COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT

APPLICATION DETAILS

School Name: Elevate Academy North	
Contact Person: Marita Diffenbaugh	Contact Email: mdiffenbaugh@elevate-north.org
Application Type: Start Up	Grant Budget: $800,000
Grades Served: 6-12	New Seats Created: 308
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, and accompanying expenses, align with the mission of the school.
- The application shows that school leadership has an understanding of the industry needs in northern Idaho.
- 5 goals are presented that reflect the school's mission and are specifically aligned to the school's core values. Only two of the goals (#4 & #5) have clear, trackable measures. Goal #4 addresses academic growth utilizing the STAR assessment. Goal #1 addresses that the school will serve all at risk students, which exceeds the state demographic.
  Goals include CTE opportunities and industry certifications as advanced opportunities for high school students. Goal 3 speaks to targeting student demographics within 5% of local demographics, and the school projects serving higher numbers off minority and educationally disadvantaged students than surrounding districts. Attendance at 90% is also set as a goal, which is important given the low overall statewide attendance rate of 82%.

Weaknesses:

- None of the stated goals are trackable with clear metrics. While it is confusingly worded, I believe the first goal is stating that the school will serve within 5% of the low income students in Elevate North's region but the application does not state the region's low income population. In addition, since the schools mission states that the school is designed for at-risk students, I would expect the target for that group to be greater than the minimum of within 5%. There is no goal that explicitly uses the ISAT as the metric.
- Goals do not speak directly to meeting or exceeding Idaho's achievement and growth requirements on the statewide assessments for both English Language Arts and Math. While the school is targeted toward at-risk, its goal regarding this (#1) does not specifically speak to serving a student population within 5% of local demographic subgroup measures. Overall, the goals mostly focus on non-quantified funding inputs, rather than targeted outcomes that will be achieved by those inputs. Some goals overlap, which may cause confusion over what which grant funding inputs align with which goal. The timeline for achieving each goal is not clearly articulated.

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:

- Building on the success of the Elevate Caldwell school, Elevate North will utilize the same LMS, cross-walked standards, and use technology (electronic portfolios, LMS, etc) to support student learning.
- There is adequate discussion of aligning CTE and Idaho Core standards, and the application does spell out the specific curriculum that Elevate North plans to use, with some cited research.
- The applicant presents a compelling educational program with clear, research-based philosophy and instructional approach (eg. PBL, Power 100, use of pathways, student autonomy & flexibility, curriculum integration, integrated CTE, year-round calendar, etc.). Citations and noted evidence and research demonstrate and justify the selected curricular and instructional approach.
- Behavior-related supports through trauma-informed resources and restorative practices is articulated in Section E.
- The integrated curriculum approach outlined for Literacy, Math, SEL and CTE is relevant and engaging, with the educational program a good match to the needs of the targeted student demographic.
- Section D addresses how the curriculum has been crosswalked with state content, CTE, Workforce Readiness, and Deep Learning competencies/standards.

Weaknesses:

- Neither technology nor flexibilities granted to charter schools are addressed in the application at all. This portion of the application is heavy in the description of outcomes and experiences for students, but light on the practices that Elevate North will use to make those outcomes a reality. For example, the Mathematics section says that students will learn math while engaged in CTE courses, which is certainly realistic, but does not at all describe how that will be accomplished.
- The beginning of this section lays out the four key design elements for Elevate North, but the rest of the section fails to address them meaningfully or specifically. For example, there is nothing in the section that addresses the unique needs of the at-risk population that Elevate North is targeting.
- Elevate North appears to replicate the organization's existing model begun at the Caldwell campus, yet the data presented regarding performance of that campus seems incomplete and does not present performance in comparison to state achievement and growth expectations.
- While the curricular approach is identified for some core content areas, Science, Social Studies, and Arts standards are not addressed. In addition, there is little justification for the suitability of the curriculum toward meeting state standards and expectations (for example, through a standards scope and sequence that demonstrates how curricular resources will be utilized to deliver set standards).
- Staff, assessment, and classroom technology needs could be more explicitly articulated.
- Autonomies and flexibilities utilized by the school are apparent, but not articulated directly.

