



COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT



APPLICATION DETAILS

School Name: Pinecrest Academy	
Contact Person:	Contact Email: grants@pinecrestidaho.org
Application Type: Start Up	Grant Budget: \$501, 600
Grades Served: K-8	New Seats Created: 367
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 application includes three project goals which are well-aligned to the vision of the school, and all are SMART goals. The goals, as a whole, speak to the school's desire to ensure every student's high achievement, enrollment of the school to reflect target demographics, engage in ongoing professional development that reflects the school's alignment with the Pinecrest educational model, and support for operational excellence via acquisition of select furniture, supplies and a Student Information System.
- Overall goals include trackable outcomes-based measures. Goal 1 focuses on grant-related activities to drive academic performance. A target of 60% meeting expectations in ELA, Math, and Science on the ISAT is set for Year 1, with that increasing to 70% by Year 3. All students are expected to meet or exceed the state's growth average on ELA and Math. Baseline data has been identified based on results from schools within a 5-mile radius that demonstrate this goal is ambitious, yet attainable. Goal 2 focuses on a student population that represents the large diversity and disadvantage of the local area. Goal 3 focuses on the learning environment (safety, supplies, furnishings, data systems), measuring effectiveness through parent, student and staff surveys.
- Goals are aligned with the school mission and include means of measurement.

Weaknesses:

- It appears that the writers of the application did not ensure alignment of the project goals (three, as described in this section), and dropped a fourth goal that was originally in last year's application. The RFA School Project Budget Template includes references to FOUR goals. Thus, this reviewer has scored this section according to the text as written in Section A: Grand Project Goals. There will be implications for final scoring in the Section H: Financial Management and Monitoring Plan.

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 school is planning to replicate and become an active member of the Pinecrest Academy charter school network. Curriculum and instruction are aligned with the school's goal to prepare all students for success via a STEAM educational program and a hybrid learning model.
- Use of technologies support individual student growth, and the school employs a variety of instructional strategies. These best practices are clearly articulated in an included table, and strongly supported through relevant research references.
- Several more specific examples are also included, including a Project Lead the Way design project and a STEAM challenge for a Reading Wonders unit on fables.
- Core curriculum is highlighted in the following areas: math, science, social studies, blended learning and technology integration, and socialemotional learning. Research support is included for each supportive program. A desire for vertical articulation is expressed.
- The applicant presents an engaging educational program with a well-documented research-based philosophy and instructional design (eg. Blended learning, STEAM, data-driven personalization and differentiation, leveraged technology, connecting learning to student experiences, 21st Century "super skills", Growth Mindset, mastery of benchmarks, etc.).
- Citations and noted evidence and research (Tier 1-3 ESSA Evidence) demonstrate and thoughtfully justify each element of the educational program.
- Behavior-related support through PBIS and RTI.
- Use of additional curricular resources from established publishers with known alignment to ID standards. Pinecrest's existing educational program will be adjusted to align with ID standards, and vertical alignment through a clear scaffolding framework, scope and sequence/pacing guide.
- Notes data and recognitions showing success of the CMOs schools in Florida and Nevada.
- 1:1 Device and classroom technology use are addressed.
- Autonomies and flexibilities utilized by the school are apparent and directly articulated within the narrative.
- Instructional methods are well-identified and clearly complement curriculum decisions and design.
- Research-based, and widely accepted, best practices support the educational philosophy of the school and its outlined goals and student outcomes. Core curriculum and research are provided.

Weaknesses:

- The application references flexibilities granted through ESEA 4310, but could spell out these flexibilities more specifically.
- The use of technology for assessment is not directly addressed.
- While technology is mentioned and tech products are listed with links to research, there is no clear plan as to how the technology will be utilized in classroom instruction, no detailed plan as to how it will address assessment needs, and little connection of the tech to the school's mission. This section uses the term "blended" but no further explanation or plan was included.



