



COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT



APPLICATION DETAILS

School Name: Idaho Novus Academy	
Contact Person: Vincent Kane	Contact Email: vkane@idahonovus.org
Application Type: Start Up	Grant Budget: \$800,228.88
Grades Served: K - 12	New Seats Created: 702
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:**

- All five goals are exceptionally aligned to the vision of the school, as well as being SMART goals. The goals, as a whole, speak to the school's desire to ensure access to the school's unique offerings and philosophy, as well as a set of ambitious outcomes for every student.
- Goals include enrolling 378 students in its first year (as a K-6 school), and then growing to 702 students at its full K-12 buildout.
- The school intends to offer the first school of choice to a number of rural communities in Idaho.
- A second goal addresses access by economically disadvantaged students through transportation and nutrition options provided by the school.
- The school's classical curriculum intends to ambitiously address academic growth, and high school students will have access to apprenticeships, internships and advanced opportunities.
- Lastly, the school's plan includes a goal related to character development, which will be measured via an annual family survey.
- The grant project goals are certainly ambitious, generally high quality, and measurable. There is strong alignment between the goals and the overall mission/approach of INCA.
- Five grant project goals are clearly outlined with reasonable measures.

Weaknesses:

- The grant project goals do not include a measurable target for students participating in advanced opportunities or apprenticeships, not receiving industry certifications.

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 grounded on a foundation of American classical education practices and philosophy – emphasizing strong liberal arts and science coursework, coupled with an emphasis on six classical virtues: courage, courtesy, honesty, perseverance, self-government and service.
- The school will utilize the scope and sequence developed by the Hillsdale College Office of K-12 Education. Hillsdale has collaborated with more than two dozen other classical schools across the country.
- The school will employ a number of key programs as the heart of its educational program: Literacy Essentials, Singapore Math. Dimensions, science and history content informed by the Core Knowledge Sequence, Spanish and Latin roots, and a comprehensive K-12 civics program.
- Additionally, technology will be utilized to support teacher-led instruction, and visual and performing arts courses will emphasize theory, history and performance.
- A K-12 curriculum map is included to provide a conceptual overview of the school's educational plans.
- Evidence of success of the American classical model is included using two lenses. The first is a description of the demand for classical schools that is growing throughout the country, including diverse rural and urban settings. Secondly, a comprehensive presentation of many evidence-based success measures from Treasure Valley Classical Academy is included. TVCA is described as Novus Classical Academy's sister school, on the other side of Idaho's Treasure Valley.
- INCA's plans for curriculum and instruction are very clear and appear well-designed.
- Curricular choices are tied back to the mission/vision of the school and include robust evidence by using TVCA as an example of the design's success.
- Educational philosophy, instructional practices, and curriculum are fully described and justified.

Weaknesses:

- The school's plan for technology use is limited. Components are named, such as iPads and projectors, but detailed descriptions of the utilization of such technology is limited.
- There is little in the application that touches on instructional practices or classroom design.
- The application also does not explicitly explain how INCA will take advantage of the flexibilities provided to charter schools.



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 reiterates the use of an instructional model centered classical education curriculum to engage students and meet rigorous performance objectives.
- The school's elementary literacy curriculum, Literacy Essentials, is summarized well.
- The application also names the hiring of a literacy specialist in its first year, who will build and implement an elementary reading intervention program. Each classroom in the elementary school will have a literacy aide to provide targeted interventions under the supervision of the literacy specialist.
- Likewise, the school's mathematics program, Singapore Math Dimensions, is summarized. The application describes ways in which the numeracy program supports the learning needs of all students. In grades 2 to 6, a common math period will provide opportunities for inter-grade and cross-grade ability level groups as necessary.
- These differentiation and intervention structures, all part of the school's RTI and MTSS systems, are described within the context of literacy and numeracy.
- The application indicates that the school will operate a comprehensive special education department to create and implement systems of intervention.
- The application includes a sufficient description of MTSS and assessment use, and explains that INCA will seek services for students with special needs.
- The application also contains a good description of the instructional approaches used in the chosen math and ELA curricula.
- Key design elements have been chosen to produce strong outcomes for the unique community and student population the school will serve.

Weaknesses:

- Though the application provides a high-level description of the special ed program and the role of the special education coordinator in designing interventions, it does not strongly describe and justify the RTI and MTSS systems as requested within the rubric.

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 includes descriptions of the school's performance management plan for monitoring and reporting progress.
- Building upon the introduction to assessments in the previous section, the application describes and justifies the use of specific standards-based assessments, including NWEA Measures of Academic Progress and the Idaho Standards Achievement Test.
- Additionally, curriculum-based measures will provide regular and timely indications of student progress.
- Test frequency and purpose are described for each of the assessments.
- Assessment data will be analyzed during grade-level meetings and by the school's leadership team to inform professional development.
- It is clear in the application that INCA plans to assess student learning regularly.
- MAP is a well-regarded assessment tool and is used across the country. The application explains that MAP and CMB data will be used by teachers to inform instruction, and INCA plans on administering a college-readiness assessment once students move into high school.
- The narrative presents a broad and thorough Performance Management plan for monitoring and reporting progress toward performance goals that ensures successful student outcomes.

