

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

August 20, 2015

Dear Madame Chair and Members of the PEC:

We wanted to write, first, to say thank you to the PEC members who travelled all the way to Gallup last Monday to conduct the Community Input Hearing for Six Directions Indigenous School (SDIS), listen to the voices of community members here, and pose questions to our founding team. It was our distinct pleasure to be able to showcase the beautiful facilities at UNM-Gallup and to allow you all to hear some compelling voices both from within Gallup and from the surrounding tribal communities.

We recognize that the PEC has a difficult job to do in order to assess applications and founding teams for their readiness to open an excellent school, and we appreciate your questions and the feedback from the PED. We believe deeply in the vision and mission we've set for schooling in Gallup, and we are committed to bringing that idea to life effectively. In that vein, the following comments and addendums add depth to our responses to your questions and the feedback made by the PED.

### **Innovative Features**

SDIS, as a school committed to finding a solution for endemic inequity in public school systems in and around Gallup, has been designed with many innovative ideas. Our largest innovation is our focus on culturally responsive education, as captured in our mission statement (page 4 of application). The theories and frameworks of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) (which also goes by names such as culturally relevant teaching, culturally responsive schooling, etc.) are all about ensuring that students from nondominant cultures are safe and successful in school. It is not about teaching culture explicitly; rather, it is about building school culture and curriculum that sees students' identities and local funds of knowledge as assets, that decreases dissonance between home life and school life, and that ensures academic content is taught through methods that are authentic and meaningful to youth (pp 11-12). Without going into detail about the history of Indian education in McKinley County, CRT is an explicit divergence from curricula and institutional culture in many education systems serving youth in our area.

We fear that at times there is a perception that Culturally Responsive Teaching means lowering academic standards when in reality the opposite is true (as described on page 24 of our application). One critical aspect of frameworks of Culturally Responsive Teaching is a commitment to academic excellence given that students of color often face lowered expectations in school. We seek to accomplish academic achievement through our combination of small-group skills labs and project based learning, both of which we will describe in more detail in the section on curriculum. Rigorous project-based learning, critical thinking, and depth of learning are all a part of the foundation of our school.

A second, significant innovative feature of SDIS is our commitment to holistic wellness through frameworks of Positive Youth Development (p 12). Positive Youth Development is an important feature of our school first because it is an explicit recognition of local sources of knowledge about wellness. And,

second, this framework aligns with our hypothesis that for local youth to fully succeed academically in school we must take responsibility for the child's emotional, relational, identity, intellectual, and physical wellness holistically in order to ensure his or her readiness to learn effectively. This commitment to building students' readiness to learn through holistic wellness is perhaps our greatest divergence from other local schooling options.

A third innovative feature of SDIS is our commitment to building a culture around Restorative Justice (Appendix F). Again, this is valuable in part in that it aligns with indigenous understandings of justice. But, importantly, it is also a method of building school culture and creating deliberate protocols to respond to misbehavior or conflict that has been shown to decrease suspensions and expulsions and keep students in school. This will be important for improving graduation rates, and it is expressly different from the zero tolerance policy of GMCS.

### **School Goals**

We expect students to be on grade level or at least on a path towards catching up to grade level if they are behind. NWEA is a tool that will help us measure individual student growth throughout the year. Our NWEA goals (pp 5-7) allow for students to meet the standard if they are already on grade level, or, if they are behind, they could exceed the "expected growth" line. If students are on grade level and staying on grade level then they are, by definition, showing at least one year's growth and remaining proficient. For students who are behind, NWEA uses historical precedent to create an "expected growth" line based on how students nationally have scored in the spring after starting from a particular score in the fall. Our goal is to, over the course of a year, exceed that predicted growth with our students. This seemed both ambitious and reasonable. This particular idea came from the way many charter schools in Washington, DC set goals with their authorizer (p 9).

### **Curriculum**

Our curriculum is delivered through skills labs, electives, and project-based learning. Skills labs are daily, small-group, direct-instruction lessons in each of math, reading, and writing skills. This ensures students are getting instruction tailored to their needs and ability level based on short cycle assessment data and aligned to Common Core standards (p 26). This is not the only time when students will practice those skills; they will also be applied in project-based learning settings.

