COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT

APPLICATION DETAILS

School Name: Idaho Youth Ranch Promise Academy	
Contact Person: James Brownson	Contact Email: jbrownson@youthranch.org
Application Type: Start Up	Grant Budget: $229,429.00
Grades Served: 6 - 12	New Seats Created: 64
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.***

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Reviewer Comments – Grant Project Goals

Strengths:
- The school seeks to address the gap in local youth mental health services and offer an Alternative education charter school in conjunction with a new residential facility.
- The project goals include resources specific to the target student population and their unique needs, including assessment tools and curriculum.
- The project goals address the varied lengths of enrollment that students may experience in the program and are differentiated based on length of stay.
- Goal 1 includes clear, trackable measures.
- Well-articulated goals that align with the unique mission and educational needs of the targeted student group.
- Strong expectations for growth for all students, benchmarked by time a student is with the program.

Weaknesses:
- Goal 2 seems in early development. Pathways to industry-recognized certifications and apprenticeships are unclear; therefore, it is difficult to understand how this goal can be appropriately measured.
- While Goal 3 fulfills the minimum content requirements, it does not provide any detail on how serving these students is an entire goal upon itself, or how that goal has outcomes that can be measured.

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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 academic program is focused on developing academic competencies in an individualized manner, in addition to self-regulation and other emotional needs to support the target population.
- Students will have individual plans that are based on mastery of Idaho core standards-based assessments and will be developed in collaboration with therapeutic program staff to ensure students receive a seamless learning experience.
- Promise Academy will utilize charter flexibility to run the program year-round and use daily schedules that allow for therapy sessions.
- The application cited the curricular choice based on research and evidence of success with the target student population.
- The technology plan supports the individualized nature of the academic program and will allow teachers to monitor student progress.
- It is clear that this program has been carefully designed with this particular student group in mind.
- Use of blended learning to highly personalize students' learning plans helps address a broad variety of student learning needs in a small student population with a small but intentional grouping of skilled educators.
- Alternative all-year, nontraditional approach makes maximum use of flexibilities afforded to charter schools.
- Use of diagnostic and interim assessments to identify and benchmark student practice is integrated.
- Work-based practical learning and integration of electives with therapeutic purposes are highly valuable and engaging offerings for the target student group.
- Curriculum is fully online and flexible-use for adjusting content by grade-level abilities, with online assessments and diagnostic and remediation tools, delivered with chromebooks.

Weaknesses:
- Very little, if any, research was provided to support the educational philosophy of the school and its outlined goals and student outcomes.
- Additional research or evidence on performance of a highly-personalized model in a small school format with at-risk kids would strengthen this section.

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:

- Instructional strategies are based around individualized assessment and learning pathways with an emphasis on personal growth acknowledging different starting points for each student.
- Frequent assessment practices will determine a student's baseline and growth towards standards mastery.
- RTI processes will occur in partnership with RCH&R staff and parents to address academic and behavioral needs.
- This section of the narrative appropriately laid out how teachers will use a range of data and varied instructional strategies to support individual learners.
- Maximum differentiation for all students.
- Use of iReady as a diagnostic and reporting tool, and SICA and IBA interim Idaho assessments to measure baseline, at intervals, and upon exit to establish and track academic growth.
- Monthly RTI meetings review data, student course completion, behavior, and input from teachers, counselors, and parents to inform adjustments to Individual Learning Plans.

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 application outlines a strong performance management system that will inform student learning and monitor performance for both students and staff. In addition, data will be utilized by the School Leader and Board to inform management and policy decisions.
- The application would be strengthened by including more detail on which policy decisions may be informed by data and at what frequency data will be evaluated to support this process.
- Entry, daily, weekly performance checks.
- 30-day and 90-day RTI review of growth and performance.
- A culture of data-driven programming is clear and threaded throughout.

