



# COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT



## APPLICATION DETAILS

<b>School Name: Alturas Preparatory Academy</b>	
Contact Person: Callie Hatch	Contact Email: <a href="mailto:callie.hatch@alturasacademy.org">callie.hatch@alturasacademy.org</a>
Application Type: Start Up	Grant Budget: \$800,000
Grades Served: 6-12	New Seats Created: 602
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 goals meet the objectives of providing an IB high school experience for the students of Alturas.
- APA does outline the required 3 measurable/trackable goals – ISAT proficiency, enrollment demographics, and all high schoolers participating in advanced opportunities or internship/apprenticeship. IB's DP and CP programs match well with the requirements for advanced ops and internship requirements.
- The applicant identifies growth targets. Goals are provided for academic performance, advanced secondary opportunities, inclusive and collaborative learning, civic engagement, and representative student demographics.

**Weaknesses:**

- The text is in some cases taken almost word for word from the grant criteria, but meets those criteria nonetheless. There is no clearly stated mission/vision for the school in the application, so squaring the goals to that mission is not possible, however the goals do align well enough with the language in the executive summary. It would have been nice to see a more convincing means of measuring APA's school culture goal (#3).
- Achievement measures are not included in academic goal(s). Specific measures are not provided for goals in all instances; not all have an established outcomes-focused target for the identified measures. Targets that are mentioned do not always have a justification for the cut point identified, particularly in terms of meeting the needs of the anticipated student demographic.

**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 applicant has provided ample examples of chosen curriculum that meets the mission of an IB school. Technology usage is well described.
- APA's curricular choices are strong and well-justified by external sources, with the exception of Arts and Humanities. IB clearly offers a bedrock foundation for curricular choices and the fact that AIA has been successful with the program instills confidence.
- The applicant describes an educational program focused on small group, highly differentiated, project-based learning of an International Baccalaureate programming that includes character development, community awareness, a 4-day instructional week, and facilitated inquiry cycles.
- Curriculum materials are presented for all core and enrichment content areas.
- The school is already authorized for IB delivery grades 6-10.
- 1:1 chromebooks and classroom technology identified, is suitable for assessments, and is included in the proposed CSP project budget.
- The school exercises flexibility available to it in terms of staff hiring, curriculum, professional development, and scheduling.

**Weaknesses:**

- This section would have benefited with more specifics throughout, which made it difficult to rate more sections higher. The instructional methods are outlined vaguely and don't often describe convincingly how a teacher's actions will translate to student success. For example, "As educators emphasize these core values, students will internalize them as characteristics they possess" is not much of a justification.
- Section 4 describes that students will have Chromebooks and that teachers will have smart TVs and projectors, but not how that will enhance instruction other than unnamed enrichment activities and that students will "code."
- I am not aware of many educators who would describe themselves as not "open-minded about small group instruction with multi-age groups at instructional level," so this does not ring true as a use of the autonomies granted to charter schools.
- It is not clearly presented what expectations will exist for students on the 5<sup>th</sup> weekday when staff have a professional development focus.
- It is not articulated how the IB curriculum aligns with the project-based learning focus, particularly for grades 11-12.

**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 multi-aged classroom approach helps achieve the goal is teaching at a student's instructional level.
- The CAT team will use data to evaluate student progress and to make adjustments to their instructional plan.
- The application does list a robust set of assessments (STAR, MAP, ISAT) for gathering data on student learning.
- The applicant provides general information on a culture of using data to drive and differentiate instruction.

**Weaknesses:**

- Again, while it is understood that the successful and foundational model of IB and AIA's current practices form the backbone of this application for APA, the application itself lacks clarity and specifics. "Teachers will also evaluate progress towards learning outcomes through observation, essays, interviews, performance tasks, demonstrations, and portfolios" is a hodgepodge and gives no image of what a given teacher will do at school. The application says that teachers will "use data" to determine how to assist students not on grade level, with no additional detail. The application asserts that Alturas' strength is true content mastery for each student but there is no concrete description of how this is achieved that is different from other schools, aside from IB.
- Specific strategies for instructional modification and differentiation are not fully identified.
- Tools to be utilized for individualized learning are not named, which would provide greater clarity to this section of the application.