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:
- A variety of instructional tools were identified, strong special education and mental health supports have been researched and developed.
- Individual student pathways and learning plans tailor curricular pathways for all students.
- PBIS practices support teachers and students.
- Across sections B & C, various design features of the educational program are articulated, such as integrated educational philosophy and PBL curricular approach. A 4-part "Learning Hook" is introduced as a visible learning process structure for lesson delivery. Scaffolding of lessons for mastery is described through use of the "Learning Hook" and SOLO taxonomy.

Weaknesses:
- No specific mention of an RTI structure but it seems as if the school has thought through both academic and social emotional needs.
- The application asserts that "at-risk students traditionally lack the surface level knowledge necessary to be successful in meeting higher level competencies." This statement is frankly offensive and is deeply rooted in a deficit mindset.
- While it belongs in the prior section, the description of Learning Hooks is confusing and lacks specifics. For example, while it states that each phase will be measured, the application does not state how.
- The application provides a list of instructional strategies but does not describe how these meet the needs of their specific student population, nor does it give a sense of priority, which will be used more often, or in what scenarios.
- CTE, supposedly a focus of the school, is barely mentioned, and once it is in reference simply to field trips.
- No student assessments are named, neither are specific differentiation strategies.
- The information presented in this section is limited in terms of it directly addressing the selection criteria. Assessments are not addressed in this section, though STAR growth assessment is mentioned elsewhere. How assessments will be used to adapt instruction is unclear.
- The intervention (RTI) and MTSS systems are not identified, and it is not clear how teachers will ensure differentiation and supports to meet individual student learning needs through the ILPs or otherwise.

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:
- Identified assessments – Renaissance Learning Star and STAR.
- Teachers will receive training, support and time for data-driven analysis.
- The application describes that each student will have a digital portfolio through Elevate North's LMS that will provide them with a picture of their own progress.
- The essential components of a broadly-based performance management plan are articulated (though not in much depth).
- Effective practice to utilize STAR as interim assessment for progress monitoring and measuring growth.
- Elevate has utilized external expertise to develop relevant performance measures and interim benchmarks, which are listed.
- Professional development to establish a data-driven instructional culture is outlined.

Weaknesses:
- There are almost no specifics in this section. The application discusses a set of "design measures" that are mission aligned developed in partnership with a national expert, but does not name what those are. They could be the metrics listed at the end of the application, but those metrics are not labelled "design measures". The targets for student success metrics at the end of the section do not seem to match the mission of the school. For example, Elevate North is targeting at-risk students, and the application states that they expect these students to be behind grade level, but the targets for Star reading and math are for just one grade level of growth each year, which would not close the gap. It is unclear why the school has included a 5-year cohort graduation rate for the high school. There are no interim benchmarks set against these student success metrics.
- The application is not specific about who will use assessment data, when, and how, and there is no mention of how the data will be used to inform policy decisions at the school.
- The practice of teacher reflection and use of data was not fully articulated in the grant application. It is not clear what data systems will be utilized for housing and analyzing data. Use of formative assessments is not articulated in the application.

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:
- Multiple examples (door-to-door campaign, mailers, social media, community events) were provided on how the founders intend to conduct outreach within the community.
- A strong industry partnership is also evident and local business leaders will serve on advisory councils.
- The application identifies appropriate marketing strategies and names several avenues through which Elevate North hopes to reach its target at-risk population. The application also provides the school's enrollment goals.
- Elevate North is offering a CTE-enriched program to all students grades 6-12 that would not otherwise would not otherwise be available. The Justification of community need for Elevate's model of programming is clear (job preparation, engaging learning environment, etc.).
- Strong and broad community connections with agencies working with target demographic, particularly those most vulnerable. Established connections with local businesses and industry to inform and advise CTE provision.
- The school has identified a target enrollment of 44 students per grade level 6-10 for Year 1, adding a grade level of 44 students each year thereafter until grades 6-12 are reached in Year 3.
- The recruitment plan includes engaging disenfranchised youth through a door-to-door campaign, mailers, social media, website, local community events, and communication with local partners.
- Technical Advisory Committees and Parent advisory committee to engage parents and community members.
- The school has included a request for marketing funding in its proposed grant budget.