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:**

- The application describes the PAI Data Impact Model of standards-based assessments utilized throughout the school year to identify student learning needs, adjust instruction, and identify students for additional intervention.
- Data review is built into all levels of the school, including monthly data analysis and school-wide data chats. These data analyses are used to adjust instruction, and use supplemental instructional materials such as iReady, ST Math, Reflex, Ready Math, Accelerated Reader, Wonderworks to positively effect student learning outcomes.
- Pinecrest schools use a "Power Hour" for ELA and math in order to effectively differentiated instruction. A description of the ways in which this Power Hour is used to implement tier 2 MTSS strategies is included.
- The applicant provides significant detail about how collaborative data analysis will inform instructional calendars and supplemental instruction.
- Specific diagnostic, summative, and interim assessments and programs are identified for use in determining student progress and learning needs for the purpose of adjusting and differentiating instruction.
- An RTI/MTSS process is outlined, with use of the "Power Hour" to deliver supports and interventions.
- Instructional practices and types of tools and curriculum presented are detailed, realistic, and consistent with the proposed educational program.

Weaknesses:

- This is a strong set of instructional materials and methods, and will demand ongoing professional learning to start up and maintain its efficacy. This is not noted as an application weakness, but simply as a fact of school startup.

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:**

- The school's application includes an assessment framework – The Data Impact Model for Continuous School Improvement – which outlines a range of assessment tools to facilitate a data-driven culture.
- Teachers and principal meet weekly during data chats to review progress, with a special focus on underperforming students.
- The school's principal reviews data trends in student achievement, grade level proficiency, content mastery and student growth percentiles with the board.
- The applicant presents a broad and thorough performance management plan that monitors a variety of data points to ensure successful student outcomes. Use of iReady, Accelerated Reader, ST Math, Reflex, and NWEA MAP to inform student progress, as well as developing Individual Learning Paths and necessary interventions.
- Processes for analyzing achievement, mastery, and student growth data are articulated.
- Specific performance targets are presented in Section B.
- Professional development to establish a data-driven instructional culture is outlined.
- Identifies sound assessment practices, what data or information will be collected, how it will be analyzed, and by whom. Interim benchmarks have been identified and a plan is presented to adjust these benchmarks annually.

Weaknesses:

- Creating and sustaining this kind of data-driven instructional culture, especially one that values and includes disparate voices and perspectives, is exceedingly complex work. This is not a weakness of the application, but instead a challenge to make it happen over time.
- Would be useful to articulate how often performance benchmarks for the school will be adjusted. Specific interim benchmarks to assist the school in progressing toward performance targets could be articulated more specifically.
- It is not articulated what data systems will be utilized for housing and analyzing data.

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:**

- It appears that the Twin Falls area has experienced substantial population growth in the recent past, and has struggled to offer sufficient high quality seats for students. This charter school will help to address that enrollment need. The application describes a multi-pronged effort to market the school to the surrounding community, including print and digital outreach.
- Additionally, opportunities for informational meetings and inperson meetings are named as engagement efforts.
- The school is projecting to open with students in grades K-5, and grow a grade each year until fully enrolled as a K-8 school. This more gradual enrollment on-ramp is always a smart strategy, allowing the school to focus on recruitment of students within a narrower band, as well as develop the school's program and culture across six grades (a sizable challenge in itself!) before growing it gradually into the upper grades.
- The project budget includes a substantial \$17,000 in years 1 and 2 marketing of the school. This amount should allow for substantial support for getting the word out about the school.
- Opportunities for parent engagement and involvement are effectively presented in table form, to include School Advisory County, Parent Teacher Organization, Parent Club, open houses, career fairs, satisfaction surveys, and quarterly parent/teacher conferences.
- They are at 63% of targeted enrollment for opening during a pandemic, and as of CSP application had achieved 85% of its targeted enrollment for 2021-22.
- \$5k is requested for marketing in the CSP project budget, and a reasonable marketing plan is included to attract additional students.
- The applicant demonstrates established community engagement practices, with a variety of local support.
- Family engagement practices are outlined through typical school efforts (open houses, school advisory, PTO, parent survey, etc.).
- The application demonstrates community need and demand for the school and Pinecrest's educational model.
- The school shows they will meaningfully engage current and prospective families and community members.

