

Gilbert Sanchez
PO Box 62
Laguna, NM 87026

August 19, 2015

Ms. Carolyn Sherman, Chair
Public Education Commission (PEC) members
c/o Linda Olivas
Charter School Division
300 Don Gaspar Ave.
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Re: Written comment

Dear Ms. Sherman,

I am providing additional background information regarding the application for the STEAM Academy Charter School to be located within Eastern Cibola County that will draw students from the Pueblo's of Laguna and Acoma and the Land Grant Communities of Seboyeta and Cubero.

I was the lead person on the original application for a Charter School that was supported by our Governor of Laguna Pueblo as we began the planning process in October 2012. With support from our former Governor we were excited about the opportunity to initiate the application for a Charter School with an emphasis on Culture and Career Development. However, in an initial meeting with NMPED staff of the Options for Parents Division led by our Governor of our Charter School committee, we learned through the meeting that a Tribal Government could not be a direct support of the Charter School or have a role in the management of the school. The process for a Charter School application should come from the community, essentially a "grass roots" effort led by community leaders. With that clarification, the Governor and the Pueblo with drew to minimize any perception that they would be affiliated with the school. In addition we received an email on March 26, 2012 with attachments from Kelly Callahan, General Manager, Options for Parents - NM PED notifying all Charter School applicants that the US Department of Education will not fund the Grant to NM PED for planning and implementation funds for new charter schools for 2012-15. Consequently I suspended the charter school application process.

With that understanding in 2012, this new initiative has been taken on by a new set of community leaders who have found and acquired support from the Native American Community Academy Network (NACA) that will provide technical and financial assistance to establish a revised model of education from the original application of a Culture and Career Development framework to the STEAM Academy. The revised model came as a result of community meetings where people were aware of the challenges their children will face in a global economy. The model of this new charter school reflects the emphasis of community base education. It is also an opportunity that fits in with the call for quality and relevant education programs by the communities of Eastern Cibola County.

Through out the history of public education delivered to these communities by the Grants school leadership has been the quality and relevant educational programs that continues to show low achievement test scores of the students as well as some of the events that are well documented over the last fifty years, such as: From the US Office of Civil rights finding in 1982 of over \$800.00 spent per student attending the Grants High School to \$38.00 spent per student attending Laguna-Acoma High School. The Grants District successfully led the effort to stop the construction of the new Laguna Middle School in 1980 funded by the BIA. But in 1995 the Pueblo of Laguna leadership initiated a call to action to address the out dated facilities at L-A High School by enlisting support from the Pueblo of Acoma and the Land Grant Communities for construction of a new high school facility to replace the 1963 facility that was originally constructed as a Junior High School. The older facility never met the high school needs of the community. Though a collective effort and passionate leadership over an eight-year process, a new high school facility was opened in 2003. However, the education program continues to struggle under the Grants School District.

As in many communities through out the State of New Mexico, new Charter Schools are being started to address the varied needs of the communities through unique models and strategies not offered by the local school districts.

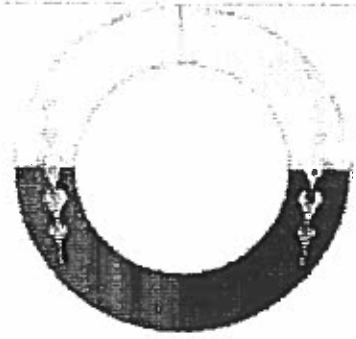
This new updated initiative for a STEAM Academy has broad support and interest as evidence from the number of people who attended the August 17th Community Hearing. What's also important to note is the new leadership from the community led by Dr. Francis and Shannon Douma as well as several other young professional educators who could not attend the community hearing. This leadership has also enlisted the support of the NACA Network who have led the development of the successful NACA Charter School over the last ten years. The future for sustaining this newest form of public education model for these four Eastern Cibola County communities will bring the opportunity of Choice that many parents have voiced in community meetings. Given the long history of struggles by these Native American communities with this school district they are ready for the next chapter for a true community base approach for education.