Electives will allow for the teaching of New Mexico Content Standards like physical education which may not be covered in the core coursework. It will also allow for the teaching of Navajo and Zuni language for students who would like to opt in to that learning.

Project-based learning will make up the core curriculum. It will combine Common Core standards with projects that have local resonance and a deliberate focus on rigor through the "Four Cs": collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, communication (p 24). Understanding by Design will be used as a curriculum-planning framework to ensure rigor, depth of knowledge, and that projects have real purpose (p 12).

For brief examples of what a curriculum could look like that combines Common Core standards, New Mexico Content Standards, and authentic, local projects, please see Appendix A.

## **Student Enrollment**

While our school has been intentionally designed through culturally responsive frameworks, we agree that this does not preclude us from being a free, open-enrollment public school that may not discriminate on the basis of age, disability, gender, ethnic or national origin, religion, or academic standing (pp 84-85).

The student enrollment schedule as articulated in our application (pp 85-86) is what we intend to follow, opening enrollment in November and remaining open until a lottery in April. If we have not filled our capacity, we will keep enrollment open and hold a second lottery in June.

## **Special Education/ELL Services**

During the planning year, SDIS will officially adopt policies and develop procedures to address how special populations will be served in alignment with federal law and state guidance (pp 30-40). We understand that ELL students may be identified to take the W-APT by a teacher noticing limited language skills. Students who qualify as ELL will be placed in the school's Language Support Program, with the Skills Lab and Humanities Teacher who holds a TESOL endorsement. Student progress monitoring will be managed by the Language Assistance Team, who will monitor student progress on certain language objectives in their Skills Labs, on short cycle assessments, and through end of year WIDA testing (p 39).

## **Head Administrator**

We recognize and acknowledge that the Principal is the legal head administrator of our school. They are hired and evaluated by the Governing Council. As is stated on page 61 of our application, "Ultimately, the Head Administrator is responsible for the school and the work of the Executive Director." The organizational chart in Appendix B supports this supposition by placing the Executive Director beneath the Principal. The Executive Director role is meant to assume operational responsibilities as delegated by the Head Administrator so that the Head Administrator may focus on effective instructional leadership of our school.

## **Governance Council**

While our Governance Council is made up of individuals who already hold a range of knowledge and skills that will help us meet our mission, they are committed to building their capacity to provide oversight of a charter school by attending trainings through the New Mexico Coalition of Charter Schools, New Mexico School Board Association, the PED, and the Attorney General's Office. Through this PED-sanctioned training, and in conjunction with other informal capacity-building through the NACA-Inspired Schools Network (NISN), the Governing Council will finalize all of its policies and plans regarding self-evaluation and school oversight by December. The budget that was submitted as part of the application was not reflective of trainings during the planning year, because the budget is designed for the first to fifth years of operation. Both board travel and board trainings are budgeted for years one through five under function 2300, lines 55811 and 55812 for a total of \$2500 annually.

## **Facilities**

In terms of finding suitable locations, we are lucky to be within the city of Gallup, where we have more options for facilities than other rural areas of New Mexico. We have worked with our local school board members, city government employees, and two real estate agents to identify possible facilities. Right now we have 10 possible sites that we believe can meet our needs as articulated in our Facilities Master Plan/Ed Specs Checklist (Appendix I). We will continue to work with project managers and PSFA to assess the potential costs and benefits of each site.

Through NISN, we will receive the support of the operations team in finding and assessing sites, hiring a project manager a/o architect a/o general contractor, developing a budget, constructing or remodeling as necessary, and completing all necessary approvals.

## **Finances**

In our finances section of the application, we based our budget only on operational dollars to be conservative and ensure that we could develop a plan that was sustainable. Any additional funding sources--NISN or grant sources--would supplement the SEG funds budgeted in the application. We understand that there are fixed costs and variable costs associated with the budget. During the planning year, we will create a budget based on projected numbers while keeping a contingency plan for half of the enrollment and reduced costs, in the event that our target enrollment is not met.