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. Additional descriptions of the school's systems for utilizing that data (How often will teams meet to analyze data? What will that analysis look like? What processes turn data into professional development?) will strengthen the school's approaches to "informed instruction."
- INCA does not plan on using any standards-aligned assessments until administering the ISAT at the end of the year, making it less likely that students will meet the school's goals for math and ELA proficiency.

E. Student Demand and Community/Local Support

Schools funded under the CSP subgrant must ensure they are in tune with their communities' needs and priorities. In this section schools will document their vitality and long-term sustainability through demonstrating their dedication to developing and maintaining community partnerships and connections.

Reviewer Comments – Student Demand and Community/Local Support**Strengths:**

- The school is targeting a relatively large rural community which includes one dense suburban community and several rural communities.
- Even though the school will not open until fall of 2024, it has already signed up 378 students on an intent-to-enroll basis. The geographical spread of this enrollment pattern to date is illustrated via a chart within the narrative.
- Outreach and recruitment events have included nine public information sessions throughout the primary attendance zones during the past year.
- Online, web-based ads were utilized, as well as a large-scale mailing campaign targeting more rural areas. The application describes a number of additional recruitment events, including participation in outdoor community festivals.
- Ongoing information sessions are scheduled in the months ahead, with an enrollment lottery in the spring.
- The application describes a thorough approach to meaningful parent and community engagement, primarily via two leadership groups: The Parent Teacher Community Association and the Mission Support Team. Composition and focus of both of these groups is described.
- The application describes robust marketing efforts justified with sound reasoning.
- There appears to be solid demand for enrollment and parents are already engaged.
- There is a strong strategy in place to meet student demand and local support. The school has meaningfully engaged parents and the community.

Weaknesses:

- The application describes the representation of the Mission Support Team, and its focus on continuous improvement. The processes, schedule and outcomes through which it will inform and advise on school improvement issues could be more strongly developed.
- Though the applicants hope to attract students who may benefit from special education services, the application narrative in other sections does not adequately describe RTI/MTSS or special education services. Such detailed planning can turn aspirations into reality.
- Other than including transportation and food information on mailers, the application does not describe how the school is working to reach out to low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities specifically.

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 applicant describes a high-level description of the special education program that will support educationally disadvantaged students.
- Staffing and a general preference of approach (inclusion versus pull-out) is included.
- First-year supplemental instruction in phonics, and remedial math courses in later middle school years, are named.
- Character education via children's literature is intended to be offered to all K-6 students during story time each morning.
- The school will offer free transportation through the purchase of four full-size buses. This is especially important given the large geographical area served by the school.
- The school will offer nutrition services via a partnership with the Healthy Scholars Project, an independent contractor already offering meals to INCA's sister school in the Treasure Valley.
- INCA's nutrition and transportation plans seem appropriate, especially in the case of transportation and the school's decision to provide bus services to a large area.
- INCA has anticipated students coming in behind grade level and describes strategies for catching those students up.
- The narrative includes a strong plan to offer a continuum of services for all types of students.
- Nutrition and busing are included.

Weaknesses:

- While the application names the operation of a special education program, it does little to flesh out what those interventions and plans might look like. A stronger application would include descriptions of supports such as:
 - Social-emotional learning programs and practices
 - English Language learners (screening via WIDA Access for example)
 - Title I services
 - Staff development and training (including how the MTSS team will interface with classroom teachers)
- The application does not provide a thorough description of policies and procedures designed to support students with disabilities, including the development of IEPs and Section 504 plan accommodations.
- The application does not specifically address high expectations for low-income students and students with disabilities.
- It does not mention how it will serve English learners.
- It also does not indicate how staff will be trained on intervention strategies for low-income students or English learners.

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 summary of the school's approach to staffing.
- Prior to its opening year, the school will hire a full elementary school staff.
- The school's professional development plan is rightly targeted on all aspects of classical curriculum and pedagogy.
- Two weeks of intensive training will occur prior the school's opening day, and will be provided by the Hillsdale College Office of K-12 Education.
- Twice-monthly professional developments will be built into faculty meeting schedules.
- Classroom observations of each teacher by the principal will occur every other week at minimum, followed by coaching.
- A free classical education conference is offered each summer by Hillsdale College. Funds are allocated for every teacher to travel to this conference each year.
- The application describes a solid staffing plan, including robust support from Hillsdale college.
- INCA seems to have anticipated challenges with staffing and planned appropriately.
- The narrative explains that access to specific resources and support through their network will contribute to meeting staffing and professional development needs.

Weaknesses:

- The application states that recruitment of teachers with American classical experience can be challenging, and that its staff will come from local and regional markets. Details about how that recruitment and selection will actually be implemented are lacking.
- Details regarding professional development are lacking, both regarding summer intensive and ongoing training. Specific schedules, content and training objectives, etc., would strengthen this section of the application.
- There could have been more detail in the application related to retention and ongoing support as a result of classroom observations.