Thank you for your time as part of the process for listening to and acceptance of written comments from the community.

Gilbert Sanchez

FAX

**Native American Community
Academy**



NACA

To: Linda Olivas

From: Gilbert Sanchez

Fax: 505-827-7839

Pages: 3

Phone: 301-788-1498

Date: 8/20/2015

Re: STEAM Academy

CC:

Reason: Letter of support

Priority:

Comments: Thank you for your consideration

Phone: (505)-266-0992

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August 20, 2015

Carolyn Shearman, Chair
Public Education Commission (PEC) Members
c/o Linda Olivas
Charter School Division
300 Don Gaspar Ave.
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Madame Chair and Members of the PEC:

Thank you again for taking the time to come out to San Fidel and spend time hearing from the founders and community members of the STEAM Academy in Eastern Cibola County. We appreciate your desire to inquire about the school and for providing feedback on the process and application. We are thankful for your allowance of the many community members to speak on behalf of the creation of STEAM Academy and its establishment.

The development of a charter school for Easter Cibola County has been a long and enriching process. Working with our communities, we have been able to address a number of issues, concerns, and needs in mapping out our school that have been expressed over many years. If provided the opportunity to continue moving the school forward, we have the capacity and dedication to work full-time during the planning year to ensure that we are able to effectively and efficiently manage and operate the school that has been envisioned for our community. With the support of the NACA Inspired Schools Network (NISN) and many of our community partners, we will be able to continue with our plans of opening a school that incorporates the dedication, passion, and commitment of those community members who have sought better educational opportunities for their children.

The following comments are respectfully submitted to further clarify and articulate our responses to the various questions and issues raised during the hearing, as well as highlight our plans moving forward.

Innovations for STEAM Academy

The STEAM Academy was created to offer an alternative type of education to students in Eastern Cibola County, intending to meet the needs of the community, as they desired both “real-world” experiences and postsecondary preparation for their children. We believe that our foundational areas of STEAM, rural technology, project-based learning, and the Mentoring Core-Circle of Care, distinguish the STEAM Academy from the local school district (pp 11-12).

At the core of our curriculum is a project-based learning approach to the articulation of knowledge. Project-based learning focuses on utilizing real world situations to excite and inspire student learning. In combining STEAM with this learning approach, we seek to ground students in 21st Century knowledge that can ensure post-secondary opportunities

either in higher education or a definitive career track. Additionally, our focus on supporting students holistically, through our Mentoring Core-Circle of Care (pp12-14), both in school and beyond the secondary process, is an aspect of the school that is not seen in most public schools within New Mexico.

Tribal Support

Over the past year, the STEAM Academy has worked diligently to cultivate relationships with the tribal communities in Eastern Cibola County (Pueblos of Laguna and Acoma). As a state-chartered school it is important to us to ensure all students, whether they are from the Pueblos or not, know that the school is a free public school open to all students. Locating outside of the Pueblos ensures that there would be no perception of Pueblo jurisdiction in the school.

The charter initiative grew out of various iterations over the past two decades, including the most recent Notice of Intent (prior to this application) in 2012. At that time, the Pueblo of Laguna was informed by the PED that a government entity could not be the founders of a charter school. As the development of the STEAM Academy moved forward, it was clear to the founding team that the focus and direction of the school should be community-driven and inclusive of the surrounding areas. In seeking continued support from the Pueblo of Laguna, the Pueblo Council felt that as a school independent from the Pueblo, there was no need for governmental support. Additionally, the Council members related that they had recently re-established connections with Grants-Cibola County Schools, after years of contention, and endorsement of a new charter might be perceived as a hostile act, which could result in repercussions for students at Laguna-Acoma High School. As such, the Academy made the decision to not be located on Tribal land, where there would be no jurisdiction by the Pueblo of Laguna (or Acoma) and no perception that the tribe was involved in the school. It must also be noted that we have received our business license to operate on the Pueblo, which is a decision that is made by the Pueblo Council Staff Officers. Further, several Council members independently support the establishment of the STEAM Academy, as do many families and students, and the efforts to provide a different educational system for students in Eastern Cibola County.

