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Options for Parents



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SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

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OPTION FOR PARENTS
CHARTER SCHOOLS DIVISION

NOTICE OF INTENT TO SUBMIT CHARTER APPLICATION

INSTRUCTIONS

According to NMSA § 22-8B-6(B) the Notice of Intent to Submit a Charter Application ("NOI") must be filed by the organizers of a proposed charter school to the Public Education Commission at the address below **AND** to the superintendent of the school district in which the charter school is proposed to be located. *Failure to notify may result in your application being rejected.*

This year the NOI must be submitted by 5:00 PM Mountain Time on **the second Tuesday of January of the current year**. Notices of Intent that are not received by the Public Education Commission and the superintendent of the local school district by the deadline may result in the application being rejected. When you send the NOI to the superintendent of the school district in which your charter is to be located, you are strongly encouraged to send it by certified mail return receipt requested, or request a signed receipt when you deliver the NOI. Contact the local district regarding electronic filing.

Notice to the Public Education Commission should be delivered by one of the following methods:

- Electronically to: Linda.Olivas@state.nm.us
- By mail or personal delivery:
PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION
c/o New Mexico Public Education Department
Attn: Ms. Linda Olivas, Administrative Assistant
Options for Parents/Charter Schools Division
300 Don Gaspar, Room 301
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

The NOI is intended to provide the Public Education Commission with the primary point of contact among the charter developers, and preliminary information about the charter proposal, such as the school's mission statement, the school's focus, target student population to be served, enrollment projections, key innovations, etc. (not to exceed 5 pages).

1. General Information

- Name of Proposed School

Desert Willow School

- Grade levels to be offered and enrollment projections

Grade Levels to be Offered	Projected Total Enrollment
K-5 in Year 1 with the potential for a 5 th /6 th classroom beginning in Year 2 for students who need continued language therapy before middle school.	Year 1: 83 in K-5 Years 2-3: 83 in K-5/6 Years 4-5: 121 Years 6 & beyond: 166

- Primary Point of Contact

Name	Emily Aversa		
Mailing Address	2216 N. Cactus Street		
City	Silver City	State	NM
Zip	88061		
Phone	(575) 534-4735 and (575) 313-7305		
Email	emilyaversa@gmail.com		

2. Names, roles, and current employment of all persons on the applicant team, and qualifications of the team members to establish a high-quality charter school

Name	Role on Team	Qualifications: Education, Employment, Experience
Emily Aversa	Co-founder, Academic plan	EDUCATION: MA in Special Education, BA in English EMPLOYMENT: Currently teaching 1 st and 2 nd grade combined class at Down to Earth School (private) EXPERIENCE: Special education teacher for 15 years, grades K-7; trained and experienced in Orton-Gillingham based reading instruction and intervention
Fiona Bailey	Co-founder, Academic plan	EDUCATION: MA in Outdoor/Experiential Education, BS in Elementary Ed with a minor in Biology. Working toward Academic Language Therapist license. EMPLOYMENT: 1 st grade teacher at G.W. Stout Elem. EXPERIENCE: 25 total years teaching experience in grades K, 1, 4 and 5. Board Member and Secretary of The Learning Center for Dyslexia and Academic Success; Parent of a 14 year old daughter with dyslexia
Alicia Edwards	Organizational Advisor	EMPLOYMENT: Exectutive director of The Volunteer Center of Grant County, a non-profit that engages volunteers in fighting hunger and poverty in the county EXPERIENCE: 25 years of C-level experience in for-profit and non-profit organizations, fundraising, grant writing, board and organizational development
Pam Gibson	Special Education Administrator and Advisor	EDUCATION: MA, Educational Leadership; M.Ed, specializing in Special Education; Certification, Educational Diagnostician; BS in Education

