

Executive Summary

Columbus Community School (CCS) is the name of the proposed charter school. Students to be served include sixth through twelfth graders living in southern Luna County. This includes students in Columbus, as well as American citizen students living in Palomas, Chihuahua, Mexico. All sixth-through twelfth-grade students are presently being bused to Deming, New Mexico. The round trip is over 60 miles and takes over two hours daily.

Columbus, New Mexico is a small, incorporated border town of 1,664 residents with a divided ethnic mixture of 85.9% Hispanic and 14.1% White. However, over 99% of all students from the Columbus area are Hispanic (<http://nces.ed.gov>).

- 80% percent of the residents speak Spanish at home.
- 34% of the residents were born in Mexico.
- 40% of the residents over 25 years of age have graduated from high school, compared with 84.6% nationwide (U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2005-2010).
- Many of the residents are low-income recent Mexican immigrant families. 59.2% of families with related children under 18 years of age earn below the US poverty level; 100% of families with related children under 5 years of age earn below the poverty level (U.S. Census, 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates).
- Over 96% of the Columbus students are eligible for the free lunch program (New Mexico Public Education Department (PED)).
- The principle source of employment for Columbus residents is seasonal work in agriculture. However, once the harvest is over (in December), the only source of income is unemployment checks until late spring, when agricultural work begins again. Many of the younger workers leave the community to work in places that are far enough away that they can only come home for weekends and holidays. Their families are left alone, and as a result, these young workers have little time to spend with their children and their families.

Our education program is single dual language with an integrated project-based STEM curriculum. Research shows that single dual language programs are effective for students along the US-Mexico border (Collier and Thomas, 2004). A second language will give students a competitive edge in today's global economy. Extra effort will be exerted to assist students struggling with English or with Spanish. We will be both bilingual and bicultural whereby students will be able to use their prior knowledge from either culture for learning. We believe that technology is a motivating factor for students while they are learning, as well as providing better opportunities in today's global society. Mastery of curriculum that is driven, in part, by

hands-on projects which includes high performance, sustainable design, “green” architecture, the environment, alternative energy, water related issues and technology is win-win-win. Integrated project-based instruction is also an inspiring method for learners. It gives students hands-on opportunities, as well as a method of instruction through which they can see the relevance of coursework in their lives. Other innovative and unique programmatic features to accomplish our mission include, longer school day (7 hours), multiage classes, team teaching, student learning teams, home visits on both sides of the border by teachers, mastery of Common Core and state standards, instead of seat time, and last but not least we will be a community based school with daily direct access by parents and the community.

We plan to concentrate on sustainable housing and energy. Southern New Mexico has 350 or more days of sunshine annually. In addition to solar energy, we will concentrate on rammed earth and adobe housing. These methods are sustainable and are labor intensive, with most material found locally. Hence, this will enable more money to remain in the community, aiding in its economic development. Adobe and rammed earth housing date back hundreds of years in our area and are culturally acceptable (Fathy, 1973;1986) . As we integrate history and social issues into our curriculum, we will concentrate on energy development and housing to understand how their development progressed throughout history. We plan for our students to help eventually design and build our school using these methods. They will also reach out to the community to help design and build this type of sustainable housing. Hence, students will be learning through community service at the same time promoting economic development.

The need for a charter school in Columbus is great and is multi-faceted. The inability of the majority of parents to meet with teachers which in most communities is something that is taken for granted. The low achievement rates under the present system. The long daily bus ride from Columbus to Deming takes students out of their community and provides for less time at school or with family. Columbus, in our opinion has been dysfunctional for a long time, and is a direct result of the lack of foundational institutions within the community. Foundational institutions such as a school provide opportunities for its residents to build capacity and learn leadership skills that are essential for community health.

The following are examples of the proficiency rates for Hispanic students compared to Caucasian students in the Deming School District.

1. Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) statistics for the 2012 school year indicate that 12.3% of Deming High School Hispanic eleventh-grade students are proficient in math as compared to 30.9% proficiency for Caucasian students. Hence, Caucasian students at Deming High School are 2.5 times more proficient in math than Hispanic students are.

2. In reading, 20.2% of eleventh-grade Hispanic students at Deming High School are proficient in reading compared to 57.4% proficiency for Caucasian students. Hence, Caucasian students are 2.8 times more proficient in reading than Hispanic students are.

3. Although statewide AYP statistics consistently show that Hispanic students trail Caucasian students, it is not nearly to the exaggerated extent seen for the students of Deming High School. At the high school level, state-wide ratios show Caucasian students are 1.6 times more proficient in math as compared to Deming's 2.5 times more proficient level and 1.5 times more proficient in reading as compared to Deming's 2.8 times more proficient level.

5. The New Mexico Public Education Department's (PED), Habitually Truant School Type Report, School Year: 2009-2010 shows that Deming's high school rate of truancy was 51.9%. We believe that a school based in our community will lead to closer parent and community supervision, ultimately resolving this truancy problem.

Parents will choose to send their children to CCS because they will be able to be more involved with their children's education and will have direct access to their children's teachers. The majority of our students are US citizens from Mexico, many whose parents are Mexican citizens and are not able to go to Deming. Deming is over thirty miles away, and requires a US visitor visa, which some Mexican parents cannot get. Even if parents could get permission to travel to Deming they lack the resources to do so. Research suggests that parental involvement with the school's is a significant force in the student's education (Skandera and Sousa, 2003; Hoxby, 2001; Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Henderson, 2002).