



COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT



APPLICATION DETAILS

School Name: Mountain Community School	
Contact Person: Jenny Schon	Contact Email: jschon@mtncommunityschool.org
Application Type: Start Up	Grant Budget: \$222,396.00
Grades Served: K – 8	New Seats Created: 225
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 describes student growth goals as measured by Idaho's English and mathematics assessments. There is general alignment between the description of the school and the stated goals. The application describes 4 goals, though they vary in terms of measurability.
- The goals address Idaho's required performance criteria for achievement and growth outcomes in Math and ELA for both 4th and 8th grades.
- The school identifies 4 grant project goals that address demographical representation within 5% of area representation. Student academic growth is addressed within one goal. Grant goals seem to align with the mission and vision and have a justification presented for each.

Weaknesses:

- The application does not describe any proficiency expectations, and some of the goals will be difficult to measure as worded. The narrative describes gap closure but does not quantify this in its goals.
- Measures and metrics are vague and it is unclear if they are appropriately rigorous for targeted student populations.
- Achievement outcomes are not presented within one of the goals. In general goals do not have clear trackable measures and metrics. The grant goals do not seem to align with the proposed grant spending and do not include outcomes measurements.

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 application links the curricular choices of the school to how the instructional program will incorporate place-based education and content that is relevant to residents of Valley County. Ample research is cited to justify the instructional design at the school. It is clear that the school plans to take advantage of Valley County's unique advantages in its educational program.
- Majority of section B is thorough and adequate evidence is provided regarding the design of the academic program.
- A strong research basis is cited for the school's educational approach. Level of technology investment aligns with mission/vision and is suitable for target demographic in terms of educational performance and skills development, and assessment. The school's use of available autonomies is evident throughout the application.

Weaknesses:

- The application does not translate the instructional design to concrete classroom practices, scheduling, and educator or student behaviors. While the design is described in general terms, it is difficult to envision how the design is implemented day-to-day by reading the application. The technology plan is also general and does not, for example, describe specifically how students will use their 1:1 devices each day. No specific charter flexibilities are cited.
- Evidence was lacking in response to B5. It is unclear what an "education that mirrors the lifestyle and values of a rural mountain town" means/is and how it will help meet the needs of the students.
- More articulation on how technology will be utilized within the delivery of the curriculum and educational program would strengthen this section. While research is cited, performance data of outcomes of the educational approach in existing schools serving a similar demographic would also improve 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:**

- The application presents a plan for assessing and tracking student needs using both interim and summative data (MAP, ISAT) as well as informal data (interviews, conversations with students and parents, etc.). An adequate RTI strategy is described, and the application states that the school will use Schoology to track and communicate student mastery.
- Response includes details around instructional practices and types of tools and curriculum, explains how assessments will be utilized to drive and differentiate instruction, and identifies a range of differentiation and intervention structures.
- Teaching methods are clearly outlined and are realistic and consistent with the educational program proposed. Weekly teacher meetings, systems for tracking mastery, personalized learning plans, and MAP testing to drive Tier I support. These, and use of a flipped classroom, also enable increased differentiation.

Weaknesses:

- In several places the application states that members of the community will be brought in to address specific student interests, but this general commitment is not backed up with any strategy for finding or training these individuals (or how to integrate them into student learning). Again, general instructional strategies tend not to be translated into real-world, specific teacher behaviors.

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 describes how MAP will be used to understand student content knowledge and growth. There is a reasonable description of how rich, diverse data will be used to inform instruction.
- Plans and systems are built around the use of a school portfolio and Profile of a Graduate.
- The applicant presents a broad performance management plan that utilizes multiple ways of assessing and multiple adjustments over the year based on the outcomes of those assessments. The frequency of data reviews by PLCs supports efforts for dramatic personalization for students.

Weaknesses:

- Again, a lack of specifics hurts the application. There are no clear numerical goals (other than grade level), making it unclear what teachers will look for as they collect the diverse data and feedback described. While the application states that students will complete projects, surveys, and so on to demonstrate mastery, there is no description of what teachers and staff will do to actually determine whether the student has mastered content (other than MAP, which is not standards-aligned). The application states that the standards students are held to are above those of the Idaho's content standards, but says nothing more specific.
- No points deducted, however, it would have been helpful to see more detail around interim benchmarks as well as how this data is (or will be) utilized to inform policy and management 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:**

- It is notable that the application includes a letter of intent from the Tamarack holding companies to serve as a partner as the school opens. It is clear that the school meets a need in a growing community with diverse needs. The application lists several community outreach and engagement strategies that together should generate continued interest and partnerships, including those targeted specifically to underserved populations.
- Evidence shows the school's dedication to developing and maintaining community partnerships and connections.
- Significant efforts are apparent in terms of meaningfully engaging the community and parents, including how the school design and in-kind needs have parents involved and supportive. A plan for ongoing parent engagement is articulated.

Weaknesses:

- Aside from "committees," a strategy for parent engagement in the school is not outlined with any specifics, and again aside from generalities current parent engagement is not clearly described.
- Reference to strong parent support and contextual demand that is not quantified, which makes it harder to determine the actual level of demand. No marketing funds seem to be included in the budget, other than \$5,000 within the CSP project budget.

