COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT

APPLICATION DETAILS

School Name: Pinecrest Academy, Lewiston	
Contact Person: Anna Wilson	Contact Email: annacwilson5@gmail.com
Application Type: Start Up	Grant Budget: $282,691.06
Grades Served: K-8	New Seats Created: 450
Application Status: Funded	

RUBRIC

> ### A. Grant Project Goals
> *Identify* 3-5 grant project goals and *justify* each goal in terms of its value in supporting the planning and implementation of your proposed school. ***All grant spending, including future revisions to your budget, must fit clearly within one of your stated project goals.***

Reviewer Comments – Grant Project Goals

Strengths:
- The application includes three project goals which are well-aligned to the vision of the school, and all are SMART goals. The goals, as a whole, speak to the school's desire to ensure every student's high achievement through the purchase of supplies and curriculum, STEM Lab technology and "maker space" equipment.
- Additionally, funds are set aside for marketing in order for enrollment of the school to reflect target demographics.
- More than $100K is allocated for hiring an administrator and front office staff, as well as to engage in ongoing professional development that reflects the school's alignment with the Pinecrest educational model.
- Lastly, substantial funding supports the goal of operational excellence via acquisition of select furniture and supplies.
- The application describes appropriate goals for PAL that are informed by the conditions of the surrounding community and aligned to the school's mission and vision.
- The baseline performance for PAL's anticipated student community was researched and provided. It serves as a basis for its academic goals, which are specific, measurable and of an appropriate magnitude for gradually increasing achievement. A comparative demographics related goal is included.
- The grant goals and activities identified to be funded under each goal are in alignment with the school's mission and educational program.

Weaknesses:
- The school's mission and vision were not found among the application materials.
- Since the goals do address a particular focus on the most vulnerable student populations, it would have been good to see disaggregated achievement goals for those student groups.
- Given that the proposed school knows that its average student will come in behind grade level, it would be more appropriately ambitious to set a higher growth goal for the school. The school will need to exceed the state's average growth for students who need to catch up to grade level.

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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 school is planning to replicate and become an active member of the Pinecrest Academy charter school network, as Idaho's second Pinecrest school (many other schools in Florida and Nevada participate in this network).
- Curriculum and instruction are aligned with the school's goal to prepare all students for success via a STEAM educational program and a hybrid learning model.
- Use of technologies support individual student growth, and the school employs a variety of instructional strategies. These best practices are clearly articulated in an included table, and strongly supported through relevant research references. Several more specific examples are also included, including a Project Lead the Way design project and a STEAM challenge for a Reading Wonders unit on fables.
- Core curriculum is highlighted in the following areas: math, science, social studies, blended learning and technology integration, and social/emotional learning. Research support is included for each supportive program.
- Ample space in the application is dedicated to the description of the curricular approach and instructional design of PAL.
- Curricula are described sufficiently and justified.
- The application describes how instruction will be customized to the region and provides useful examples of this.
- PAL's educational program is based on an award-winning model.
- A strong Social-Emotional thread is interwoven into programming.
- A research basis for core components of the educational program is provided, along with links/citations.
- 4 research-based core values anchor the program.
- Core Curriculum resources are identified and align to Idaho standards.

Weaknesses:

- Technology is not mentioned in this section of the application, which is especially notable given PAL's STEAM emphasis.
- The application would be strengthened by including data on outcomes of the educational program specific for the targeted demographic of students. For example, how well has the educational program performed at enabling groups of students performing below grade level expectations to accelerate their learning to catch up with grade-level skills?
- Technology use and "blended learning" are references, including identification of types of technology to be purchased within the grant budget. However, "blended learning" is not clearly defined, and specific device ratios and a clear picture of how technology will be integrated into classroom instruction is not provided.
- The application generally references the school making use of flexibilities afforded to it as a charter school, but no specific examples or intended waiver and flexibility requests are articulated in the application.

C. Teaching and Learning

Fully *describe and justify* the design of the instructional strategy in terms of the educational philosophy, instructional practices, and curriculum that will be utilized to meet the school's performance objectives. Be sure to include key design elements, references supporting its validity and alignment to state and federal requirements, and rationale for why this strategy was chosen and how it will produce strong outcomes for the unique community and student population the school will serve.