Technological Capacity

As we have chosen to focus on technology as a prime component and goal for our school, we are aware of the need for stable and accessible technology. In adapting to a mobile world there is less need, however, for ground lines. The Eastern Cibola area has considerable cellular access: an LTE Network – the highest rated cellular network capable of streaming data at high speeds – more than qualified to be able to provide distance learning courses, online instruction, and student resources. The type of hardware we intend to provide students with, and have budgeted for, will be equipped with cellular access, overriding the necessity for a static, hard-line. As much of our work will physically be in the surrounding communities, as part of our project-based learning approach, there is less of a need for static telecommunication lines, as there have been in the past. As we seek to develop our facility, the STEAM Academy is currently a part of a

USDA Broadband Access grant, which will allow us to further establish the infrastructure in the area and enhance mobile access for students and the community.

Policy Development

Once we are authorized, our Governance Board will modify, if necessary, and formally adopt board policies. The policies we include in Appendix F, Appendix G, and pages 80-81 of the Charter Application, were established as frameworks by which the Governance Board could cultivate and enact policies that were in alignment with the development of the school. We intend to develop several additional policies throughout our planning year. We understand that the PEC has established timelines during the planning year and our creation and implementation of policies will align with that timeline.

Teacher Recruitment

We are aware of the lack of science and math teachers available to schools in both urban and rural areas. We also know that special education teachers might be difficult to attract. However, we are confident that our innovative approach to instruction will draw upon a different pool of applicants who may be more interested in teaching at a uniquely structured organization, rather than a traditional public school institution. An example of this ability to attract applicants based on a distinct type of environment is Walatowa Charter High School in the Jemez Pueblo, which has been able to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers to support their system, both in math and English in a rural area of New Mexico. Further, the use of distance courses and partnerships with local universities through CNM and UNM, as part of the relationship with the NACA Inspired Schools Network, provides opportunities that are not considered or not implemented by the local public school systems. The use of IDEAL-NM and other online coursework allows for a larger student to teacher ratio and less need for specialized teachers based exclusively on student enrollment. Further, our efforts over the past year have been to initiate recruitment efforts focusing on local graduating college students who may be interested in teaching in their home communities. Already, we have been approached by two teachers with the option for science and math endorsement who are interested in teaching at the STEAM Academy.

Academic Goals

Our primary academic goal was based on a cohort model of benchmarking NWEA scores against the ACT scores, as cited in Appendix ACD.NWEA. As our focus is on post-secondary success and providing students with the opportunity to determine their next steps, we chose to establish a goal that would align with a post-secondary assessment as a fundamental approach to our learning and instruction. Further, the core of our school is centered on developing a collective culture that values the community rather than the individual. As such, we believe that establishing a goal for the school, as a whole is critical to supporting our vision for a community-minded school. This does not diminish the idea of addressing each student individually. As stated on pages 9-10, we indicated that we will use NWEA assessments to determine individual student growth in order that each student receives the services and educational supports necessary to prepare them for postsecondary success. Further, we will track yearly student growth, which we have set at 1.5 to 2 years of student growth annually, and will receive NISN support for data

analysis and interpretation provided as part of our network relationship. Additionally, we are aware of the contract negotiation process and are willing to refine our student growth and achievement goals to ensure an adequate, equitable, and consistent process across PEC-chartered school.