		EMPLOYMENT: Retired, Special Education Dir., 5 years. EXPERIENCE: Educational Diagnostician, 13 years; Teacher, K-5, Gifted Education, 20 years; Faculty of first Arts in Education School in OK; Currently on Board of Directors for Life Quest, serving individuals with or at risk for developmental disabilities.
William Knutinen	Financial Planning	EDUCATION: Bachelor of Science and Business Admin EMPLOYMENT: Certified public accountant (CPA) at Morones and Knutinen in Silver City. EXPERIENCE: CPA for 22 years; Owner of a CPA firm for 14 years; Excel in financial areas of projections, forecasts, taxes, and audits.
George Lundy	Strategic Planning	EDUCATION: MA in Political Science EMPLOYMENT: Retired USDA Forest Service in 1999 after 30 years of service, served as a national asset for leadership training, strategic planning, and organizational development; 17 Service Awards. EXPERIENCE: Founder and Chair of Board of Directors for The Learning Center for Dyslexia and Academic Success (501-c-3 corporation established, Dec. 2011).

3. Model or focus of the proposed school (e.g., performing arts, dual language, college prep, STEM, Montessori, IB):

Desert Willow School's design is comprised of four components that are uniquely blended: 1) Small group, multi-sensory reading instruction for all, with intensive intervention for students with dyslexia and other language-based reading differences; 2) Enki Education, a holistic, integrated curriculum based on a synthesis of Montessori, Waldorf and the U.N. School's methodologies that encourages student exploration and creative problem solving; 3) the cultivation of self-awareness of one's unique gifts and learning styles; and 4) building a sense of belonging in the classroom, school, and local communities through connections with multiple caring adults. Desert Willow School offers an environment for passionate learning, immediate and thorough reading intervention and a focus on the process of learning to achieve exemplary outcomes through project-based learning, hands-on teaching approaches and the cultivation of a caring school community.

4. Does the school expect to contract with another entity for either management, or substantial oversight or direction in the school's operation? Yes: No:

If YES, describe the entity and the role it will have in the school's operational plan.

N/A

5. Does the applicant team or any members of the team currently operate any other schools? Yes: No: .

6. If the charter proposal is a replication, identify the school(s) you are replicating and the data that you have that support why this model should be replicated.

N/A

7. Vision/Mission statement. (2-3 sentences)

Desert Willow School VALUES children's unique learning styles, INSPIRES learning through a multisensory approach, CULTIVATES self-awareness and BUILDS a sense of belonging. Our vision is that every student become a creative, critical-thinking problem solver and an engaged, proficient reader prepared to be a contributing citizen of their community.

8. Student population and geographical setting of the school

- Define the targeted geographical area of the proposed school from which you expect to draw a significant number of your students.

The targeted geographical area is rural Grant County in southwestern New Mexico, including Silver City, Bayard, Santa Clara, Hurley, and the unincorporated communities of Mimbres and Gila-Cliff. Desert Willow School will be located in Silver City, the county seat.

- Describe the targeted student population including key demographic data (academic performance, home languages, ELL, and special education populations).

The targeted student population is comprised of students who need or desire alternative methodologies and academic structure in order to thrive. Some of the population are kindergarteners through 5th graders who need Orton-Gillingham based reading instruction delivered in a small group setting in order to read fluently. The National Reading Panel found that about 1 in 5 students has a language-based learning disability. Intensive remediation is needed to a greater extent than schools currently provide. Another segment of the student population are children who read at or beyond grade level who need a more hands-on curriculum and a differently structured school experience to ignite their natural passion for learning. Yet another part of the population are students whose parents are interested in the holistic philosophy and curriculum at Desert Willow who are currently home schooling their children because they do not want to place their children in our local public schools. The student population we are passionate about are students who have historically been referred to as "falling through the cracks" when their local public schools are not able to meet student educational needs.