Reviewer Comments – Teaching and Learning

Strengths:

- The application describes the Pincrest Data Impact Model of standards-based assessments utilized throughout the school year to identify student learning needs, adjust instruction, and identify students for additional intervention.
- Data review is built into all levels of the school, including monthly data analysis and school-wide data chats. These data analyses are used to adjust instruction, and use supplemental instructional materials such as iReady, ST Math, Reflex, Ready Math, Accelerated Reader, Wonderworks to positively effect student learning outcomes.
- Pinecrest schools use a "Power Hour" for ELA and math in order to effectively differentiated instruction. A description of the ways in which this Power Hour is used to implement tier 2 MTSS strategies is included.
- The application describes a broad and appropriate range of assessment tools that teachers will use to guide instruction.
- It also names and describes a range of intervention structures that teachers will use in accordance with assessed student outcomes.
- Project-based elements on STEAM themes create points of real-life engagement for students.
- Monthly data analysis is used to identify tiered support, and a variety of diagnostic and interim assessments broaden available data on student performance and capabilities.
- Use of Power Hour block ensures support for all kids at the level appropriate to their needs and performance.

Weaknesses:

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

D. Student Academic Achievement Standards
As an independently governed public school, charter schools need to ensure plans, systems, and tools for strong oversight and monitoring in the areas of academic performance. In this section, persuade the reader that your school will have rigorous goals and adequate oversight to ensure quality implementation, operation, and accountability.

Reviewer Comments – Student Academic Achievement Standards
Strengths:
- The school's application includes an assessment framework – The Data Impact Model for Continuous School Improvement – which outlines a range of assessment tools to facilitate a data-driven culture.
- Teachers and principal meet weekly during data chats to review progress, with a special focus on underperforming students.
- The school's principal reviews data trends in student achievement, grade level proficiency, content mastery and student growth percentiles with the board.
- This application is particularly strong in its description of a culture of data-use and assessment practices. Several data analysis strategies/practices are included and the entire approach seems well-conceived.
- A broad performance management system is in place that collects a broad variety of behavior and academic points, and reviews them monthly at team data meetings to inform the level of instructional support necessary for each student.
- A multi-tiered system helps identify the appropriate level of supports for students, establishing a culture of data-driven instruction.

Weaknesses:
- Creating and sustaining this kind of data-driven instructional culture, especially one that values and includes disparate voices and perspectives, is exceedingly complex work. This is not a weakness of the application, but instead a challenge to make it happen over time.
- If there is a present weakness (or risk), it lies in the fact that an instructional leader/principal has not been hired at the submission of this application. She/he will be instrumental in establishing and maintaining a local, contextualized implementation of this model.
- The narrative about implementation benchmarks is future tense and does not specifically articulate targeted benchmarks that will enable it to achieve the performance goal expressed in Section A of the grant application. Given what the school knows about its anticipated student population, these cut points for interim assessments could be identified now.

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 rural city of Lewiston and surrounding areas in a twenty mile radius of the school is the target population of this school. The application indicates that charter school options in this area is limited, and few options add high-quality school seats. 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 is projecting to open with up to 240 students in grades K to 5, and grow slowly from there until fully enrolled as a K-8 school three years later. 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.
- The project budget includes a substantial $20,000 in years 1 and 2 marketing of the school. This amount should allow for substantial support for getting the word out about the school.
- Opportunities for parent engagement and involvement are effectively presented in table form, to include School Advisory County, Parent Teacher Organization, Parent Club, open houses, career fairs, satisfaction surveys, and quarterly parent/teacher conferences.
- It is noteworthy that the application pays particular attention to the recruitment of traditionally underserved students and families.
- PAL describes a sound marketing strategy with targeted outreach.
- The list of included family engagement activities is solid.
- Based on the 2020 US Census data, the full build out of 450 students K-8 represents approximately 11% of K-8 students in the Lewiston community.
- A demonstration of need is presented on the basis of historical low performance of current schools in the Lewiston community.
- A broad strategy of marketing and a corresponding budget is articulated.
- The application describes an effective parent, family, and community engagement plan that employs several effective strategies.
- Need for strong communication is identified.
- Connection with community organizations is identified. The anticipated role of parents and community members for participating in and informing school decisions is clearly outlined.

