



# COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

## IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT



### APPLICATION DETAILS

School Name: Gem Prep Twin Falls	
Contact Person: Jennifer Ashmead	Contact Email: <a href="mailto:jenniferashmead@gemprep.org">jenniferashmead@gemprep.org</a>
Application Type: Start Up	Grant Budget: \$837,500.00
Grades Served: K – 12	New Seats Created: 574
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:**

- Goals align to the vision and mission of the school. Cross-site collaboration allows students to receive instruction from teachers who have expertise in certain areas no matter their location through the use of technology. This technology expands access to some of the "best teachers" as well as provides options for geographic teacher shortages.
- The five project goals are all quality goals and align strongly with the mission and vision of the school. Each goal includes appropriate metrics and timelines, and is focused on ensuring a quality educational experience for all students. The school leverages the successes of other schools in the GEM Prep network. This offers a high likelihood of not only adding charter seats to the state, but ensuring their success. Additionally, goal 3, focuses on ensuring that middle school students will receive instruction from teachers identified as particularly successfully through the use of online collaboration.
- The goals are appropriate, aligned with the mission, and directed toward student success.

##### **Weaknesses:**

- Goal #3 states students will receive instruction from some of the "best" teachers, no matter their location. Completion of Goal 3 is tracked through the school's SIS for students. How is this tracked for teachers?



**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 grant application explains the trajectory of preparing students for college readiness beginning in Kindergarten utilizing a K-12 graduate profile. Elementary students are provided a core foundational curriculum and a variety of electives and includes character and behavioral attributes preparing them for entry into middle and high school. As students progress there is a shift toward independence and taking ownership of learning. By grade 11 students are primarily taking college-level courses, with the goal of completing an associate's degree by the time they graduate from high school. Electives are aligned with career plan goals.
- Gem Prep schools have a demonstrated track record of success as evidenced by ISAT and NWEA MAP assessments. Students receive instruction through in person, online, and virtual class opportunities.
- Curriculum and instruction are aligned with the school's goal to prepare all students for success in college. Use of technologies support individual student growth, and the school employs a variety of instructional environments (small group interventions, distance education, etc.). The goal for all students is to earn an associate's degree by graduation, by completing mostly college-level coursework in their 11th and 12th year.
- The school draws on the successes of other GEM network schools – utilizing their proven approaches and curriculum. Students complete core requirements through the General Education Matriculation (GEM) courses – which allow for more seamless transfer to Idaho colleges. Selection of subject specific curriculum (Zearn math, Science Fusion, My World Social Studies) is justified through research references and alignment to the model. The application details significant achievement differences between other GEM Prep schools and the state.
- Like all GEM Prep schools, GPTF leverages three charter autonomies: 1) acquisition and retention of high-quality teachers; 2) innovative, individualized instruction; and 3) development and implementation of college-ready competencies. The school utilizes Canvas, a learning management system, and various adaptive technology to provide individualized learning – core to its educational philosophy. The school will use the network's GEM Prep Graduate Profile as central to its educational objectives.
- GPTF models after other Gem Prep schools which has seen great academic success. A thorough academic plan, a comprehensive assessment plan and the use of technology ensures attention to the needs of all students.



**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:**

- Gem Prep Twin Falls will utilize a robust assessment system that includes benchmark, diagnostic, lesson and unit assessments that include a variety of summative and formative formats. Students are assessed three times per year utilizing the NWEA MAP reading and math assessments. Data from assessments are used on a consistent basis to determine curricula and class placement for acceleration or remediation opportunities. The school will offer weekly after-school tutoring opportunities based on individual needs.
- 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. These include MAP assessments which are administered three times each year; IStation to monitor progress more frequently; College Readiness Quizzes to assess student mastery of weekly learning standards; and other benchmark assessments. Data review is built into all levels of the school, including teacher and principal data review and monthly student/teacher data conversations. Third tier student intervention is offered to students who need it, in the form of weekly after-school tutoring during College Prep Academy.
- Detailed information about how assessments are utilized and data is used to personalize instruction for each student. A data-driven environment is evident.

**Weaknesses:**

- The grant application states classroom data is shared with practitioners on a weekly basis, each teacher meets with the principal one time per month to review students data, and with students at least once per month to review data and set goals. How is all this tracked in order to make sure this is a proven consistent practice?



**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:**

- A comprehensive assessment system is utilized school-wide with all in-school stakeholders from students to board members involved with decision making. A clear assessment framework for all grade levels makes the main assessments clear. Strategies are in place to improve teaching and learning at every level, including the improvement of teacher classroom instruction.
- The school's application includes a detailed description of the Gem Prep: Twin Falls Assessment Framework, which outlines the range of assessment tools to facilitate a data-driven culture, from kindergarten through grade 12.
- The network employs and leverages its Chief Academic Officer, data manager and principal to work with individual teachers in evaluating their student data. Weekly two-hour professional development includes a review of all sources of formative and interim data. Teachers are paired by grade level across all Gem Prep schools, and the group's administrative leader facilitates discussion about successes and challenges.
- Data is also shared within the GEM network of schools, in service of both supporting struggling teachers and identifying those teachers who are experiencing great success – in order to share those best practices with others.
- The CAO, data manager and principal regularly interface with teachers on the use of data, student performance and adjustments that must be made in order to reach students. Standards and expectations are high but attainable with supports.

