, real-world application, and student choice. Justification for both academic and social-emotional programs was detailed and in alignment with research-based best practices.
- The school's technology plan will allow for adequate classroom technology in addition to individual student laptops and home wifi access to equip students with the ability to learn at home when they are unable to attend school in person.



- The application contained strong examples of utilizing autonomies and flexibilities granted to charter schools through the use of block scheduling, year round calendar, flexible schedules, workplace readiness, and ample Career and Tech education opportunities.

Weaknesses:

- If anything, the application could more directly reference or cite specific autonomies and flexibilities granted to charter schools to support programmatic and planning choices.



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:**

- There is strong evidence of research based approaches for this school population as well as a repertoire of assessment practices that include a variety of informal, formal and summative assessment practices. A multi-tiered approach to instruction is embedded throughout the instructional and behavioral model.
- Instructional practices and curriculum – specifically the multi-tiered Layered Curriculum instructional model developed and used by Kathie F. Nunley – are presented with sufficient detail and are in alignment with proposed educational program. A description of the three layers, which progress with building background knowledge toward application, is included.
- The application explains how the school will use classroom and 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 the design and explains how teachers will use these systems to respond to the needs of individual students.
- The school uses a variety of standards-based assessments throughout the school year to identify student learning needs, adjust instruction, and identify students for additional intervention. Data review is built into ongoing conversations between teachers and students.
- The application clearly describes how the curriculum, varied instructional strategies, and assessments selected support the unique student population.
- A range of differentiation and intervention structures are imbedded into the design of the school and informed by regular informal, formative, and summative assessments.

Weaknesses:

- Links to the research and evidence basis for the Layered Curriculum instructional model would strengthen this section of the application.
- Explanation of the SOLO taxonomy would be helpful.
- Specific examples of a layered curriculum "lesson plan" would also be helpful in articulating the core instructional framework.
- Descriptions of the school's Response to (MTSS) is relatively superficial. Given the school's reliance on layered, individualized curriculum developed by teachers, it may be unrealistic to expect that curricular and instructional modifications for the range of at-risk learners that will likely attend the school will also be adequately developed and implemented. Additional descriptions or examples of how standards-based descriptions of curriculum will be tiered and implemented will be helpful.
- Daily meetings between teacher and students are named as avenues for informing instruction, setting goals, tracking progress, and modifying daily plans. While this is aspirational, actually implementing it is very tricky indeed. Depending on student/teacher ratios, the time that this kind of ongoing activity requires can become a large part of the day.



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:**

- Students participate in classroom assessments that include formal and informal applications. Students also participate in all state mandated testing.
- Benchmark assessments in reading and math are conducted on a quarterly basis in order to monitor and record progress and achievement.
- All assessment practices are analyzed by staff and teachers in a PLC setting in order to inform and plan instruction and meet students' Individualized Learning Plans.
- Multiple forms of assessment are used by school personnel, including Renaissance Star math and reading upon enrollment.
- Teachers and administrators are formally trained on administration and collection of data, and classroom teachers receive training on formative assessment to drive daily instruction.
- Teachers will use Professional Learning Community structures and meetings with the school's Director of Academics to inform instruction.
- A variety of assessment types are used to monitor student growth and achievement and are used on a regular basis to inform instruction.
- Teachers meet weekly in Professional Learning Communities to analyze, evaluate, adjust instruction, and modify Individual Learning Plans.

Weaknesses:

- This section does not describe how data is (or will be) utilized to inform policy and management decisions.
- Creating and sustaining any type of highly personalized and data-driven instructional culture is exceedingly complex work. This is not a weakness of the application, but instead a challenge to make it happen over time. Putting as much time as possible on the front end into systems development will allow more time and energy for the plethora of significant challenges that will develop almost immediately. The school's leaders – both its executive director and Director of Academics – will certainly put their considerable experience to work!
- The application did not describe how data will be used to inform policy and management decisions.

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:**

- The school has conducted an analysis through the CDC in order to gauge enrollment targeting 6%-15% of eligible students.
- Marketing includes a robust array of strategies and activities (focus groups, social media that includes posters and video, relationships with community partners, press releases, public service announcements, website blogs and email).
- It appears there is ample funding for marketing and a sustainable process for doing so as an executive assistant is hired to take on such responsibilities as well as recruitment, promotion of school awareness, fund raising and event planning.
- The school has a strong relationship with the Salvation Army, Boise Corps. This partnership has provided the school a facility, social work services, managing an on-campus childcare center as well as financial assistance, and the provision of meals for students. Other partnerships consist of a variety of fields that lend themselves to the well-being of the population being served.
- Communication between home and school is of significant importance.
- The school's co-founders are seasoned local educational leaders, with a combined 30 years of experience with this student population. They have garnered considerable funding and business partnerships – especially in connection with its vision and mission.
- Within its targeted enrollment zone, it is estimated that 900 students would be eligible for Cardinal Academy. The school needs to enroll between 6% and 15% of those students to be fully enrolled. Given that no other similar school exists, it is reasonable to expect that the school will be enrolled.
- The school's marketing strategy is informed by the Pew Research Center and will rely on social media and radio outreach. Marketing expenses are included in the budget, as is the provision of a full-time executive assistant whose responsibilities will include recruitment, marketing, fundraising, etc.
- The school has developed mature and strong community relationships, especially with the local Salvation Army Corps. This organization will provide the school with a school facility, social work services, on-campus childcare, financial assistance, and nutrition services.
- Multiple partnerships which will provide wraparound services for students are detailed.
- The school has made a strong investment in a marketing plan with targeted advertisements and community partnerships.
- The relationship with The Salvation Army is a critical one for the school and will provide facility space, social work services, on-campus childcare, and meals.