Weaknesses:

- The school's target startup year is 2023-24, allowing considerable time for recruitment. That said, it takes time to secure the intentions and commitments of families – especially when plans are built around a K-5 structure with 240 students.
- No mention of waitlists are made in the application. It may be that it is considered too soon for this data, but the application would be stronger if such information was included.
- It is not clear if the proposed school has already identified confirmed parent/student interest, and to what extent this represents the number of students it intends to serve each year over the build out. This also makes it difficult to determine if enrollment goals are realistic, and/or if the school will be able to reach the demographical representation that it has presented in the application.
- It is not clear in the application to what extent PAL has already engaged with parents of the Lewiston community and to what extent that engagement has informed the plan for implementation of the school at this location. What information is included is future tense.

F. Effectively Serving All Students
Charter schools are obligated to take specific actions to ensure an open, fair, non-selective method of attracting and enrolling students, and all charter schools need to be ready to serve the group of students that choose to attend. In this section, describe your plan to offer a continuum of services for all types of students, including those that are educationally disadvantaged (such as low-income, special education, English learners, homeless, migrant and other at-risk students) and gifted and talented.

Reviewer Comments – Effectively Serving All Students

Strengths:

- The application describes a staffing model to support students with special needs, including the development and implementation of Individualized Education Plans, utilizing the structure of the Student Academic Behavioral Intervention Team (SABIT).
- The application justifies the design of school programs, interventions and plans to support educationally disadvantaged students.
- A comprehensive system of academic and behavioral supports is described very well, including Tier 1 through 3 MTSS supports.
- Provisions for the nutritional needs of students is described. The application projects that 66% of the student population will qualify for FRL.
- Transportation of students will occur through a contract with Brown Bus Company, a vendor in Idaho. A single route for transportation has been budgeted for – and it not clear how many of the school's students will utilize this route – or whether it will be adequate to need.
- Again, the application is strong here in its description of focusing on students that are traditionally underserved.
- There is a solid plan in place for behavioral supports and the application describes appropriate strategies for academic catch up.
- PAL plans to provide transportation to and meals at school.
- The application articulates comprehensive and compliant systems for generally supporting students at risk, educationally disadvantaged students, and those needing extra instructional support.
- A plan for a federal school meals program is presented with several possible options for meal-providing partners.
- A reasonable attempt at providing viable transportation options for students, including those educationally disadvantaged students, includes a combination of bus route(s), bus passes to existing public routes, and coordination of carpooling.

Weaknesses:

- Over the school's first five years, special education staffing grows from a single teacher to two teachers and para support. Without knowing more about the actual students the school will serve, it is questionable whether this single position will be adequate to meet the need of an impacted student population.
- The school's Student Academic Behavioral Intervention Team (SABIT) carries tremendous responsibilities for identifying and supporting all at-risk students. The school should consider whether to develop a more robust set of teams, or a narrowing of responsibilities to make the work of SABIT more prone to success.
- Articulation of the needs of prospective educationally disadvantaged students specific to the Lewiston community was not clearly addressed. For example, what are the unique needs for prospective students in terms of their location in a rural community?
- The application's articulation of transportation options could be strengthened by specifically addressing how it intends to support return trips for extracurricular activities for students who ride provided bussing.

G. Staffing and Professional Development Plan
Describe the approach to staffing, inclusive of ratios, positions, etc. required for effective implementation of the chosen education model. Further, describe the process in which all staff will be supported in their ongoing professional development.

Reviewer Comments – Staffing and Professional Development Plan
Strengths:
- A model for staffing the school as it grows over a period of five years is presented in table form.
- The school will deploy a hiring plan that has been utilized across other Pinecrest schools.
- The Pinecrest Great Teaching and Leading Program is the school's professional development plan to identify, train and sustain a system of exemplary teachers.
- Grant funding will be utilized to train and support teachers.
- The application presents a compelling set of professional development experiences, including new administrator and teacher induction, administrator and teacher mentorship, teacher leadership opportunities, and the development of Professional Learning Communities. The school plans to leverage the expertise of other teacher leaders within the Pinecrest system to accomplish many of these activities.
- The application contains adequate detail regarding staff recruitment and solid detail regarding retention and professional development.
- Recognition of the need to focus on teacher retention within the context of a teacher shortage.
- Use of Professional Learning Communities and Mentorship/Coaching for teacher support.

Weaknesses:
- The comprehensive and exceedingly complex role of the principal in a small, single-administrator school cannot be overstated. At the time of grant application, a school leader had not been selected. It will be important for this individual to bring considerable experience, to ensure instructional effectiveness and champion the needs of a diverse group of students. This selection process should have the board's most focused attention.
- The staffing plan would be more feasible if the need for content-specific credentialing for middle school student grades was addressed. The staffing model only appears to have one teacher per grade level for grades 6-8, which might not be sufficient to ensure secondary credentialing for each required content area.
- Listing or citing the name of the highly effective staff recruitment method would strengthen this section.