**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:**

- A variety of student recruitment strategies are utilized based on proven recruitment strategies from other Gem Prep schools. A clear Planned Growth Chart is included within the text of the application.
- Parent and community engagement includes multiple participatory and meaningful opportunities.
- It appears that the Twin Falls area continues to experience substantial population growth – almost 24% in the past ten years, 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 in-person meetings are named as engagement efforts. The school plans open with students in grades K-5, and mostly grow a grade each year until fully enrolled as a K-12 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 annual budget includes \$5,000 for recruitment and marketing of the school. Opportunities for parent engagement and involvement are described, to include Principal's Advisory Committee, Finance and Fundraising Committee, and Community Connections Committee.
- The school has established a partnership with the College of Southern Idaho to strengthen its talent pipeline, coordinate student dual credit college courses, and collaborate on community events and activities.
- The school utilizes a robust student recruitment plan to enroll a diverse student population. It uses a variety of print material, public forums, social media, strategic door-to-door campaigns to attract a student population that mirrors the local district's profile and which prioritizes enrollment of students of color and low-income students. The application cites very strong enrollment data of another of the network's schools, which is relatively proximate in location, and transfer enrollment is anticipated to bolster initial projections. The school's wait list of 200 is significant, with two additional years of recruiting to secure those seats. The application describes the school's use of a variety of committees to enhance parent and community engagement.
- Gem Prep has an excellent reputation for serving students and opening a new school provides the opportunity to show parents what their schools are about. Examples are provided on how parents can be involved, and how recruitment takes place. With the population growth in Idaho they shouldn't have any issue reaching enrollment goals.



**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:**

- A thorough explanation is provided in how the school will serve students who require additional support. Consistent professional development is provided in order to best meet the needs of struggling students.
- Bussing services includes extracurricular activities.
- The school's commitment to all students' success via high expectations is clear throughout the application. A thorough description of the school's Response to Intervention system is included, and teachers norm around a definition of what rigor and equitable instruction look like in the classroom.
- The application describes an appropriate level of staffing to support students with special needs, including the development and implementation of Individualized Education Plans.
- The school will employ a certified English Language Coordinator who provides screening, assessment and intervention support for all EL learners. Advisories of 15 students each will be in place for secondary students to promote acquisition and development of non-academic competencies such as goal setting, mindsets and habits of success.
- The school will implement its own onsite lunch program for students. Transportation will be provided to students who need it, with two to three bus routes currently planned. The school owns a lift-accessible bus to provide access to students with disabilities.
- The school will use RTI, EL supports, special education services and small group instruction to support students. They will provide nutrition and transportation services to all students who choose to participate.

**Weaknesses:**

- Although the school provides students a college prep education, there is little evidence in ways acceleration is provided for students who need to move beyond the provided curriculum.
- The application names necessary staffing and operational supports for nutrition services, but the application lacks detail about these supports, as well as specificity regarding funding sources to sustain the program.

**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 begins in January in order to thoroughly vet staff and determine if there is a good fit for all. Staff are provided retention bonuses as well as stipends for mentoring, providing staff development and holding shared leadership responsibilities. Consistent professional development is provided throughout the year. Master teachers with a proven track record become innovators and trainers.
- The application provides a summary of the school's approach to staffing, including student-to-teacher and student-to-adult ratios. Support staff includes paraprofessionals, a school counselor, receptionist and an operations manager.
- The school leader for GPTF is a bilingual, Latina female with a strong record of success in another GP school. These attributes are described as critical strengths, given the school's diverse student population in which many students are "first or second generation Americans." Two special education teachers will be employed immediately, and additional special education paras will be in place by the school's third year.
- A robust process for recruiting highly-qualified teachers is described in the application. Additionally, the school is hyper-focused on retaining its best teachers – offering mentorships, professional development leadership, and shared leadership opportunities – each of which carries a stipend for service.
- Eighteen professional development days are included in teacher contracts, in addition to weekly 2 hour trainings. Much of this training is facilitated by the school's/network's best teachers. These are significant investments of time and funding. The principal is the school's instructional leader, and spends time each week in classrooms. Immediate feedback is offered through an online tool. Coaching and feedback within individual professional learning plans are in place for all teachers.
- Gem Prep utilizes a robust hiring process to vet the best candidates possible. They provide extensive professional development for staff and offer retention bonuses to keep the highest-performing employees.