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 school's 3-year operating budget and narrative demonstrates a conservative approach that assumes no increase in state funding.
- Substantial cash reserves are anticipated each year, and mitigation strategies for under-enrollment are outlined.
- The CSP budget template provides an incredibly detailed picture of planned expenditures utilizing CSP funds. All are aligned with the school's mission and vision.
- CSP funds are targeted toward a smart combination of staffing investments (ensuring smaller class sizes in K-1), curriculum, training, instructional resources, recruitment, and a host of other activities aligned to grant goals.
- The school has received a \$2.15 million grant from the Albertson Family Foundation that will be expended over 5 years.
- The school's plan for facilities is solid as well. Having received a donation of a 15 acre parcel of land by the McLeod family, the school will build a facility in two phases. Costs and debt-service are below sustainability thresholds.
- The school has contracted with Paradigm of Idaho as its owner's representative to manage the construction project.
- Bouma USA provided the initial facility design.
- Everything submitted regarding this section appears sound and sufficient to meet financial obligations associated with opening and running INCA.
- The school's leadership is receiving robust support from a variety of organizations.
- The narrative ensures quality financial management practices and ongoing financial stability.

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 will be governed by the board of American Classical Schools of Idaho (ACSI), a new non-profit charter support organization launched in Idaho to support charter schools interested in implementing American classical education. Currently, it will govern Treasure Valley Classical and INCA.
- Board composition and selection is clearly articulated, and individuals represent a breadth of critical expertise. Additionally, specific representatives from each of the two charter schools (and others that will likely follow) are included in ACSI's makeup.
- Oversight of INCAS's finances is the chief responsibility of the board, and systems for monitoring and control are described.
- The board will conduct self-evaluation and ongoing training each year. It intends to take advantage of free training offered by the Hillsdale College each year.
- INCA is building from the experience that TVCA has had in leadership and governance.
- The application describes an appropriate role for INCA's governing board and a reasonable plan for self-evaluation and training.
- The applications shows how the school has developed a strong governing board with a diverse set of skills.

Weaknesses:

- It is not clear whether board members were selected in part for their specific areas of expertise (legal, policy, etc.) as opposed to only their representation of various communities that are relevant to the school.

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 will utilize a dual administrator leadership model, with a principal and assistant principal already selected and supporting founding efforts. Division of responsibilities between the principal and assistant principal are clear.
- As the school grows (in year 4 and beyond), the board has identified a more expanded leadership structure, to include the principal who will supervise a director of operations and deans of academic and students. Again, descriptions of those individuals' roles is clear.
- This portion of the application is strong – containing good detail around how school leadership will evolve as INCA grows.
- Leadership roles are clearly described not only during the school's initial year but also for future years as the leadership team evolves.
- The leadership and administrative roles at the school are well-defined, and comprehensively cover the broad set of responsibilities required of charter school leadership.
- The school demonstrates sufficient leadership and governance capability to implement and sustain the new school or expansion projects outlined in this application.

Weaknesses:

- All administrators at INCA will teach one or more courses after the first year of operation. Though this is identified as an important element, this evaluator will call out the complex reality that is the life of a school leader. Preparation for and execution of quality instruction to students may make accomplishing the many other mission-critical aspects of leadership (to include teacher coaching, evaluation, board interface, daily instruction in character education, etc.) difficult or impossible. This is especially true as the school grows to serve 700 students across a K-12 environment.
- There is no explicit discussion of risks, however the leadership plan seems robust enough to include implicit acknowledgement of how leaders will be distributed to mitigate risks.



Overall comments

Reviewer Comments

- The INCA grant application is thoughtful, complete and articulate.
- Clearly, the founders and founding board have thought through their approach to education, and are leveraging the expertise and success of Treasure Valley's first American classical charter school.
- The school's governing board is already providing policy and financial oversight to TVCA, thus bring real experience to this next school.
- The fact that school leadership (principal and assistant principal) are hired and on the ground is amazing at this point in the planning process.
- Additionally, the guidance and training those school leaders are receiving as BLUUM innovators is not to be understated.
- Lastly, the school's facility prospects and finances are incredibly sound – allowing for a strong liftoff in fall 2024.
- This evaluator offers two cautions. First, fully fleshing out what instruction and intervention looks like for under-served, educationally disadvantaged students is super complex work. Naming staff that will do this work is not the same as identifying strategies, timelines, structures and schedules for doing so. Keeping this focus uppermost in present and future planning is of utmost importance. Second, the expectation that all administrators will also serve as courses instructors seems out of touch with the realities of school leadership. It would be wise for the board, and founding school administration, to revisit this aspiration periodically as the school grows.
- INCA's application is generally strong, describing a clear vision, matching curricula, and forward planning beyond the school's first few years.
- The school has strong support (financially and otherwise) both within Idaho and from Hillsdale College.
- It is notable that the application discusses strategies for catching students up as the new school absorbs students that were previously enrolled elsewhere.
- The application does not indicate that INCA's leadership is deliberately recruiting students that the existing system is not serving well (low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, etc.). While the application does describe the services INCA plans to provide for some of these students should they enroll, the data presented regarding expected student body and recruitment activities described unfortunately seem to indicate less intentionality toward enrolling underserved groups.
- This application covered all required aspects of the rubric, with "additional considerations".