Financial Considerations

Our team had challenges transferring line items to the new 5-year budget template (2015) from the old 5-year budget template (2014). This led to several issues in classifying budget areas and some missing explanations. When establishing our first year budget, we plan to develop a responsible and sustainable budget and as stated in our application (pages 117 & 126), do so in compliance with laws and requirements set forth by the NMPED with our licensed school Budget Manager. We will form a Finance Committee who will meet to finalize school financial policies and procedures, in compliance with Statute 22-8-12.3.NMSA and 6.20.2 NMAC during the planning year. Additionally, we are aware of the separation of responsibilities, between the Head Administrator and the Budget Manager as outlined in 6.63.12.8 NMAC, and will create policies to solidify those responsibilities at the initial meeting of the Governance Council. Those policies will specifically address responsibilities, fiscal controls, and legal requirements, though we have addressed the general structure on pages 118 & Appendix D.

Assumptions that went into the budget are included as an attachment to this letter.

Facility Preparation

In September, our plans are to engage PSFA in a walk through of the St. Joseph's Elementary School facility, which was selected later in the process due to its proximity to Acoma and our desire to be more inclusive of the communities in Eastern Cibola County. We are aware of and will adhere to the responsibilities and legal guidelines for charter schools utilizing spaces operated by religious institutions, specifically the prohibitions in regards to the Establishment Clause. The leadership at St. Joseph's is aware of these legal requirements and has been in agreement with the continued pursuit of the co-locating within the grounds of the facility. As Principal Trujillo (of St. Joseph's) mentioned during the hearing, he is very interested in co-locating with the STEAM Academy and is engaging in a discussion with the Gallup Archdiocese on this topic. We are also developing contingency plans in case this option does not work out.

Through NISN, we will receive the support of the operations team in assessing and finalizing a site, hiring a project manager, architect, and/or general contractor, developing a budget, constructing or remodeling as necessary, and completing all necessary approvals so the school has E-Occupancy by the summer of 2016.

Student Support and Special Needs

Our plans to address the needs of student with IEPs and 504 plans are covered on pages 32-34 of the Charter Application. We discuss the IEP process as a whole and students under 504 consideration. Our plans are in alignment with the PED's guidance document implementing a 3-Tiered model of student interventions. Additionally, as part of this approach, we have outlined our Individual Learning Plan approach, on page 133 of the

Charter Application, to ensure that all students receive the services and accommodations to make their learning a positive and equitable experience.

In the first year of operation, the special education position will be a contracted position. With an estimated 6 students in special education the first year and 9 the second year the load is not heavy. The teacher that is certified in special education in conjunction with the special education contractor should be able to coordinate this load. As special education student count increases to 12 in year three, and funding increases, the position for the Director of Student Wellness will be created and will become the coordinator of Special Education while special education services will still be provided by contractors.

Roles and Responsibilities

We fully recognize the delineation of the roles and responsibilities between the Head Administrator, the School Director, and the Business Manager. The organizational chart (Optional Part C Organizational Question D.(1)) and Appendices C and D describe the varying roles of each of the aforementioned staff. In the first year, these roles may be called upon to work other aspects of the school, as necessary, including instruction, special education, outreach, and more depending on the needs of the school and the students. The roles of the School Director have been noted on p.73 of the Charter Application and are focused primarily on professional development, outreach, fundraising, and evaluation.

Sustainability

We strongly believe that the sustainability of our school hinges upon developing a strong culture that can only be actualized once all the pieces are in place, including staff members, curriculum, and governance, students. The culture of the school will be built over time through the cultivation of skilled Governance Council members, who have a critical understanding of technology, innovation, creativity, and achievement. Our school mission and goals are based upon the understanding that our efforts for student achievement are inherently collaborative where students and community are interconnected and interrelated.

We anticipate being able to obtain resources and form partnerships in support of our STEAM program, including NASA (see collaboration with UC Berkeley NOVAS Project, Appendix M), the state of New Mexico (STEM Initiative), and the National Science Foundation. We are already in the process of developing our own internal pipeline to meet the current and future staffing needs of the school and will maintain contact with STEAM Academy graduates and continue to build relationships that are mutually supportive. We have already identified a possible Head Administrator, as well as the School Director positions respectively. Our focus on projects that help fulfill community needs will also develop strong community support. Ultimately, the sustainability of the school will emerge from our continued efforts to engage stakeholders and community members in the school development process.