Weaknesses:
- Again, this section generally lacks sufficient specificity, data, and justification. For example, the application asserts that "City, education, and industry leaders and teams see Elevate Academy North as a school that will fill a gap in their current educational system..." without citing any evidence (survey, testimony, etc.).
- The graphic in this section lists chronic issues in the community but neither here nor in other parts of the application is there much detail about how these issues (suicide, mental health, abuse/neglect) will be addressed by the school.
- There is no data describing how many students Elevate North expects who are low-income, have special needs, are English learners, and so on.
- A parent advisory panel will "support" the school, but there is no information regarding how.
- It is unclear how the school's marketing strategies will be targeted to their target at-risk student population.
- The application states that community members will be involved through "an ongoing process of engagement," but does not describe what that process is.
- Justification for and sustainability of identified target student numbers is unclear. How many at-risk students grades 6-12 currently reside within the target enrollment area? How many of those students are being served (or served well) by the three other alternative options mentioned?
- No figures are presented to show the current engagement thus far, and the extent to which that has resulted in student interest in attending.
- While student demographic data is included, it is not articulated how these data points were arrived at.
- Further, the timeline and specific benchmarks for student enrollment outreach efforts is not articulated.

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 plan to serve all students is thorough (from child-find practices to IEP service and mental health supports) and comprehensive.
- Food and transportation will be provided for all students.
- There is adequate evidence for the most part in this section of the services that Elevate North plans on providing to at-risk students and students with special needs. The application described a clear plan for behavioral interventions and services for mental health needs.
- The school will serve meals to all students and provide busing for all students in their attendance area.
- The applicant demonstrates a thoughtful understanding of the needs of the school's educationally disadvantaged students through seeking out partnerships, programming, and staffing specifically to meet the behavioral, mental health, physical, and learning needs of students of EL, SPED, at-risk, and housing insecure populations.
- Articulates SPED program guidelines and compliance with federal and state requirements.
- Both behavior and academic interventions identified. SEL, behavior, and trauma training for staff, as well as intervention strategies training (Section E). Behavior Intervention plans, with restorative practices and positive supports identified.
- Full food service for all students, and bus service provided for core enrollment area.

Weaknesses:
- No mention of students with 504 plans but the reviewer assumes that it is known and will be addressed through the variety of student supports.
- The application states that Elevate North will use "evidence-based, restorative programming and curricula" without naming examples. Given that the school's target population is at-risk students, it would have been appropriate for the application to include more detail regarding how those students will be served beyond behavioral and mental wellness.
- English Learner supports not clearly articulated. Many areas of this section address the "what" of the criteria, but not the "how," which would help provide stronger evidence. For example, the food service program does not articulate specific student nutritional needs it will meet, nor does it articulate sustainability of the program and compliance elements. No detail is presented regarding the school's transportation program (How many students will it serve? How will it be organized? How will it address extracurricular transportation? Etc.).

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:
- Teacher recruitment is already underway. Staff will be trained in classroom management, formative assessment and effective planning.
- Teachers will become experts in feedback looping and teacher communication.
- The application lists a reasonable set of professional development topics available for staff, including Elevate's LMS system, which is key to the instructional model.
- The application articulates a plan for recruiting quality staff.
- Articulation of coaching and a variety of professional development elements for instructional staff.
- Use of Danielson Framework for teacher evaluation.

Weaknesses:
- The staffing plan in the application does not specify how staff will be recruited with the school's target at-risk population in mind. For example, there is no mention of recruiting teachers with strong classroom management or learning acceleration expertise.
- There is no mention of CTE, even though this appears to be core to the school's approach.
- There is no mention of innovation in the classroom, and while feedback is mentioned it is not clear what and how feedback will be used.
- While an organizational chart was included, the staffing plan does not provide detail on number of certified staff per content area to verify all content areas will be sufficiently covered by qualified staff. This section would be strengthened through providing a timeline of both recruitment and professional development.
  **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:
- Well-developed and appropriate budget for the project goals and activities.
- Multi-year budget is sound.
- The included 3-year operating budget appears reasonable and includes details of other grant revenue outside of the CSP grant.
- A CSP budget narrative is provided that articulates the areas for which CSP funding is requested. It includes sufficient detail to determine timeline for purchases. The CSP budget template and 5-year operating budget are included.
- A facility location is identified, with plans corresponding to the existing Caldwell campus.
- The operating budget shows a small $90-104k (3% of total revenues) rolling surplus each of the first 5 years.