**D. Student Academic Achievement Standards**

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

**Reviewer Comments – Student Academic Achievement Standards**

**Strengths:**

- A comprehensive performance management plan has been developed.
- The assessment practices described are very sound, with clear specifics regarding expectations on STAR, MAP, and ISAT. The application illustrates that the staff understand how these the data from these different assessments should be used.
- Teachers and students will set SMART goals and check in on interim progress following each assessment.
- Use of standards-based grading to identify mastery.

**Weaknesses:**

- It would have been good to see interim benchmarks for the formative assessment program as requested in the application. In addition, there is no description of how the data will be used to inform policy or management other than "This data will be analyzed by educators and administrators during professional development on Fridays." The application does describe a portfolio of learning, but aside from the assessments themselves, the artifacts described are vague: "Students will track evidence of their learning and their personal development in a portfolio that identifies their interests, passions, strengths, weaknesses, and best learning strategies."
- Not clear where interim benchmarks have been set and the process for adjusting them.

**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:**

- Credible evidence exists showing the ability to fulfill enrollment targets. Also, meaningful community engagement has occurred and partnerships secured.
- This portion of the application is strong, and it is clear that AIA's existing relationship with the surrounding community is already good and still improving.
- It is important that APA will use marketing in both English and Spanish.
- The list of organizations that APA is engaging is impressive.
- The description of how APA expects enrollment to progress is convincing and backed up by a solid existing waitlist.
- 100 students on the existing wait list for grades 6-8 demonstrates strong community demand in general for the school.
- Use of bilingual marketing and other sound marketing strategies.
- Includes a budget allocation for marketing.
- Parent involvement in building community partnerships.
- Annual parent survey gives input into school decision-making.
- Communication strategies that include parent orientation to IB, workshops and meetings, tours, classroom visits, school events, and demonstrations of learning.

**Weaknesses:**

- It would be good if more than 25 students from outside the AIA community could join the new school. Is there a way to open up more seats?
- While not a rubric criterion, it is surprising that APA's recruitment and community engagement activities described here do not reference the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It would have been useful to learn how APA planned to engage low-income families specifically, other than Spanish communication.
- The application does not address how many current middle school students intend to continue on to the high school.
- While a projection of student demographics is provided, it is unclear if this is based on current demographic levels of AIA, current representation among those already recruited for the high school or are aspirational targets.

## 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:**

- This section of the application outlines a general sense of how students will be treated at school. This is exemplified by the application's description that "The key components of this culture will be collaboration and high levels of engagement in learning which provides a structure of clear expectations and consistency in daily routines." Kudos that special education students will learn along with students not designated as such whenever possible.
- Strong systems of positive behavioral support are articulated.
- Focus on meaningful interpersonal connections with students and staff.
- Qualified staff for SPED.
- EL supports identified (sheltered instruction).
- Inclusion is utilized to the maximum extent appropriate.
- Transportation is to be provided for students within the primary attendance area.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- More detail on behavioral strategies and PD for teachers would have been helpful.
- No mention of supporting students who qualify under McKinney Vento.
- Specifics again are often lacking, and there is no description of a behavioral intervention strategy other than a general discipline agreement.
- There is plenty of language about what students will feel or experience, but not enough language about what APA staff will do to make them feel that way or do those things.
- The application asserts in multiple sections that the school will comply with federal guidelines and then moves along without additional detail.
- While the school intends to have a food program, insufficient detail is presented to understand how the program will be implemented and what steps will ensure adequate nutrition for all students.
- Projections and assumptions for transportation are not articulated.

**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:**

- Having been in two IB schools I understand the importance of and role that IB Coordinators play. Glad to see that you have plenty of support in this area!
- Providing an opportunity for prospective teacher hires to observe APA's instructional model is a strong practice. In addition, the application indicates that educators from AIA will transfer to APA, which bodes well for a strong teacher talent pool from the start.
- It is encouraging that APA (and AIA) use the 4 day school week to invest in educator development on the day that students are not in school.
- A summary of the school's staffing is presented in the submitted budget.
- Some professional development plans are scattered throughout the application.