H. Financial Management and Monitoring Plan
As independently governed public schools, charters are fully responsible for ensuring quality financial management practices and ongoing financial stability. In this section, explain your school's plan to be compliant, strategic, and responsible with finances and business services.

Reviewer Comments – Financial Management and Monitoring Plan
Strengths:
- The CSP budget template provides a detailed picture of planned expenditures utilizing CSP funds, which are generally well-aligned with the school's mission and vision.
- CSP funds are targeted toward a smart combination of staffing investments (founding principal and front office staff), curriculum, training, instructional resources, recruitment, and a host of other activities aligned to grant goals.
- The school has secured a suitable site for the school to operate during its initial years, and co-locating with the Boys and Girls Club will undoubtedly carry additional benefits in terms of services for students.
- The budget narrative appears sufficient and PAL's debt service ratio will be appropriate for its first year of operation.
- The initial facilities plan appears to meet all requirements related to ADA and serving underserved populations.
- A hypothetical property owned by the local Boys and Girls Club is identified with a suitable number of classrooms and other administrative and jointly-used spaces, and is ADA compliant. A lease is provided (though unsigned).

Weaknesses:
- Many of the planned activities outlined in the CSP budget occur in spring and summer 2023, including for example visits to other Pinecrest sites. These visits, and this kind of work, require staff to be hired. Given that a school leader is not yet identified, let alone classroom staff, this work may not be able to be pulled off within the specified timelines.
- It is not clear from the application whether PAL intends to retain its partnership with the Boys and Girls Club long term or whether it intends to find or purchase a new building after its first few years of operation.
- It is difficult to determine if the identified facility options are feasible given no timeframe is provided to demonstrate it can be secured and made ready by Fall 2023.
- Based on the 3-year operating budget provided, the facility costs may exceed 20% of the annual budget until Year 3 of operation.
- There appears to be $26,000 for professional services included in the grant budget spreadsheet that is not reflected in the grant budget narrative.
- The 3-year Operational budget is viable, but only by a slim margin. Reaching target student numbers in Years 2 & 3 will be key to financial sustainability.

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's board includes men and women with experience in teaching, teacher development, legal affairs, small business and entrepreneurship, and youth development and community outreach.
- Investments in board training and development are wise, and the application names training resources within Idaho and visits to other Pinecrest schools.
- Current board members will participate in the Charter Start! Workshop conducted by the Idaho Department of Education's Office of School Choice.
- The board's governance structure, including its role and separation from school management, is detailed in the school's charter petition. Additional evidence of functioning includes:
  - Compliance with Open Meetings and Open Records Law
  - Clear separation of the board's governance from school administration's operations
  - Performance monitoring, including academic, financial, operational and legal compliance
  - Annual review of policies
  - Completion of a Conflict of Interest form
- The application describes a strong board with diverse skillsets and leadership experience. There is a plan in place for retaining a high performing board and investing in professional development for the board. The application describes an appropriate role for the board as well.
- A board of 5 members that have strengths in education, special education, law/real estate, business, and community outreach is presented in the application.
- A spectrum of initial board trainings and a plan for identifying subsequent trainings is presented in the application.

Weaknesses:
- The board should work continually to assess its strengths and weaknesses and engage in ongoing recruitment of future board member possibilities in light of necessary skillsets. Ongoing investments in boardsmanship are critical to a high functioning board. In regard to both of these matters, the application is not weak – and these comments are included simply as an encouragement to invest in these matters throughout the life of the school. That said, a five member board may not represent the necessary breadth and depth of experience and expertise that will help the school to succeed.
- Bylaws require two parents and someone with financial expertise on the board; the current board member descriptions do not seem to indicate whether any of the current 5 board members meet these requirements.
- The application does not address the need for annual completion of a conflict of interest policy.
- The scope of existing board policies is not entirely clear in the application. The Bylaws are referenced, but these do not cover all areas of policy typically expected of a charter school board.

