



BUILDING ON SUCCESS

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT



APPLICATION DETAILS

School Name: Riverton Classical Academy	
Contact Person: Matt Seely	Contact Email: mseely@acs-id.org
Application Type: Start-Up	Grant Budget:
Grades Served: K – 12	New Seats Created:
Total Averaged Score: 99.5	Priority Points Assigned: 6
Application Status: Funded	

RUBRIC**A. SMART Grant Project Goals**

Identify 2-4 SMART 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.**

TOTAL POINTS	9/10
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Reviewer Comments – Grant Project Goals

- The application meets most requirements in this section, including a very rigorous ISAT proficiency goal which states that the school will increase proficiency by five percentage points each year. It is good to see a goal directly related to serving disadvantaged students.
- The goals of the application are strongly tied to the school model, services planned, and unique opportunities provided to students. The goal metrics are measurable and relevant to the school's overall success.
- There is no numerical target related to advanced opportunities, certifications, or apprenticeship participation.

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.

TOTAL POINTS	19/20
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Reviewer Comments - Educational Philosophy, Instructional Practices, and Curriculum

- This is a robust and complete section, with ample detail pertaining to the instructional philosophy, methods, and pedagogy. The application describes classical education mainstays such as Socratic discussions, deep dives into great works of literature, and an emphasis on the arts. It also stresses a limited, though appropriate, use of technology. Curricular choices are clear, aligned, and backed by evidence.
- The application includes a detailed explanation of the planned instructional practices and curriculum the school will implement. The model has been successful in two other schools in the state using the same methodology.
- While the model itself is quite unique compared to its surrounding districts, the application provides little to no evidence of how "charter flexibility" is leveraged. The example given related to the school using an unchanging curriculum does not illustrate using that flexibility, as the state does not require schools or districts to adopt new curriculum on a set schedule.



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.

TOTAL POINTS**6/6****Reviewer Comments – Teaching and Learning**

- The instructional practices described here seem sufficient. It is notable that in addition to MTSS implementation, RCA plans to implement a group math strategy that allows students from different grades to be grouped together based on their needs. The application also describes services that students will receive when outcome data show they need additional support.
- The application includes detailed explanation of the model and how the school will use the data from a variety of assessments embedded in the curriculum, standardized tests, surveys discipline data etc. to measure student and programmatic success.

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.

TOTAL POINTS**9/9****Reviewer Comments – Student Academic Achievement Standards**

- The application lists several sources of outcome data to be used, including CMBs, NWEA MAP, ISAT, and other summative assessments like the CLT and SAT. RCA also plans to assess its adherence to its mission through a parent survey. The data-driven practices described here seem sufficient.
- The school provides a comprehensive explanation of how teachers and student performance will be measured and evaluated. The school and its network have given consideration to ensuring teachers receive initial and ongoing training for teachers to effectively implement the model. The school goes beyond measuring academic outcomes, to measure the components of character their school model aims to develop in students.

**BUILDING ON SUCCESS**

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT

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.

TOTAL POINTS**10/10****Reviewer Comments – Student Demand and Community/Local Support**

- Another robust section. The application demonstrates a firm understanding of the community need, documents interest, and gives clear examples of activities intended to continue recruiting families. Importantly, it also outlines the demographics of its surrounding communities and describes how RCA will engage the Hispanic community. Numerous and advantageous community partnerships are described, including the qualifications and history of the school leader.
- This was a particularly strong section of the application. The founding group is from the local community that the school will serve, with strong relationships with local government, and community groups. The intent to enroll data is strong and appears to justify strong local support from families interested in the school model. The growth in these numbers over time shows that the marketing and recruitment efforts of the founding group have been successful. The school appears to have strong support from the local business community as well. It is clear that the area the school intends to serve, which has very limited school choice options, includes many parents and community members who are seeking additional education options in their community. Plans for parent engagement are strong and take an innovative approach to ensure that while the board of directors is not embedded within the school community, the MST provides an opportunity for their stakeholders to have direct impact and input on how the mission is met.

**BUILDING ON SUCCESS**

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT

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.