Weaknesses:

- The application did not provide information about how teachers will be supported to use data to make instructional decisions on an individual basis for students.
- A performance management plan is outlined, and detail can be gathered from other sections of the narrative, but it is not broad or thorough.
- It is unclear how a culture of data-driven instruction exists. There is a system for data analysis and reflection to inform instruction, but this reviewer cannot discern what data is being collected and by whom and how it is being analyzed and used to drive instruction or how it will inform policy 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 partnership between RCH&R and the school will allow students to stay local, as opposed to being sent to out-of-state treatment centers, and have increased family involvement and ties to their community.
- The Family Driven Care model will support family investment and shared decision-making.
- Given the current rate of students in need and placement data, it is not anticipated that the school will have issues meeting enrollment projections.
- Placement will be through referrals from appropriate personnel, rather than an open enrollment system, given the specialized nature of the school.
- The school plans to engage parents whose children have been in residential treatment in the governance of the school.
- The school has secured $27.7 million to establish the RCH&R, including the school, from local and statewide partners.
- This school seeks to serve a specific demographic and region that is carefully outlined in this plan.
- Secured demand with co-location of residential treatment, providing aligned educational program.
- Clear demonstration of need for this type of co-located educational option.
- Significant planning and effort to determine the needs of students and families for this community is articulated and apparent.
- Integration of experienced parents into the design work, and continuing involvement of parents and families in the educational and treatment decisions for students is a key part of the programming.

Weaknesses:
- Further information about how IYR current partner organizations will support and interact with the new school would strengthen the application.

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 will implement Individual Learning Plans for each student which will support students with various learning differences.
- School staff will be trained in evidence-based behavior management models which will be utilized in the classroom.
- Students will receive all meals from RCH&R which abides by Federal and State food service requirements.
- Given the residential nature of the program, daily transportation will not be provided; however, vans and buses will be used for field trips, community events, and other transportation needs.
- The narrative provides a strong plan to offer a continuum of services for all types of students.
- The application demonstrates that the school knows well the needs of its prospective students.
- Certified EL and SPED staff are part of the staffing model, compliant in terms of IEP and ELL identification.
- Accessible facilities and technology.
- Meals are provided as part of the residential program, with suitable food service equipment on order.
- No daily bussing needed, but applicant has budgeted for transportation to field trips and events.

Weaknesses:
- The application indicates that IYR will provide buses and vans however it is unclear if there will be fees associated with these services. The budget identified that there would be a 65% reimbursement of Transportation fees however an estimate of those costs on a yearly basis was not included.
- The section could be strengthened by including information more specific to how all staff will be trained in support of EL and SPED students.

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:
- The application outlines a clear recruitment strategy and efforts that will be supported by IYR's Human Resources and Marketing teams.
- The school leader has experience teaching and leading in Idaho.
- The application details the individualized and ongoing professional development that teachers will receive in both academic and behavioral models.
- This section included specific, detailed plans for both staffing and professional development.
- Comprehensive multi-approach plan for staff recruitment.
- School Leader already selected.
- 9 staff ideal, but contingency made for 5-6 staff when dual credentialed staff are sought, which is likely the minimum feasible for the number and demographic of students.

Weaknesses:
- The application did not address the unique characteristics of a leader in a specialized school and how the hired leader meets that criteria.
- It is unclear if 1 special education teacher, or a core teacher with a special education endorsement, will be sufficient to support the educational needs and IEP requirements for the school's large special education population.
- it is not clear what the scheduling of staff would look like in delivery of the program with 5.5 FTE instructional staff (assuming the School Leader takes on some level of instructional delivery, as well), or how student therapy schedules would impact instructional scheduling on a practical level. How has the school modeled staffing if the residential facility remains less full and 64 students cannot be maintained? Will some staff be on an as-needed basis only, flexing in and out as student number adjust?

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 clearly delineates funding sources, including outside grants.
- The partnership with IYR has led to a facility plan that provides access to educational and therapeutic spaces at a competitive lease rate.
- The budget dedicates resources to academic intervention programs and resources that address the needs of at-risk students.
- Budget narrative aligns with project budget spreadsheet.
- 3-year operating budget is tight, but feasible if 64 students are maintained and one-off costs for start-up salaries and supplies are covered by the CSP subgrant.
- Facility is adequate and ideal for the number of students and their anticipated exceptional academic needs.