**Weaknesses:**

- More information on the coaching cycle or tools used would be helpful.
- Details around coaching are vague, as are those supporting continuous educator improvement.
- It is unclear if SPED staffing is sufficient, as 10.8% of current projected student amounts would result in a high case load (34 students) for Year 1 and a very large case load (44-55) for subsequent years.
- A specific hiring plan and timeline could also strengthen the response to criteria G.1.
- This section could be strengthened by articulating more detail regarding the staff PD plan.

## 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 is appropriate to the goals set by the applicant and will meet many of the needs for opening a new school.
- The included 3-year budget is sufficient, if missing some detail (see below).
- The facilities plan is reasonable and well described. Seems like it must be noted that each classroom will have a garage door, which creates so many opportunities for transition to outside activities.
- The operating budget demonstrates significant room for contingency and building of reserves, which presents a good fiscal position for the school's sustainability.
- Building Hope has secured and is renovating a former department store building to serve as a 73,000 sq.ft. facility; the description seems suitable for the school. The school will lease for 5 years from Building Hope, then purchases the facility.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- This reviewer could be mistaken but it seemed unusual to expect that the cost of instruction to LEP student be equal to revenue for those students. Also surprising that the only time IB was referenced in the budget was when describing the fees that the school owes to the program for its use and not actual instruction.
- There is some discrepancy between the years of the operating budget, the dates in the CSP project budget, the application narrative, and the Enrollment Task Template file. As a result, it is hard to determine how many students are being added to the school and if the budget figures presented are feasible and realistic.
- A CSP management plan with key personnel and a purchasing timeline is not articulated.
- According to the operating budget submitted, total facility costs represent approx. 23.6% of revenues for Year 1, reducing to 22.4% and then 18.4% in subsequent years.
- A timeline for facility readiness is not articulated in the application.

**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:**

- Alturas has a strong governing board with a wide range of skills and expertise. They are committed to ongoing professional development and board development.
- Alturas' board is clearly a substantial strength. The board represents a breadth of expertise and perspective, and obviously has robust prior experience as the board of AIA. Board training is accounted for in the proposed budget.
- An existing experienced board holds experience and expertise in a broad variety of key areas, including law, finance, academia, real estate, business, education, HR, engineering, and wellbeing.
- Skills-based board recruitment.
- An annual leadership evaluation and annual review of policies and conflicts of interests are performed.
- The board has received a broad variety of trainings and future board PD is included in the operating budget.

**Weaknesses:**

- This section could be strengthened by a list of established board policies.

**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 applicant has demonstrated they possess experienced school leadership as well as shared decision-making structures.
- It is encouraging that the current principal of AIA will transfer to APA upon the school's opening. That, coupled with the existing relationship between the principal and executive director, is the foundation for a solid plan.
- This application is also strong in how it acknowledges and accommodates for known risks.
- A general plan is presented regarding leadership and administration of the school.
- Leaders will be evaluated annually using School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards and Charlotte Danielson Framework.
- Several challenges and risk factors are identified along with efforts by the school to mitigate them.

**Weaknesses:**

- It must be said that the principal is surely responsible for more than "state and federal reporting compliance and teacher certification."

## Overall comments

**Reviewer Comments**

- The applicant was able to clearly articulate the vision for the school and how it will effectively serve students and the community. They have existing strong structures and personnel in place to successfully launch a new school.
- This application draws its strengths from the fact that AIA is an established and successful charter school. The board is experienced and brings diverse professional perspectives.
- Existing educators and the principal will transfer from AIA to APA upon the school's opening. The International Baccalaureate program needs no introduction and school staff are already experienced with it.
- In addition, the use of the old Sear's building will likely create a unique space where students can thrive.
- It is unfortunate that this application lacked detail in several sections.
- Assertions were made throughout describing how students would act and feel without any real evidence as to how (i.e., through what adult actions). When reading the application it is impossible to envision a day in the life of a student or an educator at APA. To exemplify this with one example: "APA will partner with local colleges, businesses, and governmental agencies to provide internships and apprenticeships." These partnerships should be well on their way by now if they are to be a part of APA's first year of programming, yet no organizations are named specifically. This is not to say necessarily that these details are not well-conceived and documented elsewhere, just not here, and so points could not be awarded for these details.
- The design of the program encourages rigor as well as student engagement.
- The experience of the board is strong.
- The application and budget narrative lack specificity in many key areas. In many places general language is used when specific details are requested by the selection criteria.