



Part B: Executive Summary

This section should be two to three pages long and address in a narrative form the following points:

- Your proposed school's name and a description of the targeted student population including key demographic data (academic performance, home languages, special populations) and the targeted geographical area of the proposed school.
- Where the targeted students are most likely being educated currently and why they are expected to choose the proposed charter school for their future educational needs.
- Evidence that there is a community need for a school of this nature in the location proposed. Note: NMSA 1978 § 22-8B-6(L)(5) provides, "[a] chartering authority may approve, approve with conditions or deny an application. A chartering authority may deny an application if...the application is otherwise contrary to the best interests of the charter school's projected students, the local community or the school district in whose geographic boundaries the charter school applies to operate." Evidence of community need is required. Specific data and evidence is required in the application itself. Therefore, specific statistical information does not need to be provided here.
- The key innovative and unique programmatic features the school will implement to accomplish its mission (non-traditional school year, longer school day, partner organizations, etc.).
- How you project that the school will be more effective than the schools currently serving the targeted student population, or the founder(s)' plans to improve student achievement and exceed the academic performance of these existing public schools in the targeted service area. Provide a brief summary of any data you have to support this assumption.
- The founders of the proposed school, their background, and expertise.
- If different from the list provided above, the founding governing board.

To complete the following form, click on the text box and begin to type.

New Charter Application Executive Summary

The proposed mission of Desert Willow School (DWS) is to value children's unique learning styles, build self-awareness and a sense of belonging, inspire creative, flexible thinking and cultivate engaged readers. The population we intend to serve includes students with dyslexia and other language-based reading issues, students who need interactive learning experiences to remain engaged in the classroom, and students who are creatively and/or academically gifted needing to be met with appropriate challenges. These seemingly disparate groups share a common need for a holistic, hands-on curriculum that engages them in creative thinking and problem solving.

Children who live in Grant County are served by two public school districts: Silver Consolidated Schools and Cobre Schools. The elementary school population in Silver City is 1,416, 13.9% of whom receive special education services. The number of ELL students in the district is 45. In the Cobre school district, approximately 15% of students are receiving special education services and 16% ELL services. The 2010 census showed the population of Grant County to be 29,514. A language other than English is spoken in 31.8% of homes. From 2009-2013, 20.2% of the population was below the poverty level. The current unemployment rate is 6% and the median household income is \$37,899, 27% below the national average. All elementary students in Grant County receive free breakfast and lunch at school.

Desert Willow School will primarily draw students from the four public elementary schools and three private schools in Silver City. A segment of students will come from the sizable number of local families who are currently home-schooling their children because of distrust of the local public school system.

Parents of elementary students seeking an alternative to public education in Grant County are expected to choose DWS for several reasons. First, our communities have no place where students with dyslexia and other language based differences can receive intensive intervention during school hours. Building Success, an after-school reading intervention option, served 10-15 students after school during the 2014-2015 school year and had a significant waiting list. Second, although alternative education is popular in Silver City considering its size, our community has no tuition-free option for elementary students other than Silver Consolidated Schools. Administrators at the three private schools indicate that their classrooms would be even fuller than they already are if more parents could afford tuition. Informal discussions in the community with those who do and do not have young children reveal that a charter school alternative in Grant County with a dual focus on reading and a non-traditional curriculum would be very popular. When surveyed in November 2014, 88% of parents said they were interested in a charter elementary school that emphasizes multisensory learning strategies. Over half of parents surveyed stated their child would benefit from more small-group and individualized reading instruction. This data shows that the community of Silver City is ready for an elementary charter school designed to more specifically meet the needs of their children.

Evidence of a community need for an alternative is also apparent in local school performance. In 2014 the elementary schools of Grant County received the following grades: three B's, one C, three D's and one F. Reading scores in the Silver schools ranged from 45.28% to 76.50% passing in reading at individual schools. Math scores ranged from 45.28% to 73.85% passing. New Mexico is one of 18 states that is well below the national average in reading. There is certainly room for improvement.

Desert Willow School's design is comprised of eight innovative features that are uniquely blended to accomplish our proposed mission:

1. Orton-Gillingham (O-G) methodology and small, flexible reading groups: All students will learn to read through a richly layered, multisensory reading curriculum. Early, intensive intervention is optimal for preventing reading struggles and closing gaps between potential and actual performance. Desert Willow School will provide an Orton-Gillingham based reading program that includes phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency practice and spelling. At DWS every child who shows signs of dyslexia will have access to small group reading instruction using Orton-Gillingham methodologies in accordance with state law requiring high-quality interventions no matter the tier of instruction, making Desert Willow School unique in our area.
2. Reading Specialists: Reading specialists will work closely with classroom teachers to more specifically identify and educate students most at risk. The reading specialists will provide Tier 2 interventions, oversee staff training in reading, and monitor program delivery for fidelity.
3. Holistic Arts-Integrated Curriculum: Research shows that our targeted population of non-traditional learners excel at connecting ideas, thinking "out of the box" and seeing the big picture. Therefore, DWS students will be instructed in a holistic curriculum that integrates subjects on a common theme in line with age-appropriate interests according to developmental stages. Children's natural abilities are thus harnessed and they are internally motivated to be engaged in their learning. The curriculum we have chosen is Enki Education, which blends elements from Waldorf, Montessori, the United Nation School of Education, and Western education's focus on skill proficiency on a path from immersion to mastery. (See Academics Section). The Enki Curriculum is being successfully used in schools alongside Common Core Standards in at least one other school in New Mexico and in other states and Canada.
4. Low Student to Teacher Ratio: Class size will be 20 (10 for each kindergarten), as compared with an average of 26 in Grant County. Several studies cited by the School Improvement Network found increases in overall achievement, especially for younger, under-performing and disadvantaged students, when class size was kept small. In addition, our 1st grade will have a full-time Instructional Assistant assuring two educators per twenty students. The 2nd and 3rd grades will share an Instructional Assistant and the 4th and 5th grades will share an Instructional Assistant; therefore assuring two educators providing small group and individual instruction for half their day.
5. Extended School Day: Desert Willow School will have an extended school day Monday through Thursday, 8:30 to 4:00, with a 30-minute lunch (7 hours learning time per day). Extended time at school each day allows for the rhythms of a child's natural impulses without the frequent interruptions that typically occur in a traditional classroom.
6. Friday Explorer Clubs: Each week Desert Willow School students will participate in Friday Explorer Clubs, designed in collaboration with community volunteers. Explorer Clubs are a way for students to find, explore, and build new areas of strength that will in turn increase self-confidence and motivation. Friday Explorer Clubs give the children opportunities to work in small groups and learn the social skills needed to create together, with progressively less direction and assistance from the teacher in both planning and execution.
7. Friday Collaboration Time: Professional Learning Communities are one of the big new things in education. At Desert Willow School we want to go beyond the typical grade level and faculty meetings. In order to truly collaborate to meet the needs of all 120 of our unique students, we are setting aside one day a week collaboration and planning time. Fridays will also be a time for IEPs and Parent/Teacher conferences.
8. Family Enrichment: Part of the DWS mission is to create true partnerships among child, parent and school to build a sense of belonging. Helping families understand their child's strengths, learning styles, and accomplishments so they are empowered to effectively support them also helps create a sense of belonging for the student and family. To this end we will offer parent evenings, workshops and other events for families on an ongoing basis. These will include education in child development, information sessions about dyslexia and other special needs, experience in a variety of arts and academics taught through the arts, learning fairs, Friday Explorer Club showcase events, and exploration of ways we can work together to support both family life and success at school.

Desert Willow School will be more effective with the targeted population because it will offer a high-quality, holistic education for all students, including high-quality intervention for students with dyslexia, a stimulating instructional program for gifted students and students who have been disengaged in traditional schools, and a culture that welcomes parental and community participation. DWS will have one and two-thirds reading specialists for 120 students, as compared to the local district average of two Title 1 teachers per 360 students. Though Title 1 teachers may also be reading specialists, DWS is committed hiring teachers with

specialized training and experience working with students who have dyslexia and are working towards their certification as Academic Learning Therapists (CALT). This level of training and speciality is not a requirement to be a Title 1 instructor in Silver Consolidated District. At DWS, students diagnosed with or suspected of having dyslexia will receive the necessary interventions, whereas in our local district schools, not even students diagnosed with a specific learning disability in reading and/or dyslexia are not necessarily receiving Orton-Gillingham based instruction. DWS will have a student-teacher ratio of 12:1 compared with 16:1 in Silver City Consolidated Schools. Currently, the Silver Consolidated Schools have no scope and sequence or adopted reading curriculum beyond the Common Core Standards and New Mexico State Standards. Though the elementary schools have many talented teachers, there is no continuity as they move through the grades (or from school to school) in either content or how instruction is developed. For this reason, DWS has not only chosen a fully integrated curriculum designed to specifically meet the needs of their students, but is also committed to weekly teacher-training and collaboration.

The co-founders of Desert Willow School are Emily Aversa and Fiona Bailey. Ms. Aversa is a Level II teacher with a Master's degree in Special Education and 16 years of experience working with children with highly diverse exceptionalities in elementary and middle school. She is trained in several Orton-Gillingham reading methodologies. Miss Bailey is a Level III teacher with a Master's degree in Outdoor and Experiential Education and a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, with 26 years of experience teaching elementary students. She has a child with dyslexia and is currently working on certification to teach as a Certified Academic Language Therapist.

Other members of the founding board include George Lundy, with expertise in leadership training, strategic planning and organizational development. He co-founded Grant County's Learning Center for Dyslexia and Academic Success. Alicia Edwards is the executive director of The Volunteer Center of Grant County. She has 25 years experience in for-profit and nonprofit organizations with fundraising, grant writing, board and organizational development. William Knuttinen is a certified public accountant with 22 years experience in areas of financial planning.