As described in pages 104-105 SDIS will create a committee during our planning year composed of parents and other active community members to help create a strategy and set of tactics for building relationships with and enrolling families and students in our school. Specific practices could include:

- advertising our school on local radio and in print media.
- connecting with local elementary schools to appear at parent nights or distribute literature to rising 6th graders.
- returning to chapter houses and the Zuni Pueblo to share information about our school design.
- hosting public information meetings.
- distributing information at high-traffic events like the Flea Market, Wal-Mart, ArtsCrawl, Ceremonial, the Balloon Rally, and Sporting Events.

These items were not included in the budget because this would be covered by funding from private sources and/or NISN funding allocation that is received during planning year during the second year fellowship.

## **NACA-Inspired Schools Network**

Currently, the NACA-Inspired Schools Network supports Six Directions through a fellowship which allows one of our founding members, Lane Towery, to work full-time on developing and planning the school at the direction of the SDIS Governing Council and its committees. During the planning year, NISN will provide logistical support in finding a facility and financial support to prepare that facility. NISN will also provide support in designing curriculum, building the capacity of the Governing Council, and recruiting staff. These supports will be provided at no cost.

The Governing Council of Six Directions will have the opportunity to obtain services from the NACA-Inspired Schools Network (NISN). These services could include:

- Professional development for staff about Indigenous Education
- Continued support and training in developing culturally responsive curricula
- Governance Council capacity-building
- Support in finding ancillary support staff
- Shared knowledge-building with other schools in the network
- Contracted business management services

The Governance Council of SDIS will have the opportunity to opt in to the services they want and negotiate the cost of those services. In an effort to budget conservatively, we budgeted for the highest potential cost of working with NISN. NISN is currently working on attaining sole-provider status given their unique institutional knowledge in indigenous education efforts.

### **Planning Year**

In order to ensure we are ready to bring our school to life effectively, we intend to create five ad-hoc committees of our Governing Council during the planning year. These ad-hoc committees will complete work that is critical to opening our school while continuing to realize our core value around engaging and empowering our local community in our design process. The committees and their goals are listed below. For more details about benchmarks, please see the included timeline in Appendix B.

1. Curriculum Committee
  - a. Goal: To have completed curriculum for 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades ready to use by June 2016. By December 2015 we should have a curriculum map that includes standards, Enduring Understandings, Essential Questions, and main projects and assessment tools.
  - b. Chaired by a member of the GC. Membership will include local educators from both secondary and post-secondary educational institutions, and will actively seek out parent and youth involvement and feedback.
  - c. Supported also by Josh Krause at NISN.
2. Wellness and Positive Youth Development Committee
  - a. Goal: To have completed our wellness framework with the Thrive Rubric, used by local partner, National Indian Youth Leadership Project, by December 2015. To have completed protocols and curricula for Advisory and Wellness electives by June 2016.
  - b. Chaired by Ben Soce. Membership to include educators with SPED background, counselors/psychologists, health professionals, and elders.
3. Facilities and Operations Committee
  - a. Goal: to have a facility ready to move in by May 2016. To have food and transportation services finalized by June 2016.
  - b. Chaired by Madeline Leyba.
  - c. Supported by operations staff at NISN.
4. Staff Recruitment and Hiring Committee
  - a. Goal: To hire a principal and have recommendations for teaching staff by May 2016.
  - b. Chaired by a member of the GC.
5. Family Engagement and Enrollment Committee
  - a. Goal: to enroll at least 50, and up to 80, students by June 2016.
  - b. Chaired by a member of the GC.

Many thanks for your time and consideration. We know that with the continued feedback and support from the Charter Schools Division and the Public Education Commission that we will be able to realize our vision for excellent and equitable education for youth in Gallup. We look forward to seeing you all again in September!