Weaknesses:

- The application does not indicate that any students are currently enrolled or on a waitlist. That said, the existing partnerships with the Salvation Army and others, combined with the considerable experience of the school's leaders, offers optimism regarding actual enrollment. Later in the application, this issue of enrollment is listed as a primary challenge/risk to the school's success.
- The application lacked detail on how parents and community members will contribute to the school's decision-making and life on an ongoing basis.

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 is implementing a year round calendar in order to continuously serve students as well as an incentive store with an extensive stock of items for parents and babies.
- An in-house childcare program is available.
- A multi-tiered approach throughout the educational program is implemented meeting students where they are at and moving them forward in their academic, social and emotional growth and development.
- The school's commitment to all students' success via personalized learning and teacher/student relationships is clear throughout the application. The school has secured specialists to help meet the needs of its student population, including one full-time special education teacher, one certified teacher in each content area, an academic/career counselor, one school nurse, and two certified Career and Technical Education elective teachers.
- The school provides full breakfast and lunch to every student, while also managing student transportation for its student population. Indeed, much of the school's CSP grant expenditure will go toward the purchase of three buses to provide transportation to students. Additionally, gasoline cards will be provided to student drivers. The removal of transportation barriers is seen as absolutely key to the school's (and every student's) success.
- The application provides clear justification for the selection of the school's programs and interventions, including the Layered Curriculum, RtI, and multi-tiered systems of support. While targeted supports will be provided to identified students, classroom teachers are also able to modify, differentiate, and accommodate for invidious student learning needs in the general education classroom.
- A strong plan for training staff on strategies to teach English Learners and Students with Disabilities, in addition to students who have experienced trauma is outlined in the application.
- The school will leverage partnerships to meet the nutritional needs of its student population. The Salvation Army to provide the USDA National Breakfast and School Lunch program and will provide an on-campus food pantry supported by the Idaho Food bank.
- Additionally, all students will have access to transportation through bus routes or supplemental gasoline cards.

Weaknesses:

- This section does not include how staff is appropriately trained on effective intervention strategies and corresponding support tools, although this addressed in another section.
- Descriptions of comprehensive academic/RTI and behavioral strategies to identify and support students lacks specificity. While the school employs the specialists and staff described above, it is not clear staff are trained to effectively meet the behavioral needs of a largely at-risk student population.

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:**

- Recruitment opportunities use a variety of forums. Candidates must present a live or videotaped lesson plan presentation.
- Each staff member will create and submit an annual Individual Professional Growth Plan.
- PLCs are held weekly and seven days are set aside for PD throughout the year. Both the Director of Academics as well as master teachers lead PD sessions.
- A continuous feedback loop in regard to professional growth is conducted throughout the year.
- The school will utilize seven full days of professional development throughout the year, in addition to weekly PLC meetings. Areas of focus for the first year include the school's instructional and operational systems, curriculum review, and academic requirements.
- Mentoring for inexperienced teachers is provided by the school's Director of Academics.
- The school is leveraging partnerships with Teach for America, Handshake, university teacher career fairs, and online employment portals to recruit qualified teachers and staff.
- The school has secured a partnership with Salvation Army, Boise Corps to provide a state-of-the-art educational facility that meets the unique needs of its Career Technical Education focus.
- All teachers will engage in professional and self-care goal setting through an Individual Professional Growth Plan and will receive ongoing coaching and mentoring.

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.
- Recruiting staff to teach within the Career and Technical field has been described as a significant challenge, according to past CSP applicants with which this reviewer has interacted. That said, the school's founders are significantly qualified, experienced and connected, which may help to make this task less challenging.
- The staff recruitment plan appears to be targeted at mostly new-to-the-field educators who will require additional supports and professional development to meet the needs of the at-risk student population. The 4 days of professional development prior to the start of school may not be adequate to ensure teachers are prepared to implement the Layered Curriculum, trauma-informed practices, and the vast array of social-emotional supports that the school has planned.
- Additionally, the .6FTE Special Education teacher may not be adequate to meet the needs of the target population with a projected 12.5% special education rate.