Weaknesses:

- Opening in August, the school currently enrolls 129 students in six grades, on track to a full-scale build up of 489 students across 9 grades. Specifics of those students' demographics is not included in the narrative. Such a description could highlight the extent to which the school's marketing and enrollment efforts are succeeding, in terms of attracting students/families who could be characterized as economically disadvantaged, English Learner, and Students with Disabilities.
- Justification for and sustainability of identified target student numbers is unclear. The \$5k grant budget request for marketing is generally a sufficient amount, but it is so late in the school year to potentially be feasible for increasing 2021-22 numbers. The school has already secured 85% of enrollment for 2021-22 (though the school is roughly 40-45% short on educationally disadvantaged student representation and information is not presented to determine if this has been rectified); given this marketing funds may be better focused on recruiting students for 2022-23.
- For 2020-21 school year, Pincrest is significantly below target demographics on Title I (40% below expectation) and EL (7% below), which does not justify whether there is demand from this demographic for this model of school. The marketing efforts directed at disadvantaged demographic groups does demonstrate the school understands how to specifically reach them effectively.



- Family Engagement strategies are fairly basic and typical of traditional schools; could include use of more research-based family engagement strategies (a link is provided to best practice strategies, but these are not reflected in the school's plan), particularly if it seeks to attract a higher educationally disadvantaged student representation.
** I suggest a condition of awarding might be that they need to focus their CSP recruitment funding on better and broader strategies to attract educationally disadvantaged students.

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 application describes a staffing model to support students with special needs, including the development and implementation of Individualized Education Plans. In at least the school's first five years, this staffing will amount to a single special education teacher. It is questionable whether this single position will be adequate to meet the need of an impacted student population.
- Provisions for the nutritional needs of students is described. The application projects that 66% of the student population will qualify for FRL.
- Transportation of students will occur through a contract with Brown Bus Company, a vendor in Idaho. A single route for transportation has been budgeted for – and it not clear how many of the school's students will utilize this route – or whether it will be adequate to need.
- The applicant presents a sound plan for identifying and serving special education students and those needing significant intervention that is also consistent and compliant with state and federal requirements.
- The school has a kitchen onsite and plans to offer a school lunch program for 2021-22.
- The applicant intends to contract bussing services.
- This section clearly outlined services for all types of students, including those that are educationally disadvantaged.

Weaknesses:

- The school's Student Academic Behavioral Intervention Team (SABIT) carries tremendous responsibilities for identifying and supporting all at-risk students. Given existing demographics and projected incoming levels of academic achievement, it seems improbable that a single team will begin to be able to fulfill its duties. The school should ascertain how to develop a more robust set of teams, or a narrowing of responsibilities to make the work of SABIT more prone to success. Additionally, since the SABIT will be composed of a teacher from every grade level as well as the special education teacher, it appears that nearly the entire teaching staff will be a part of this team.
- English Learner and Behavioral supports not clearly articulated. The applicant has identified 35% of its student population would qualify for FRL program, though its projected demographics suggest at least 46% should (% of Title I the school is asserting it will attract).
- Very little information is presented regarding the school's transportation program. The applicant was unable to secure a bussing contract for 2020-21, which may jeopardize their ability to secure such services for future years.
 ** Just because the Pincrest/Academica model CAN be successful in serving educationally disadvantaged students doesn't mean it WILL. The applicant needs to demonstrate more thoroughly how it will serve the unique needs of educationally disadvantaged and EL students from THIS community.
- While several options were provided on how the school will meet the nutritional needs of students, the options did not provide enough detail to determine if they would meet the needs of the 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:**

- A model for staffing the school as it grows over a period of five years is presented in table form. The school will deploy a hiring plan that has been utilized across other Pinecrest schools. The Pinecrest Great Teaching and Leading Program is the school's professional development plan to identify, train and sustain a system of exemplary teachers.
- Grant funding will be utilized to train and support teachers. The application presents a compelling set of professional development experiences, including new administrator and teacher induction, administrator and teacher mentorship, teacher leadership opportunities, and the development of Professional Learning Communities. The school plans to leverage the expertise of other teacher leaders within the Pinecrest system to accomplish many of these activities.
- The school has a highly-qualified school leader, who will provide coaching to instructional staff. The applicant identifies the successful Pinecrest PD model (link provided to Nevada program) that will be utilized at this campus. A recruitment and staffing plan is presented.
- The applicant recognizes the need for strong supports for new teachers, and describes a meaningful induction and mentorship program. Professional Learning Communities (a research-based strategy) will be utilized to enable teachers to reflect on and improve their practice.
- Evaluation of Instructional staff is covered in Section J, and will utilize the Danielson Framework.
- Hiring plan is rigorous. The school provides sufficient support to all staff to ensure the educational model will be implemented with fidelity across all grade levels.