TOTAL POINTS**10/12****Reviewer Comments – Effectively Serving All Students**

- The application acknowledges, commits to addressing, and describes strategies for accommodating diverse student needs, including English learners and students with disabilities (and supporting teachers to do so). It is notable that RCA plans to provide a complete bussing service within its primary attendance zone.
- The application includes information regarding how ELL students and special education students are supported through the unique curriculum that includes universal supports within the general education classroom. The school is planning effectively in advance to address gaps of incoming students and by planning to have the special education coordinator begin in the planning year, transitions for incoming students should be well organized.
- The application does not address how students with significant special education needs will be served if they cannot be served within the inclusion model. Not addressed are how the school intends to support economically disadvantaged students or homeless students specifically. No information is provided on how Title 1 services, MckKinney-Vento Services or Migrant Services will be provided. The school plans to enroll a population that will be about 70% economically disadvantaged, but no mention is made of employing a school counselor or social worker to address the high need that will likely be present within the school population.
- The school's Demographic Data Calculator estimates 11.5% of students will qualify for special education. The budget notes 10%. Using the school's estimations, they can anticipate 41-48 special education students in the first year, which would be a significant caseload for one special education teacher. The application states that the "full service (special education) department will expand along with the student population." However in the three year budget and IPCSC staffing plan, no additional special education teachers are added as the school grows. As a result in the third year the school would estimate a caseload of 52-60 students would be served by one special education teacher, which is not realistic. Given that there are no other school choice options in the area, the school may want to anticipate that the percentage of students with special education needs will actually be higher than the district, as families who have not been happy with the services their children receive in the districts finally have a second option.



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.

TOTAL POINTS**4/4****Reviewer Comments – Staffing and Professional Development Plan**

- The application acknowledges and then describes strategies for recruiting and training classical education teachers, including partnerships with Hillsdale College and Mission 43. RCA lays out its criteria for interested educators (subject area expertise, love of learning, desire to instill virtue) and describes how the school will benefit from Hillsdale's robust educator training program.
- The school has a strong staff recruitment and professional development plan that has already been tested at two other schools in their network. The colleges they are associated with provide valuable professional development services, and recruiting pipelines. The school appears to be realistic that there are not likely an adequate number of qualified and certified educators currently within their enrollment area, and have plans to identify promising paraprofessionals and community members who could be supported to become certified.



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.

TOTAL POINTS**5.5/7****Reviewer Comments – Financial Management and Monitoring Plan**

- The budget and financial plan of the school appear sound.
- The school has the financial planning support of their network and BLUUM, who will provide support to the school for long term planning and dealing with unanticipated events. The school has used conservative revenue projections and is adequately planning for the provision of nutrition and transportation services. The school has received a valuable donation of land for the school site and has the support of Paradigm of Idaho as owner's representative, which brings extensive expertise to managing the construction process. The school has used solid projections for growth in health insurance, salaries and other large expenses. The school has secured extensive grant funding outside of the CSP grant to cover the initial years of operation and expansion.
- There are expenses that may be under estimated that could have a large impact on the school's budget. The school did not provide a staffing plan outside of it's charter application, which is what the reviewer used to understand plans for staffing.
- The school states that art and music electives are provided but no specialty teachers are included in the budget. The school states that the special education department will grow in tandem with the school's increasing population, however only one special education teacher is included in the budget within the first three years. Based on the staffing plan, the school appears to plan on using Title 1 funds to hire paraprofessionals. Given that the school anticipates 70% of their school population will be economically disadvantaged, there will likely be significant needs for material support for families, but no funds or staffing have been planned to provide these supports. There is only one food service staff person included in the budget, which may make preparing fresh food and serving 500+ students difficult. Because this school is part of network and has two other school's upon whom they have modeled their expenditures in the areas listed, the school may have found ways to adequately serve the needs of economically and at risk students, but little evidence for how they plan to do so is evident within the budget or staffing plan.
- The school lists zero dollars for maintenance/repair for the property and grounds. Given that the school site is large, and the facility itself is planned to be 50,000 square feet, this seems unrealistic. Approximately \$7,000 is included for facilities purchased services. However schools with similar sized buildings spend upward of \$50,000-\$100,000 annually maintaining building systems, replacing and repairing damaged items, regularly replacing carpet and paint, cleaning windows, scheduling inspections for fire monitoring and suppression systems, mowing lawns, keeping the grounds weed free, and snow removal, to name just a few examples. Again, the school notes that this budget is predicated on their experience at their other network schools, so there may be plans in place for how these types of services will be coordinated at little to no cost, but those plans are not included in the application.
- The school includes annually increasing fundraising revenues, but does not include details on how those funds will be raised. Are these funds budgeted at levels the other schools in their network have achieved?
- The \$17 million estimate for the construction of the school is in line with what the network has spent at other schools, and the network has the experience of structuring facility financing in sophisticated manner. The debt service for the facility is under 20%, but just barely, and that is assuming meeting enrollment projections. One concern is how quickly the facility debt service begins to grow, after the school has already expended their grant funding. If enrollment projections do not meet predictions, the facility debt service could quickly grow above 20% putting a strain on the operating budget. The school has robust recruitment plans that will hopefully mitigate this risk.