Weaknesses:
- It is not clear how the finances of the school would be impacted if the number of students were to lie below the maximum of 64 for the residential facility. Likewise, what do the finances look like if the numbers of students grow faster than the planned 6-8 new students each month?

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:
- The school will seek to recruit a board with a diverse set of skills and experiences, including those in the area of serving this unique student population.
- Current board members have expertise and connection with IYR however additional board members will be needed to ensure a variety of perspectives and approaches are represented.
- The board will engage in onboarding processes and self-evaluations.
- The narrative identifies the gaps in skills and provides an explanation, as well as a plan to address the gaps through recruiting additional board members.
- A broad list of skills and experiences is presented as desirable on the board, and directors will be actively recruited to this list.
- Intention to align board policies with relevant IYR policies and procedures to allow for seamless integration of school with residential program.
- A variety of useful professional development items for the board are presented.

Weaknesses:
- The board will monitor academic and operations of the school through a regular school leader evaluation however timelines and frequency of evaluations were not included in the application.
- Relevant professional development is identified however the application indicates that board members will be encouraged, not required, to complete these essential training modules.
- What are the plans for when Rick Hale needs to roll off the board because he assumes a paid role with Promise Academy and becomes a direct employee of the board? It is unclear given it is less than 5 months before school opening that the board has the capacity to recruit new members, draft essential policies, and participate in the identified trainings all within that timeframe.

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J. School Leadership and Management
This section should describe the intended leadership structure of your school and demonstrate a strong leadership and staffing plan that ensures high-quality implementation and sustainability of the school.

Reviewer Comments – School Leadership and Management
Strengths:
- The school leader will be evaluated on several annual goals, using the Danielson Framework and a numerical competency scale.
- The school will utilize two leadership team structures, an Instructional Leadership team and a Charter Management Leadership team, to regularly review academic and operational data.
- The application identified the benefits and inherent challenges in sharing operational staff with RCH&R, as well as how the ramped up enrollment pace will help to mitigate these challenges.
- This application is unique in its partnership with Residential Center for Healing & Resilience (RCH&R), providing opportunities for strong support in leadership and management.
- Detailed plan for school leader evaluation and oversight is outlined.
- Regular meetings of both Instructional Leadership Team and Charter Management Team of staff enables School Leader to oversee all aspects of the school as an organization.
- Skilled and experienced School Leader already identified.
- The applicant has identified some material operational challenges and some key risk factors, along with some mitigation approaches (for example, seeking dual-credentialed staff to reduce staffing numbers, if needed).

Weaknesses:
- The application could be strengthened with more attention to specific risks cause by slower or faster increases in the student population that budgeted and planned for.
- An outline of training for all staff that includes EL and SPED training, would help better meet state and federal expectations based on the number of staff and the anticipated demographic and needs of the students.
- Additional plans to assist with mitigating key risk factors are outlined in earlier application sections.

Overall comments

Reviewer Comments

- The application identifies clear and relevant program goals that will support the start-up of a unique and in demand charter school serving at-risk youth.
- The design of the school addresses both academic and social-emotional needs of students with clinical diagnoses in the local community, which allows for active family involvement and connection to community.
- The application would have been strengthened by additional information about the governing board, their policies, practices, and ongoing development to ensure that the board is able to effectively oversee the school and maintaining appropriate relationships with partner agencies.
- This application is unique in its partnership with Residential Center for Healing & Resilience (RCH&R) and the plans to support a specific group of students and families.
- The application provides a clear vision of how this school model will support these students and put them on a path to success.
- There were some areas where more specific plans and research were needed to meet the criteria.
- A forward thinking school model, but also the RCH&R Program as a whole shows thoughtful and purposeful design.
- Each section of the application answers directly to the criteria requested in the rubric.
- Overall, a well-organized application with relatively minor gaps toward meeting or exceeding the grant criteria.
- Some additional detail to mitigating risks and material operational challenges, including master scheduling and planning for variations in student numbers, would strengthen the application.