School Day Schedule

Our school day schedule is built around project-based experiences and will feature both blended and experiential learning as a way of synthesizing knowledge and “real world” skill development. As noted in Appendix D5, we have established an A and B Block schedule where students spend the mornings in blended instruction developing foundational knowledge aligned with Common Core State Standards (CCSS) through distance education which will then be directly applied during their project-based learning in the afternoons. The projects, described in further detail below utilize cross-curricular approaches to solving real challenges faced by local communities. At the beginning and end of the day and in the afternoon, there is time built in for relationship development with adults and peers during the Advisory periods.

We have built a number of additional time blocks to allow for additional instruction including, again, optional time at the beginning and end of the day in their Advisory groups. Further, one full day each week will be dedicated solely to project development and community engagement, which allows for further exploration of foundational knowledge and CCSS in a “real world” setting. We are aware that the Common Core State Standards were created and adopted as a way of accessing deep knowledge, critical thinking and problem solving and believe that the spirit and the letter of the CCSS is maintained through these projects. The Buck Institute Gold Standard is in alignment with these standards and our schedule is formulated in a way that fully realizes a technology-based, project-driven model.

Project-Based Learning Core

At the heart of project-based learning is a community-centered problem or issue that students will learn about and develop solutions to, in a way that directly benefits the community. In utilizing the Buck Institute Model, we intend to approach knowledge and understanding (Appendix ACD.D1b). The projects will be developed with both student and community input in a way that helps students develop an authentic process and response, and that aligns with the CCSS. Projects will integrate the basic knowledge that students are learning in the blended-learning, core courses and the projects will serve as the primary demonstration of knowledge for each student, in conjunction with NWEA scores.

Possible projects to be built around these themes:

Water conservation. Water has always been a precious commodity for people in the high desert. This project would feature students learning about traditional conservation techniques (dry farming), developing technology to monitor water consumption, creating low cost water systems for community gardens, developing conservation outreach programs, etc. Reading about similar projects, recent articles, and employing mathematical models to analyze, create, and display data would also be a part of completing the project.

Rural communications. Rural communities have limited means for communication. One area that has always served to meet this need is the local radio. Drawing on scientific

understanding of wave-lengths, and mathematical models of distance, students will establish a low-power FM station to serve Eastern Cibola County. Students will learn frequency analysis, legal requirements, producing and writing segments, hosting skills, business management, and other necessities for operating a radio station.

Cultural revitalization. Language and culture loss are two areas that are affecting tribal communities throughout the United States. Students will engage in the creation of a cultural center that celebrates the rich history and culture of the people of Eastern Cibola County. Students will learn archive techniques, engineering and building development, code and legal analysis, cultural preservation, outreach and promotions. Through art education, students may also participate as stewards of certain crafts in their respective community.

Thank you for your time and consideration through the various stages of this charter application process. We are confident that the foundation for this school is strong and that we can, together, realize the vision of an alternative and meaningful education for our students in Eastern Cibola County, through the STEAM Academy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lee Francis IV", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Lee Francis IV and The STEAM Academy Team

Budget Assumptions and Explanations

Professional Development: The spreadsheet was condensed as it had a lot of account codes that did not apply. The training account line 11000-1000-53330 was erroneously deleted from the spreadsheet in that process. The amounts of training for instructors on the deleted line was: Year 1 - \$3000, Year 2 - 5 - \$5,000.

In years 2 – 5, Title 2 funding can be used to supplement trainings for level 1 teachers, mentor teachers and administrators. Title 1 funding can be used for training for Title 1 purposes.