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 in general terms how teachers, students, and parents will work together to ensure that student needs are met and high expectations are in place. The narrative links back to the instructional design mentioned previously and states that the design creates high expectations and rigorous instruction for diverse learners. It is notable that the school is being proactive in its participation in the FRPL program.
- A system is identified for supporting all students, including training for staff on both academic and behavioral interventions. The applicant's educational model and support systems are consistent with helping each student achieve their maximum capabilities. Some plans for school meals are outlined. A transportation plan is outlined that would meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged and disabled students.

Weaknesses:

- Again, because the application does not describe specific teacher behaviors and gives no clear picture of how the instructional design translates to instruction, the application is not able to fully justify how the design will result in effectively serving all students. "Working together" is important but is not specific enough for this narrative. The transportation plan also lacks specifics.
- The nutrition plan is unclear. While the school identifies federal funding sources to sustain the program, there are no specifics provided regarding state and local funding sources. While it seems that there is a plan to provide lunches during a non-specified time period until a full kitchen is built, there is no plan as to how the locally sourced meals will be funded. The attached Financial Summary has \$0 put aside for nutrition and there is no information provided (for nutrition) in the Operational Budget. While the school states here that they are committed to meeting the needs of educationally and economically disadvantaged students in terms of nutrition, a detail financial plan is lacking.
- The busing plan did not address a provision for participation in extracurricular activities.
- It is not clear to what extent the applicant has identified the needs of prospective educationally disadvantaged and disabled students. The school has only budgeted 0.3FTE for Special education teachers for Year 1, but projects having 15 SPED students that year (which typically is 0.5-0.7 FTE based on typically appropriate SPED case loads, and should likely rise to 1 FTE by Year 3). It is not entirely clear if and how the school's school meals program will meet required federal expectations.

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:**

- It is clear that the school is within reach of full staffing and is actively recruiting to ensure that positions are filled and trained. The application refers to several organizations that the school will work with to recruit and train educators. Sound tenants of new teacher onboarding are described.
- Staff recruiting and development plans are sound.
- A comprehensive plan for staff development that includes coaching and professional learning communities is articulated, along with a multi-faceted staff evaluation process. 4 of 6 initial teachers have already been selected, with recruitment efforts identified to attract the remaining.

Weaknesses:

- It would be helpful if the application gave more specifics in regards to how the Place Network's services and materials fit into its plan overall, and with teacher development specifically. While it is encouraging that the school has the Place Network to rely on as its ESP, one would think that there would be more detail around how this established organization fits into the school's professional development plan. While the tenants of onboarding are detailed in the application, the implementation of these tenants is not.

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 financial planning and budgeting documents seem aligned with the application narrative and school goals. With the generous agreement with Tamarack, the projected facility costs are well below the 20% threshold.
- The completed CSP Budget Template and the grant project goals and expenditures in that budget align with what is presented in the budget narrative.
- A 3-year budget is presented that includes most required expenditures within the funding amounts available. The budget does not reflect the CSP funding request, and thus the CSP subgrant would assist in providing a more solid, financially stable footing for the school.

Weaknesses:

- The budget narrative did not demonstrate investment in value-added activity to accelerate learning specifically for educationally disadvantaged and at-risk students. In addition, it was unclear if there is a plan in place to mitigate risk associated with projected enrollment and underestimated financial resources necessary to adequately serve the population of students enrolled.
- There does not seem to be sufficient funds/FTE identified for the school's SPED teacher needs. There is not much margin in the budget to adjust to unanticipated lower enrollment. Gaps in information about the facilities plan (such as size of Yurt, square footage provided, and how many students will be learning in each Yurt). Further, there is insufficient articulation of how the proposed project budget is aligned to the identified grant project goals.

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:**

- All components in this section are addressed by the application, including any gaps in board competencies and how the school is addressing them. The school is a member of the Idaho School Board Association and will be able to leverage these services for policy and training support.
- Evidence points towards a competent, trained governing board.
- Board with a broad collective competency. Board training opportunities and provider identified.

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:**

- Leadership roles are clearly defined and held by experienced, qualified educators with expertise in the stated instructional design for the school. The application describes knowledge of risk factors and addresses mitigation where relevant.
- 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 project outlined in this application.
- The applicant has identified two capable leaders and articulated their evaluation and by whom. Several risks are identified, along with mitigation efforts to address them.

Overall comments**Reviewer Comments**

- The application provides rich detail around the school's instructional philosophy and design, including research citations. The school's leaders are experienced in this design. The school plans to recruit from historically underserved populations and also plans to provide free transportation and meals. The Place Network will provide valuable resources and expertise as the school opens and expands.
- In general, this application lacks specifics in regards to how the instructional design is rendered in day-to-day classroom instruction (or outside of classroom instruction), teacher behaviors, and student behaviors. The beginning of the application addresses student growth and gap closure but these concepts are not touched on elsewhere and there are no specifics other than general RTI and assessment strategies that address gap closure. The application of personalized learning and student mastery is not well fleshed out in the narrative.
- Overall, it is clear the school is committed to providing a unique learning environment specific to this geographic area, while utilizing the support of other similar programs functioning nationally.
- As this reviewer noted, some specific information was missing in a few areas of the application.
- This is a very exciting educational program that is very forward thinking and puts the learner at the focus of the school's decisions. The flexibility of mastery and highly personalized learning can really help support and accelerate learning for students not well served in the historic, traditional setting.
- Some minor areas of detail are missing from some sections, see comments above. These may be areas for potential revision or areas of risk that will need to be monitored if a CSP subgrant is awarded.