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:**

- Facility clearly meets the needs of the target population (laundry facilities, on-site day care, showers, cafeteria, school store, library).
- The CSP budget template and budget narrative provides a detailed picture of planned expenditures utilizing CSP funds. While more than half of planned expenditures will provide for the purchase of three buses, the application makes clear that provision of transportation for its target student population is absolutely key to its success.
- Remaining CSP funds are targeted toward a smart combination of technology (including the creation of a computer lab and one-on-one laptops for remote access by students), various core curriculum and stipends for seven extra days of work prior to the beginning of the teaching contract. These days will enable instructors to participate in professional development on Layered Curriculum, trauma-informed instruction, special education and effective instruction for English Learners. All expenditures are aligned with the school's mission and vision.
- The application contains a strong plan for grant goal implementation that is explicitly tied to the mission and vision of the school and it's target population.
- The secured facility provides for adequate classroom space in addition to access to on-site services including free childcare, showers, and emergency laundry facilities which will support pregnant and parenting teens and their children.

Weaknesses:

- Key personnel for completed activities has not been identified in the budget narrative.
- The application did not address how the school will mitigate risks associated with lower than projected enrollment and the associated decreased financial resources.

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:**

- Continuous Board training is sought through such avenues as self-evaluation, Idaho Charter Schools Network, Idaho School Boards Association and digitally through BoardOnTrack.
- 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. Board members also seem to be exceptionally connected, with long and deep connections to resources and organizations that will serve the school's students well and further its overall mission and vision.
- The application prioritizes initial and ongoing professional development for all board members. Specific resources are identified, and an annual self-evaluation is utilized to identify specific areas of continuous improvement and ongoing training.
- The current board contains a variety of expertise and there is a plan to target additional board members to fill identified gaps in skills, background, and race to ensure the board is best suited to govern the school.
- The application noted that the board has already engaged in training from certified board trainers in areas of compliance, including Open Meetings, Open Records Laws, and Conflicts of Interest. The board will participate in ongoing self-evaluations and professional development.

Weaknesses:

- Additional details of board training and ongoing professional development is suggested (when, how often, responsible parties, etc.), including initial/ongoing needs assessment, compliance with relevant policies and laws, etc.

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 Leadership consists of two highly effective leaders with years of experience working with the targeted population.
- The school's executive director, who provides overall leadership and operation of the school, is a Master's level school and licensed professional counselor with 20 years of experience and education. Her background includes certification in trauma informed practices and the Danielson framework for teaching. The Executive Director works directly with the Board of Directors on the school budget, and manages other operational responsibilities including finances, purchasing, payroll, and collaboration with the schools largest partner, the Salvation Army. The application describes a system of accountability and reporting to ensure that the Board of Directors is apprised of ongoing issues, operational successes, and challenges. The school employees a Director of Academics who is also a veteran educational leader. Her experience includes 40 years of teaching, staff mentoring, training, human resources policies and procedure development. The application describes a robust set of responsibilities for the Director of academics, all focusing on enhancement and continuous improvement of instruction. This individual will also lead and coordinate professional development within the school community.
- The application identifies to important risk factors. First, the issue of student recruitment and enrollment is described. Risk mitigation measures include the hiring of an experienced executive assistant who will oversee marketing and enrollment initiatives. Second, the application describes the challenges associated with training its staff on trauma informed and restorative practices, as well as the layered curriculum instructional model. Training to address these topics will take place before the school starts, as well as during seven other professional development days throughout the year.
- Leadership and administrative roles at the school are well-defined and cover the broad set of responsibilities required to operate a charter school. The school will be led by an Executive Director responsible for budgeting, operations, community partnerships, and board relations and a Director of Academics who monitors the curriculum, coaches, and mentors teachers.
- The school leadership team also engages faculty and staff in an ongoing practice of examining the school's instructional program, operations, student concerns, fundraising, and mission and vision.
- The application outlines two risk factors and the ways in which the leadership team will navigate and mitigate them.

Weaknesses:

- A comprehensive process for the board's evaluation of school leadership is not described in the application. It may be wise to choose from the list of key indicators those to be reviewed on a monthly basis (such as enrollment and financial status) and those that might be best reviewed quarterly or annually (specific academic data).

Overall comments

Reviewer Comments

- There are many value-added structures that will benefit students, their families and the community.
- School leaders have experienced success previously with the targeted population.
- Strong partnerships, especially with the Salvation Army, Boise Corp, allows the student population an advantage in obtaining academic and life skills success.
- Application offers strong evidence of demand for a school focused on the educational needs of pregnant and parenting teens and Career and Technical Education for the area's target student population.
- The vision of the school is well-articulated, and the framework for supporting that vision (teaching strategies, curriculum, staffing approach, etc.) are generally described.
- The school's leadership team is a tremendous asset, bringing to bear decades of experience with similar work and student populations. Its founding board is well connected, and represents the necessary diversity of experience to operate effectively.
- The school's multiple partnerships with various organizations, especially the Salvation Army, Boise Corps, is described compellingly. Without a doubt, these trustful partnerships will help to launch and sustain the work of the school.
- The school's primary risk seems to be perceived uncertainties regarding actual student enrollment. While this is honestly portrayed as a risk, the application also includes a strong plan for marketing the school and recruiting its student body.
- The application outlines four program goals that will support the school in providing access to education and support services for young parents through an Individualized Learning approach and community partnerships. The grant will enable the school to expand it's professional development, provide much needed technology and transportation services, as well as implement a strong literacy program. The application demonstrates a clear understanding of the needs of the targeted student demographic.