Weaknesses:
- Budget details are fairly sparse in general. Again, the budget narrative and expenses do not link back to to Elevate North's target at-risk population in any meaningful way. There is no way to tell through the figures presented how resources are going to be expended specifically to meet the needs of that population.
- There is no description of facilities costs at all.
- 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. No articulation of qualifications of finance/operations staff or specific plans to mitigate risk beyond marginally lower enrollment.
- The specific details of the facility are not articulated beyond their comparison to the existing Caldwell campus. Facility costs are slightly high at 25% for Year 1, reducing to 21% by Year 4.
- Staff for implementing grant are not identified.
- No identification of risk, or mitigation thereof, is articulated.

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:
- Existing Elevate board will expand and include new members from the local (new) community. There will also be an advisory board for Elevate North.
- The board is experienced in governing a charter school and is committed to continuous growth.
- Elevate North's governing board appear qualified and hold a wide array of expertise.
- The board's role and chosen policies are appropriate and align with Idaho law and best practice.
- The application discusses how the board is taking advantage of ISBA's training for professional development.
- One combined network board with diversified expertise, and representation for the Elevate North campus will be added. Articulates necessary board compliance elements.
- The board recognizes its public accountability for financial, academic, and operational outcomes of Elevate Academy.
- Comprehensive professional development of the board is articulated, including an annual evaluation of its training needs.

Weaknesses:
- The application states that the board's strengths and weaknesses have been identified but doesn't say what they are.
- No articulation of full scope of existing board policies and procedures, and so it is not clear the extent to which the board can and does exercise oversight.

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:
- Between the identified school leader and the experience and support of the Elevate Academy Network for CEO, CFO, and COO positions, Elevate North is set up for success.
- Elevate North's school leader seems excellent and well qualified. The application lays out a reasonable division of labor among school staff and Elevate Academy, Inc. acting as an ESP.
- There is a process in place for the board to evaluate the school leader.
- Division of responsibilities between school leadership positions and network positions (CEO & Professional Services) are clearly outlined.
- A board-approved "RAPID" framework describes the organizational structure and decision-rights.
- The application articulates that the board will review the school administrator at least once annually.
- The Elevate North administrator has previous school leadership experience at multiple levels. The Principal has recently participated as a BLUUM Fellow.

Weaknesses:
- There is no process described for evaluating the ESP.
- Material risks and mitigation strategies are not described.
- The process by which school leader will be evaluated and held accountable is not articulated. Further, it is unclear how the board will hold the CEO accountable for operations, finances, and academic outcomes at the school.
- The application does not specifically identify key risk factors that the school may face or potential material operational challenges.

Overall comments
Reviewer Comments • Elevate North will build upon the successes of another school in this charter network. • The school will meet the needs of underserved students in the region and provide a pathway for the workforce for many students. • The organization appears to be of high-quality (academically and organizationally) so there is high confidence that this new school will also be. • Elevate North clearly has a strong academic and managerial foundation to build on. Idaho certainly needs more schools focusing on the at-risk student population and giving students skills that are relevant to the employers in their region. • This application was light on details in many important areas. Most importantly, there was little description of how the school's academic program, staff, and resource allocation would specifically benefit at-risk students, which the application frequently stated as the target population. Meanwhile, the application also did not indicate that the school would attempt to recruit a higher proportion of at-risk students than its surrounding area. Nowhere did the application even indicate what the percentage of at-risk students in the region was. • CTE was stated to be a core focus of the academic program but links to CTE were also thin when it came to teacher recruitment and resource expenditure. • There were several components of the evaluation rubric that the application simply did not address. • The applicant presents an application that follows the outline of the selection criteria. A compelling educational model is presented, and some sections are quite detailed. The design is forward thinking and presents a lot of elements missing from the broader secondary education landscape. The applicant has paid particular attention to designing a program that meaningfully addresses the learning, social/emotional, and physical needs of the targeted student population. • While there are some very detailed and articulated parts, the application as a whole lacks specificity in many areas. In these cases, the "what" of the criteria, but not the "how," which would help provide stronger evidence. As a result, what the program will look like in practice and the justification for design choices are not always clear. Data from the Caldwell campus (even if local or interim assessments) would strengthen the justification for replication.