Weaknesses:

- The comprehensive and exceedingly complex role of the principal in a small, single-administrator school cannot be overstated. Though the school's principal is an experienced educator, it is unclear whether her experience has prepared her for the level of "classroom teaching" leadership that will be required to ensure instructional effectiveness and that the needs of a diverse group of students are adequately met. Her experience as a dean of students, activities administrator and counseling will serve the school well – but questions remain as to the extent to which she is prepared to facilitate the continuous improvement of instruction, evaluation and recruitment/retention of teachers.

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 CSP budget template provides a detailed picture of planned expenditures utilizing CSP funds, which are generally well-aligned with the school's mission and vision. CSP funds are targeted toward a smart combination of staffing investments (staffing for the important STEAM Specialist Teacher and an instructional assistant in years one and two), curriculum, training, instructional resources, recruitment, and a host of other activities aligned to grant goals.
- The school is actively pursuing a variety of leads for long-term facilities. In the meantime, it appears the school has secured a suitable site for the school to operate during its initial years. The narrative does indicate that the right kinds of work and connections are taking place in pursuit of a long-term home for the school.
- The applicant includes a complete 5-year budget for the school, as well as a CSP project budget with eligible costs.
- The current facility is very low cost. The school has plans to build a larger facility as it grows.
- Evidence provided supports sound financial management practices and ongoing financial stability.

Weaknesses:

- As stated in 'weaknesses' in section A, there is a mismatch between the number of goals specified in Section A (three total) and the specific goals in Section H and on the Project Budget (four goals). Overall, this resulted in only a loss of one point within this section. Misalignment of project goals with project budget may make required reporting to state and federal entities a challenge. It is suggested that the goals section A are revised to include the appropriate goals as detailed in project budget.
- This section was weak overall. The school essentially has no viable reserves until Year 4 (2023-24). The operating budget assumes continuation of the current low-cost lease, and does not appear to include the costs related to the proposed new build. The school does not appear to have budgeted for liability insurance. These combined call into question whether the operating budget is viable and sustainable.
- No articulation of qualifications of finance/operations staff or specific plans to mitigate risk. 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 development to maintain board strength going forward.

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

- The school's board includes men and women with experience in small business ownership, legal affairs, education, and finance. Recruitment of board members with expertise in accounting and school finance, marketing, real estate and community relations.
- Investments in board training and development are wise, and the application names training resources within Idaho and visits to other Pinecrest schools.
- Current board members participated in the Charter Start! Workshop conducted by the Idaho Department of Education's Office of School Choice.
- The board's governance structure, including its role and separation from school management, is detailed in the school's charter petition. Additional evidence of functioning includes:
 - Compliance with Open Meetings and Open Records Law
 - Clear separation of the board's governance from school administration's operations
 - Performance monitoring, including academic, financial, operational and legal compliance
 - Annual review of policies
 - Completion of a Conflict of Interest form
- The school's bylaws require a minimum of board competencies, and the current board has a diversity of skill and expertise. Board duties are outlined and include a board retreat, PD, and self-evaluation.
- Articulates necessary board compliance elements.
- The board recognizes its public accountability for financial and academic outcomes. Financial Policies and Procedures are referenced within the application. Conflict of Interest is covered in Section J.
- It is clear the school has developed a strong governing board with a diverse set of skills. This application supports a plan for ongoing board professional development.

Weaknesses:

- The board should work continually to assess its strengths and weaknesses, and engage in ongoing recruitment of future board member possibilities in light of necessary skillsets. Ongoing investments in boardmanship are critical to a high functioning board. In regard to both of these matters, the application is not weak – and these comments are included simply as an encouragement to invest in these matters throughout the life of the school.
- While some crucial policies are outlined/included, articulation of the full scope of existing board policies and procedures could be provided.