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lane Towery', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Lane Towery, on behalf of the entire Six Directions Indigenous School team

## Appendix A: Example Curricula

*\*We acknowledge that the following are incomplete examples of a curriculum. We wanted to show, briefly, the ways that PBL, local projects, and common core could come together in an engaging and authentic curriculum.*

<b>6th Grade Humanities PBL Unit</b>	
<b>Theme:</b> Identity and Borders	
<p><b>Essential Questions</b></p> <p>How do we shape and form our identities? How do individual identities and group identities interact?</p>	<p><b>Enduring Understandings</b></p> <p>Identity is deeply influenced by place, geography, and natural boundaries.</p> <p>Crossing borders can change identity.</p> <p>Borders are often drawn based on geography and cultural identities.</p>
<p><b>Common Core Standards Addressed</b></p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1</p> <p>Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2</p> <p>Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3</p> <p>Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.</p>	<p><b>New Mexico State Standards Addressed</b></p> <p>Social Studies Standards 5-8</p> <p>Benchmark 2-E</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. explain how human migration impacts places, societies and civilizations;</li> <li>2. describe, locate and compare different settlement patterns throughout the world; and</li> <li>3. explain how cultures create a cultural landscape, locally and throughout the world, and how these landscapes change over time.</li> </ol>

### Summative Projects and Demonstrations of Learning

- An oral story-telling project with elders on their experiences travelling between reservation communities and Gallup presented as a podcast at the end of the trimester.
- Put on a “Native America Calling”-style show from their classroom in which parents or older students are encouraged to “call-in” on a topic related to borders or identity and send a recording to the producers of Native America Calling for their feedback and ideas.
- Produce and “publish” a magazine with a combination of reporting and literature that they choose and write. At the end of the trimester students could host a magazine launch as a demonstration of their learning and invite their families.

### Readings

- Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian: explore how the protagonist’s identity changes as he goes to school in a border town through literature circles.
- Informational texts on the history of the signing of treaties, creation and growth of reservation boundaries, founding of Gallup, etc.

### 7th Grade STEAM PBL Unit

**Theme:** Energy

#### Essential Questions

Where does energy come from and where does it go?

How do different cultures define and explain sources of energy?

#### Enduring Understandings

Energy can be transferred between objects and converted to different forms.

Human use of energy resources can have a wide-ranging impact on lifestyles, ecosystems, and cultures.

#### Common Core Standards Addressed

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.7.SP.A.1

Understand that statistics can be used to gain information about a population by examining a sample of the population; generalizations about a population from a sample are valid

#### New Mexico State Standards Addressed

5-8 Benchmark II: Explain the physical processes involved in the transfer, change, and conservation of energy.



<p>only if the sample is representative of that population. Understand that random sampling tends to produce representative samples and support valid inferences.</p> <p>CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.7.SP.A.2</p> <p>Use data from a random sample to draw inferences about a population with an unknown characteristic of interest. Generate multiple samples (or simulated samples) of the same size to gauge the variation in estimates or predictions. <i>For example, estimate the mean word length in a book by randomly sampling words from the book; predict the winner of a school election based on randomly</i></p> <p>Use variables to represent quantities in a real-world or mathematical problem, and construct simple equations and inequalities to solve problems by reasoning about the quantities. <i>sampled survey data. Gauge how far off the estimate or prediction might be.</i></p> <p>CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.7.EE.B.4</p>	<p>1. Know how various forms of energy are transformed through organisms and ecosystems, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sunlight and photosynthesis</li> <li>• energy transformation in living systems (e.g., cellular processes changing chemical energy to heat and motion)</li> <li>• effect of mankind’s use of energy and other activities on living systems (e.g., global warming, water quality).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Summative Projects and Demonstrations of Learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The design and building of a device to turn wind or solar energy into another form of energy, like mechanical energy or electrical energy. Students could invent a tool that solves a need in rural homes. This could end in a product launch in front of their peers and families.</li> <li>• Taking air and water samples from multiple communities in and around Gallup to measure the impact of of pollution from different forms of energy extraction, and then putting together a museum exhibit displaying charts, data, photos, and history.</li> </ul>	