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 single administrator organizational model. The school leader has the ultimate authority to direct all aspects of the school's instructional and operational functions, including discipline, finance, legal compliance, operations, certified evaluations and community relations.
- The principal is evaluated annually using the Idaho Principal Framework.
- The school's operational and business support functions will be supported through a contract with Academica, an educational support service provider to all Pinecrest schools in Nevada and Florida. This contractual relationship will be an important asset to the school, allowing the school's principal to remain focused on programmatic development and instructional quality.
- The scope of services offered by Academica to the board is also robust, and will greatly assist the work of governance and oversight.
- From a school leader's viewpoint, having the services of Academica on board will be hugely helpful – as it is easy for operational details to overwhelm and press in on a single administrator. When this happens, real leadership for instructional excellence, staff support and community connection can suffer.
- The application contains a sufficient plan for organizational/ESP management, including an appropriate role for the board.
- There also appears to be a sound principal evaluation plan in place.
- The duties of the Principal described in the application represent a fairly comprehensive list.

Weaknesses:
- Though key risk factors and operational challenges are implied in the section narrative, they are not clearly spelled out with associated action plans.
- Many of the challenges regarding launch and operation of the business side of the school will be supported by the Academica, the school's ESP.
- What is inadequately addressed, perhaps, is the lack of a founding school leader. This is the school's biggest risk factor, at present, as the school's success hinges on securing the right person for this post. Thus, within the rubric in this section, it is impossible to evaluate the sufficiency of the school's leadership team.
- It will be important to closely monitor the many risk factors associated with school start up – and make sure the board is as supportive as possible of the school's leader, who carries a hugely critical and often seemingly undoable set of responsibilities.
- The application does not sufficiently address risk factors and mitigation, especially considering the plan to open the school in a shared space.
- It is not clear where Human Resources duties fall. An organizational chart or more description of the organizational structure would be helpful in understanding leadership and management.
- A brief description of board oversight of the school leader is described, but the timeline or tools utilized for overseeing the non-academic side of the school leader's position are not articulated.
- Potential challenges or key risk factors that may be faced in launching the school are not articulated.

Overall comments
Reviewer Comments • Pinecrest Academy of Idaho will clearly utilize and benefit from a mature network of schools – the Pinecrest charter school network, located throughout the country, including another network school in Idaho. The ability of the school's leader to draw upon this network expertise will be all-important during the school's formative years. • The STEAM integration models described in the application narrative are in line with the school's desire to leverage these strategies to boost student engagement and academic growth. • Hiring a superb STEAM specialist to lift off, coordinate, provide professional development and monitor the success of the school's STEAM applications is a critical investment. • The school's founding board represents necessary diversity of experience to operate effectively. • The school's contract relationship with an Educational Service Provider, Academica, is a wise investment of resources. Especially in small, single administrator environments, taking some of the business side of the charter school's operation off of the principal is always a smart move. • The strategic and tactical skills associated with leading instructional quality, promoting fidelity and consistency to the school's STEAM focus, and meeting the needs of an inherently diverse student population is a huge responsibility for any one person. • Without knowing anything about the future principal's actual teaching background or experience that is relevant to starting up a K-5 charter school, it seems imperative to again call out the risk factors associated with instructional leadership. The board should do everything within its power to facilitate the right set of supportive relationships for the school's leader, to include mentoring, executive coaching, connections to other Pinecrest schools, and professional development in school leadership. • Additionally, the school should consider identification of its strongest one or two teachers, and provide them with some additional responsibilities and incentives related to teacher leadership. Dispersing instructional leadership in even small ways can be very impactful. • Overall this was a strong application with specific focus on recruiting and serving students that the traditional public school system has been underserving. There is ample detail regarding the instructional approach and the application provides examples of how PAL will customize the educational experience to serve the students in its target communities. • It would have been good to see the application spend more time on longer-term anticipated needs around leadership and facilities. • The application makes no mention of technology. • There are many strong areas of the application. Strong Grant project goals and a good use of grant funds, well justified. The description of the system of supports for students and the breadth of the curriculum is strong. • This reviewer recommends that the applicant be given the opportunity to submit additional information that addresses the areas of weakness in order to bring their application to a fundable score. • The applicant did not always ensure it addressed all of the criteria for a given section. Some areas where specifics were requested, only general language was provided. Stronger evidence of demand for this school model in this location, and evidenced success of the model (with actual statistics provided) with similar rural communities with low performance would significantly strengthen the application. • It was not made clear the full staffing structure and if the number and expertise of staff was sufficient to carry out all aspects of the school's model.