Student Recruitment: Since all of the recruitment strategies necessary to reach enrollment for the first year will have to be employed before the school is opened, and before the school receives any funding from SEG, these expenses will have to be raised by donations from the community. Since operational funding cannot be used for advertising, free advertising or donations will have to be utilized for recruitment purposes. Social media can be used to grow community interest and to announce events and can also be utilized for fund raising. Community events and dinners can be hosted at local venues such as parks or libraries with pot lucks or food donated by community vendors or individuals. Charter Schools must be very creative in recruitment efforts since funding is not available until after the school is opened, and since operational funding cannot be utilized for advertising for recruitment.

Cost of Testing: The testing increased each year based on student count. The amounts include short cycle, SBA and PARCC testing.

Office Equipment and Classroom Furniture: Electronic tablets and desks are included under account code 11000-1000-57332 for supply assets (under \$5,000) which **IS** the correct line item. The school budgeted a total of \$22,500 for the first year and \$10,000 each subsequent year to ensure new students were equipped as enrollment increases. There is \$500 for electronic tablets and tables per student and \$2500 for other classroom furniture in the first year. This should be enough to supplement the used furniture and equipment that we will secure from other schools and organizations giving away or selling this used equipment very inexpensively.

Student Information System: The PowerSchool funding in 11000-2100-55915 increases as student count increases as there is a per student charge for PowerSchool. The additional funding allows for increasing services from PowerSchool such as utilizing their service for electronic announcements to parents on snow days and for school events, and for any additional services that may be needed as the information required by the state for testing and STARS reporting continues to increase. Any funding on this line item that is not actually needed for PowerSchool can be used for other needs as identified during the year (with proper BARs) or for carryover at the end of year.

Janitorial services: Janitorial was budgeted on line 11000-2600-54312 in the amount of \$2000 for buildings and \$500 for fixtures. This is a function that can be fulfilled or supplemented by staff, parent and community volunteers in the first years of the school

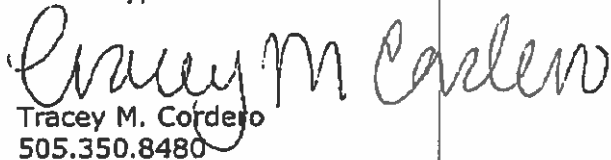
until the budget can sustain a janitor. Other schools have fulfilled this need in this way. The budgeted amount should cover fixing toilets or door locks or changing air filters.

Greetings Honorable Public Education Commission,

I appreciate the time and attention that was dedicated to the community input hearing for S.T.E.A.M. Academy on Monday, August 17, 2015. I am very excited about and fully support the S.T.E.A.M. Academy. I feel that the S.T.E.A.M Academy will be a life changing opportunity for many of the Native youth in the immediate area of the school site.

In Monday's hearing I left deeply concerned and troubled by Superintendent Space's comments regarding the Pueblo of Laguna's Tribal Council. As a tribal member of a related Pueblo, I feel that it is disrespectful to an entire sovereign government to have Dr. Space speak on its behalf without having any official authority to do so. Had it been Laguna Tribal Council's intention to voice opposition to S.T.E.A.M., I am sure the Tribal Council would have delegated authority to a designated spokesperson to speak on its behalf at the hearing. It is my hope that Dr. Space's comments regarding the Tribal Council will have no bearing on the perception of community support or the overall decision to approve the opening of the S.T.E.A.M. Academy.

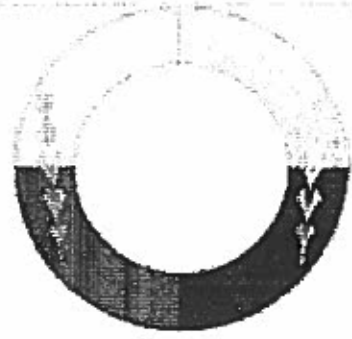
Sincerely,



Tracey M. Cordero
505.350.8480

FAX

**Native American Community
Academy**



NACA

To: Linda Olivas

From: Tracey Cordova

Fax: 505-827-7839

Pages: 2

Phone: 301-788-1498

Date: 08/20/2015

Re: STEAM Academy

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Reason: Letter of support

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Thank you

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