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.

TOTAL POINTS**12/12****Reviewer Comments – Board Capacity and Governance Structure**

- The application describes in detail the skills and qualifications of existing ACSI board members. It also describes the appropriate oversight role and how the board will be evaluated and supported in that responsibility.
- The network has a strong board that includes members with expertise across a broad range of important areas such as finance, real estate, and technology. The board has policies in place at the network level and has governance practices in place for ongoing board training thorough Hillsdale College.
- One board overseeing multiple, unique charter schools (as opposed to multiple campuses of the same charter "LEA") does raise some questions about efficacy as ASCI more schools are founded. However, there is no evidence of difficulty so far.

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.

TOTAL POINTS**9/10****Reviewer Comments – School Leadership and Management**

- The application clearly outlines the leadership structure and roles within, including noting that all school leaders are expected to also teach at least one course per year (after the first year), which is an interesting strategy common among classical schools. The structure appears appropriate for the school, as does the process for evaluating the principal.
- The school has provided a detailed and effective staffing plan for the leadership team that outlines how operational and educational duties will be assigned. The Head of School has extensive experience and strong ties to the local community. The application includes information on how the school leader will be evaluated, and how stakeholder input will be gathered.
- No mention is made of risks and how to mitigate them in this section.
- Specific information on what the school sees as their key risk factors and how the school leadership team will mitigate those factors is not included, but given the experience of the chosen school leader and the support of the network, their capacity to address challenges appears strong.



Overall comments

Reviewer Comments

- This is a thorough application that describes in detail the philosophy and instructional practices at RCA. It is easy to envision the student experience, the influence of classical literature and learning methods, and out these practices will result in the successful implementation of the school's mission and vision. Importantly, the application indicates an understanding of the student population in its area and lists plans for recruiting and serving them.
- Aside from a few omissions of required details, this application did not show any significant weaknesses.
- The greatest strengths described in the Riverton Academy application are the strong case for local demand for school choice in their enrollment area, a local founding group that is embedded in and well connected to its community, a school model that is well codified and an experienced network to provide implementation and back office support for the school. The classical model is very unique in their area and will provide an enriching opportunity for students who otherwise may not be exposed to great works of literature or have the support to develop an individualized plan for their continued education or vocational training post graduation. The school has done extensive work during a long pre-opening period to recruit students and build strong connections within their community that will serve their students well in the long run.
- Schools across the state are experiencing strain from the increased need for specialized services their students require. The application does not outline a robust plan for how the school will provide special education, high need behavior support, homeless, and migrant services in an area where the need for these services may be high. When families in a community have not had viable options outside of their traditional district for meeting the needs of their students, a new model may attract an outsized number of families searching for better specialized services for their children. This has been experienced at other charter schools during their expansion or founding years where special education rates have been closer to 15%-18%. Given the facility costs that near or could exceed the 20% ratio, including the maintenance costs that do not appear to be adequately provided for- the school could experience very low liquidity if a higher percentage of students with special education needs enroll, or enrollment projections aren't met. The school is fortunate to have a network office that can help them plan for and mitigate these risks if they arise.



APPLICATION TOTAL POINTS		
Rubric Section	Points Awarded	Points Possible
A. Grant Project Goals	<u>9</u>	10
B. Educational Philosophy, Instructional Practices, and Curriculum	<u>19</u>	20
C. Teaching and Learning	<u>6</u>	6
D. Student Academic Achievement Standards	<u>9</u>	9
E. Student Demand and Community/Local Support	<u>10</u>	10
F. Effectively Serving All Students	<u>10</u>	12
G. Staffing and Professional Development Plan	<u>4</u>	4
H. Financial Management and Monitoring Plan	<u>5.5</u>	7
I. Board Capacity and Governance Structure	<u>12</u>	12
J. School Leadership and Management	<u>9</u>	10
STANDARD POINTS AWARDED	<u>93.5</u>	100
Priority Points: 2 Additional Points may be awarded for schools that articulate a plan to serve and intentionally meet the unique needs of students in rural geographic areas.	<u>2</u>	2
Priority Points: 2 Additional Points may be awarded for schools that provide a high-quality high school program.	<u>2</u>	2
Priority Points: 2 Additional Points may be awarded for schools that articulate a plan to serve and intentionally meet the unique needs of a student population of more than 50% economically disadvantaged students.	<u>2</u>	2
Priority Points: 2 Additional Points may be awarded for schools that serve a 100% at-risk student population.	<u>0</u>	2
Priority Points: 2 Additional Points for schools authorized by a public school district .	<u>0</u>	2
TOTAL POINTS AWARDED	<u>99.5</u>	110