**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 budget narrative tightly aligns to CSP Budget Template. It is very easy to follow and includes key implementation information.
- Facilities cost is below the 20% (estimated cost is 16% of total budget).
- The applicant's financial standing is boosted by its inclusion in the Gem Prep School network. Many operational expenses are distributed across the network of schools, rather than falling solely onto a single school. Additionally, the Albertson Family Foundation and Charter Schools Growth Fund contribute to the Gem Innovation Schools Foundation, offering additional financial stability. Financial projections are very conservative, and the application outlines contingency plans in the event that enrollment falls short or specific grants are not secured. Neither of these shortages seem probable. Planned CSP grant funds are aligned to project goals.
- The school's plan for facility acquisition and construction is adequately described. Land for the facility is under contract, a design company is working on the design, and approvals for school construction are in place with city entities. Annual payments for the facility are approximately 16% of revenue through year 3, and trend downwards after that. Descriptions of classroom design support the school's focus on collaboration, project work and online coursework.
- GPTF has based their financial model upon years of historical experience in their other schools. They have built a conservative financial plan and outlined ways to mitigate expenses if needed. They utilize state revenue, philanthropic support and (hopefully!) CSP funds for start up expenses. Their outlined expenses are appropriate for the CSP sub-grant.



**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:**

- Board Composition Profile and Terms of Service provides information of expertise in diverse areas and how long each member will serve. Board Chair has multiple years of experience with Gem Prep schools. Recruitment of board members hone in on needed skills which provides a well rounded board with the required expertise. A monthly dashboard provides a 'year-to-date' review of the school's academic, financial and operational performance. Training for board members is provided as needed and as available.
- The school benefits tremendously from a network-level board of directors who offer considerable experience and the right breadth of expertise for a solid and growing network of schools. Additionally, network-level leadership (CEO, etc.) interact appropriately with the board, allowing school-level leaders to focus on the instructional needs of their individual schools. Gem Prep Twin Falls will continue to benefit from this leadership super-structure. Professional learning needs are identified, and a board professional development plan is utilized to further the effectiveness of these volunteers. The school's budget includes \$5000 in financial provisions to support ongoing training.
- The board supports four committees: finance, academics, governance and facilities. The board reviews a monthly data dashboard that includes the school's academic, financial and operational performance. The board's governance structure, including its role and separation from school management, is detailed in the school's charter petition. Though a complete copy of the board's policies and procedures was not reviewed, the school's charter petition includes sufficient language to ensure clarity and inclusion of the following:
  - 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
- GPTF has a wide range of expertise on their board, including the chair who has 7 years of experience in the Gem Prep organization. A well-developed plan for board recruitment, evaluation, committee structure, and overall board operations is in place and builds upon the historical success of the overall organization.

**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 division of responsibilities between the school principal and the executive team is clearly defined and allows for the principal to focus on instructional leadership and all areas of running a school day to day.
- A portfolio of communication tools has been developed for all stakeholders to share pertinent information about the school.
- The school's management plan provides school support from a network-level of seasoned leaders, with leadership/management functions smartly dispersed across the team. This executive team includes a CEO, CAO, CFO, COO, Chief Growth Officer, and College Access Director. This team manages most aspects of a school's operations – which in smaller schools, can often stress or break the school's approach. Functions such as human resources, legal matters, facilities, federal programs, purchasing, payroll, A/P, operations and financial management are all executed at this network level, freeing the school to focus on implementation of quality instruction, teacher recruitment and support, and student-level interventions.
- The school's principal is evaluated annually by the Chief Academic Officer utilizing the Charlotte Danielson Evaluation Framework.
- The application reflects a thorough understanding of the school's operational challenges. These include ensuring that facilities' logistics are thoroughly planned, schedules are conducive to rigorous instruction, technology is well-planned, and academic leadership supports teachers and students. Network and school level teams are in place to problem solve these challenges. The remaining school-level risk factor, that of ensuring effective, uniform instructional excellence in the context of a rapidly growing school, is honestly stated. That said, the school will employ a strong leadership team with successful track records within Idaho charter schools – which will be an asset to overcoming these challenges.
- The Gem Prep team has a well-developed management plan and knows the challenges to anticipate when opening a new school, hiring staff and implementing their proven instructional model.

## Overall comments

**Reviewer Comments**

- Gem Prep schools have a proven track record of success. Gem Prep Twin Falls is built upon the successes of those schools. Several board members and Executive Team members have a history of serving Gem Prep schools and providing the necessary expertise for successful implementation.
- Gem Prep Twin Falls is clearly positioned to utilize and benefit from the mature and highly effective network of established charter schools in Idaho – the Gem Prep network. The network, and its newest school, are articulate in all aspects of its school model – including leadership, curriculum and instruction, assessment, a culture of high expectations, and a seasoned board and network executive team. The application offers compelling data and narrative toward justifying charter networks as the way to grow and expand in order to meet greater numbers of students.
- This application is among the strongest that this reviewer has ever seen. Not only are the founders taking advantage of network resources, many have actually "grown up" and contributed to the success of other Gem Prep schools. Thus, this school and its leadership team will be important contributors to a growing and vital charter network in Idaho. No weaknesses are apparent – thus, full points have been awarded.
- Gem Prep Twin Falls is modeled after existing Gem Prep Charter Schools who are successfully operating and serving Idaho students. It is a college prep, K-12 school designed to personalize instruction through rigorous assessments, the use of technology, and supportive educators. This reviewer is confident that they will carry on the reputation that the other Gem Prep schools have for a track record of success.

