



**New Mexico Public Education Commission
Charter Schools Division**

**2015 New Charter School Application Kit
Part B. Executive Summary**



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 communities in Eastern Cibola County have a long and cosmopolitan history within the area. Made up of the Pueblos of Laguna and Acoma, as well as the land grant communities of Cubero and Seboyeta, the eastern half of the county has always been an area of culture, tradition, and entrepreneurship. Both the Pueblos share a common history and have existed in their present locations since the time of Spanish exploration in the 1500's. The Pueblos have seen a number of boom and bust cycles, though Laguna has often been at the forefront of economic development for the area, beginning with the railroad in the 1800's and moving through Laguna Industries at the end of the 20th century. Through it all, education has always been a top priority for the eastern Cibola communities.

For the past decade, there has been serious discussion regarding the relationship of the local school district and its ability to meet the needs of the students and community. By 2010, the local high school ranked as one of the poorest performing schools in the state. Although there has been much done to reform the local high school, numerous questions exist about the local high school's ability to provide a quality education and sustain the educational gains made in the past three years. Additionally, there are questions about the responsiveness of the district in addressing the needs and concerns of the local communities.

Over the past year, there has been a concerted effort to engage the community in a dialogue around educational choice and alternatives. The founding team convened a number of community conversations with families, students, parents, elders, business leaders and citizens in and around the Eastern Cibola communities to listen and understand their concerns with the local education systems. During these conversations, community members expressed a need for an alternative to the local high school with more emphasis in the areas of workforce development, college preparation, community culture and history, and student attainment of 21st century skills. Many of the students and families had chosen to go to schools outside of the local area, some traveling as far as Santa Fe in order to receive a better education. Those students and families who attended the local high school - Laguna-Acoma - had concerns around the areas of college and career readiness and student health and wellness. These issues were not limited to a handful of folks but was echoed in more than forty face-to-face meetings, over ten small focus groups, and two community surveys conducted by the founders of this charter school. The message was consistent: Eastern Cibola County needs another school for those students who don't fit the standard system.

*It should be noted that the initial proposed name for the school was the Kawaik'a High School of Tradition and Technology. After several conversations with community leaders in the area, it was determined that **The STEAM Academy** would be more accurate and would serve to invite more students to attend.*

We propose the creation of an innovative, project-based charter school located in Eastern Cibola County, which has the potential of engaging those students and families who have been disenfranchised by the local system. The school would be built on a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) framework and would be an innovative example of how technology and project-based learning aligned to common core standards can be successfully implemented in a rural setting. Although, the rural poverty aspect has been described as a barrier for creating a high performing school, we believe that a strong youth development perspective coupled with connection to community and tradition holds

the key to developing high performing students. By creating educational opportunities for students to directly engage with their communities, we hope to ground students in the strong values of the local area and encourage sustainability and revitalization of our rural communities. We also know many of our students may need additional socioemotional supports in order to necessitate post-secondary success, therefore, we have developed the initial framework for our Mentoring Core-Circle of Care, which will surround each student with a number of mentors and health supports to ensure students are supported throughout their high school journey.

We believe these efforts will be effective and successful with students in the area for several reasons. First, by creating an alternative, high performing, option for local families, we offer something usually reserved for urban localities: choice. As such, we are not looking at the highest performing students, we are looking at appealing to those students who are struggling with or have left the local educational system. Our project-based approach to instruction offers a viable solution to those students who need different strategies for secondary success. Several project-based projects and school systems have proven to be highly effective with rural students, including the ZETAC (Zuni: Engaging Teachers and Community) Project in Zuni Pueblo, which is now entering its third year. Second, our community engagement program seeks to eliminate the historical “walls” that have separated school from community which have often functioned to disenfranchise, rather than embrace, local communities. Our belief is that schools are a necessary and integral part of a healthy functioning community and the stronger connections will equal student success. Finally, our student support mechanism is a key component in ensuring an effective and successful educational experience for the students who may select the STEAM Academy. As studies have shown for several decades, the single most consistent indicator of student success is parent or familial involvement. With our Mentoring Core-Circle of Care, we seek to enhance this effect by creating broad and deep networks for students to support their post-secondary choices for years after their high school experience.

The STEAM Academy will be a member of the NACA-Inspired Schools Network (NISN) seeking to engage communities in building networked schools of academic excellence and cultural relevance. Although there have been a number of incredible people who have lent their expertise in crafting the school, the founding team has been instrumental in guiding the process and conversations within and around the community. Led by Dr. Lee Francis IV, the team consists of Shannon Douma, Gilbert Sanchez, and Dr. Shelly Valdez. Mr. Sanchez has been instrumental in his efforts and submitted the original Notice of Intent prior to transitioning the work to Dr. Francis. Dr. Francis IV has more than fifteen years in education, serving across multiple ages and disciplines from middle grades to higher education. He is a current fellow in the NISN. Dr. Francis IV received his Ph.D. from Texas State University in School Improvement and is a strong advocate for community-based, responsive schools. He has served the communities of Laguna and Acoma for more than ten years and began his teaching career at Laguna-Acoma High School in 2003. Shannon Douma is a Laguna community member and the current Out Of School Time coordinator for the Native American Community Academy in Albuquerque. She also serves as the NACA Recruitment Coordinator and has assisted and supported hundreds of Native families in Albuquerque and the surrounding areas and accessing NACA. She is also an instructor/facilitator with the Leadership Institute in Santa Fe. Gilbert Sanchez was the original lead on the charter process that began at the Pueblo of Laguna in 2011. He currently serves as the Executive Director for the Laguna Community Foundation and was the founder and initial Superintendent for the Laguna Department of Education. He has more than thirty years in educational administration and brings significant expertise in all areas of community-based education. Finally, Dr. Shelly Valdez is a local consultant who works on numerous federal projects providing technical assistance and evaluation services, especially in the areas of science and technology. Her focus is supporting Indigenous educational systems with their science

programming and she is strong advocate for community-based educational reforms.