**Appendix B: Planning Year Benchmarks**

<b>Work stream</b>	<b>September</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>December</b>	<b>January</b>
<b>Governing Council</b>	Launch new ad-hoc committee structure.	Become an approved board of finance. Attend NM Charter Schools Coalition Conference.	Begin developing and approving policies. Approve bylaws, conflict of interest, and nepotism policy. Begin monthly meetings.	All financial and personnel policies approved.	
<b>Operations – Facilities, Transportation, Food.</b>	Have top 3 sites reviewed by PSFA. Create design of final site w/ architect or project manager	Contractor in place. Begin permit, lease, and approval process. Begin food and transportation research	Complete all permits, leases, approvals.	Have all subcontractors in place. Finalize planning year budget for facilities. IT, telecom research.	Construction begins.
<b>Curriculum</b>	Establish curriculum committee with chairperson, initial members, and goals.	Establish formal relationships with DODE & Zuni Language board for development of language curricula. Begin UBD process.	Continue UBD process—naming EUs and EQs, assessment for different aspects of curriculum.	Complete UBD process, and align with Common Core and State content standards with UBDs to complete curriculum map.	Begin unit planning from curriculum map.
<b>Family Engagement and Enrollment</b>	Committee established with chair, members, goals, and strategies.	Begin advertising the school’s approval and methods of registering.	Enrollment opens. Lane serves as registrar for planning year, updates GC on progress. Advertising continues.	Family Committee offers feedback, input, and values in the curriculum development process. Advertising continues.	Advertising continues. Family and youth input in curriculum continues.
<b>Staff Recruitment and Hiring</b>	Committee established with chair, members, and goals.	Establish prioritized skills and qualities for each position; methods for assessing candidates.	Establish strategy for recruiting candidates. Begin executing on strategy to build pool of candidates.	Advertising, recruitment, relationship-building continued.	Advertising, recruitment, relationship-building continued.
<b>Wellness and Positive Youth Development</b>	Committee established with chair, members, and goals.	Seek input from local health providers on key data and priorities for health and wellness of local youth.	Seek input from local elders and traditional practitioners about indigenous conceptions of holistic wellness.	Complete SDIS’s framework for Holistic Wellness combining local knowledge and the Thrive Foundation tools.	Seek input from NIYLP on building culture and relationships with middle school youth.

<b>Work stream</b>	<b>February</b>	<b>March</b>	<b>April</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>June</b>
<b>Governing Council</b>	Approve all student policies.	School operations budget for year 1 based on projected enrollment. Spring Budget workshop.	Complete applications for funding sources such as IDEA-B, Title I, Bilingual, etc.	Board approval of budget. School Law Conference.	Board retreat with self-evaluation.
<b>Operations – Facilities, Transportation, Food.</b>	Construction process ongoing while final approval process initiated.	Construction ongoing while approval process continues.	Construction process complete. RFP out for transportation and food services.	E-occupancy approval process complete. Building ready by May 31 <sup>st</sup> .	Move into building. Select accounting software, set up bank account, order checks.
<b>Curriculum</b>	Continue unit planning.	Continue unit planning. Order books, supplies and resources for curriculum.	Continue unit planning.	Curriculum completed. Map curriculum beyond 6 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> grades – UBD process again.	Continue UBD process for higher grades. Order computers, software for curriculum and instruction.
<b>Parent Engagement and Enrollment</b>	Advertising continues. Begin events to build community and relationships.	Advertising and events continue.	First lottery for new students. Family event with accepted families.	Second family event with accepted families. Advertising continues as necessary.	Second lottery, if necessary.
<b>Staff Recruitment and Hiring</b>	Advertising, recruitment, relationship-building continued.	Interviews begin.	Interviews continue. Recommendations made to GC.	Interviews done by GC. Offers made to principal, teaching staff, business support specialist.	Onboarding/orientation planned for July. Any pre-work sent to new staff.
<b>Wellness and Positive Youth Development</b>	Protocols and rituals finalized for Advisory period, the use of Circle of Power and Respect, reflection and goal-setting.	Begin writing curriculum based on wellness framework.	Continue writing curriculum.	Curriculum completed for a wellness course to be offered during elective period.	Nature of relationship with NIYLP finalized.