**** Full set of policies should be verified as part of the awarding/risk assessment process.**



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 utilizes a single administrator organizational model. The school leader has the ultimate authority to direct all aspects of the school's instructional and operational functions, including discipline, finance, legal compliance, operations, certified evaluations and community relations. The principal is evaluated annually using the Idaho Principal Framework.
- The school's operational and business support functions will be supported through a contract with Academica, an educational support service provider to all Pinecrest schools in Nevada and Florida. This contractual relationship will be an important asset to the school, allowing the school's principal to remain focused on programmatic development and instructional quality.
- The scope of services offered by Academica to the board is also robust, and will greatly assist the work of governance and oversight. From a school leader's viewpoint, having the services of Academica on board will be hugely helpful – as it is easy for operational details to overwhelm and press in on a single administrator. When this happens, real leadership for instructional excellence, staff support and community connection can suffer.
- The duties of the school leader are clearly defined and cover the broad set of responsibilities necessary to manage the school. Evaluation of the school leader will be annually and compliant with the Idaho Standards for Effective Principals.
- Services of the ESP are outlined and are provided pro-bono the initial years and are for a reasonable cost thereafter.
- The applicant articulates awareness of key risk factors and identifies some strategies to mitigate them.
- Leadership structure is strong. This section provides a comprehensive process that will be used by the board to evaluate the performance of the school leadership and ESP (Service Evaluation).

Weaknesses:

- Though key risk factors and operational challenges are implied in the section narrative, they are not clearly spelled out with associated action plans. That said, many of the challenges regarding launch and operation of the business side of the school will be supported by the ESP. It will be important to closely monitor the many risk factors associated with school start up – and make sure the board is as supportive as possible of the school's leader, who carries a hugely critical and often seemingly undoable set of responsibilities.
- It is not clear if the strategies to combat low enrollment (particularly amongst educationally disadvantaged student groups) is sufficient to overcome the challenges/risks in this area.

Overall comments

Reviewer Comments

- Pinecrest Academy of Idaho will clearly utilize and benefit from a mature network of schools – the Pinecrest charter school network, located throughout the country. The fact that the school's leader is a veteran educator from one of those network schools will assist in the heavy lifting of establishing a new school.
- The STEAM integration models described in the application narrative are in line with the school's desire to leverage these strategies to boost student engagement and academic growth. Hiring a superb STEAM specialist to lift off, coordinate, provide professional development and monitor the success of the school's STEAM applications is a critical investment.
- The school's founding board represents necessary diversity of experience to operate effectively.
- The school's contract relationship with an Educational Service Provider, Academica, is a wise investment of resources. Especially in small, single administrator environments, taking some of the business side of the charter school's operation off of the principal is always a smart move.
- The strategic and tactical skills associated with leading instructional quality, promoting fidelity and consistency to the school's STEAM focus, and meeting the needs of a very diverse and impacted student population is a huge responsibility for any one person. Without knowing much about the principal's actual teaching background or experience that is relevant to starting up a K-5 charter school (to grow to K-8), it seems imperative to again call out the risk factors associated with instructional leadership. The board should do everything within its power to facilitate the right set of supportive relationships for the school's leader, to include mentoring, executive coaching, connections to other Pinecrest schools, and professional development in school leadership. Additionally, the school should consider identification of its strongest one or two teachers, and provide them with some additional responsibilities and incentives related to teacher leadership. Dispersing instructional leadership in even small ways can be very impactful.
- Most parts of this application are detailed and well cited with evidence and research-based best practice. The school's educational program is based on a model that can be successful with the predominantly educationally disadvantaged population around the school's location.
- The biggest weaknesses of the application have to do with recruiting and serving educationally disadvantage students and their families. In some cases, best practices are cited but then not fully integrated into the narrative or the school's programming. There seems to be a disconnect between the needs of this population (which makes up over 50% of students in the area) but yet the school has not attracted or produced an articulated plan for meaningfully serving within this application.
- Also, the fiscal viability and sustainability of the school is not fully demonstrated through this application.