The 2010 census showed the population of Grant County to be 29,514. Current demographics show this population to be 49.1% Hispanic, 47.4% White, 2.1% American Indian and 1.2 % Black or African American. 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. Per capita income in 2013 was \$22,755. Grant County's 20-year average unemployment rate is 7.9%. Job growth for the last ten years is 0.6% and the median household income is \$37,675. This means 50% of our families are living well below what Wider Opportunities for Women considers basic economic security for a family of four in New Mexico (Basic Economic Security Tables-BEST Study). All elementary school children in both districts are on free breakfast and lunch programs. Studies show that growing up in poverty is toxically stressful to children, deeply affecting the architecture of their brains and significantly limiting their capacity to be contributing members of their communities. Desert Willow School will be a place in our community where children are supported through a philosophy, curriculum and community intentionally created to give them the academic skills and experiences needed to thrive now and in the future.

According to a ground-breaking study conducted by researchers Hart and Risley at Rice University in 2003, the differences in language usage in the homes of children whose families receive welfare assistance versus families with high incomes results in the economically advantaged children being exposed to 30 million more words by the time they are 4 years of age. Follow-up studies show that the differences in language exposure have lasting effects on a child's academic performance and life experience. With an eye to this, Desert Willow's reading instruction will include a strong vocabulary study component, workshops for parents, and new experiences through our Friday experiences.

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. ELL students in the district number 45. In the Cobre school district, approximately 15% of elementary schools are receiving special education services and 16% ELL services. There are 9 public elementary schools in Grant County, and only four have met AYP. Reading scores in the Silver schools ranged from 45.28% to 76.50% passing at individual schools. Math scores ranged from 45.28% to 73.85% passing. The Cobre schools showed a range of 47.15% to 73.44% passing reading and 36.59% to 57.81% passing the math assessments at the various schools.

- Identify where these students are most likely being educated currently and why they are expected to choose the proposed charter school for their future educational needs.

Desert Willow School will primarily draw students from the nine public elementary schools and three small private schools in Grant County. A segment of students will come from families who are currently home schooling their children. As demonstrated by our survey results below, a charter school with our intended focus of high-quality reading intervention and a holistic hands-on curriculum has met with strong enthusiasm in these communities. Parents of elementary students seeking an alternative to public education in Grant County are expected to choose Desert Willow 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. The Learning Center for Dyslexia and Academic Success serves 10-15 students after school and has a significant waiting list for this necessary instruction. As seen in the reading scores posted above, there is considerable room for improvement in reading instruction in Grant County. 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. 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.

9. Provide evidence that the applicant team has assessed community need for a school of the nature that will be proposed in the application (e.g., objective surveys or other measures of local demand for the proposed educational program).

A survey inquiring into parental perceptions about elementary children's current experiences was administered in public locations such as community events, storefronts and public playgrounds. The survey showed 84% of survey takers' children are in public schools and 16% are being educated privately. Fifty-five percent of parents stated that their child would benefit from more individual and small group reading instruction. Twenty percent of parents realize their child is struggling to learn to read, which is consistent with the 1 in 5 students who will need the type of reading instruction that Desert Willow can provide. Twenty-nine percent of parents state their child's current school does not know how their child learns best. One part of the Desert Willow mission is to help students understand how they learn, so they can be self-advocates in their education. Thirty-eight percent of parents feel their child's current school does not bring balance between work and play into their child's school day. The curriculum we will implement is based upon children's developmental needs and understands that play is children's work. Its incorporation of movement, music and role playing captures students' interest and makes learning meaningful. Finally, the survey demonstrates that there is keen public interest in an elementary charter school with Desert Willow's focus. When asked if they were interested in having a charter elementary school that emphasizes multi-sensory learning strategies, 88% of parents said yes.

10. Identify significant innovative features that the school will implement in order to help it realize its vision / mission (e.g., non-traditional school year, longer school day, partner organizations, etc.).

Desert Willow School will use a number of innovative features to ensure all students meet their full potential.

1. Orton-Gillingham methodology and small, flexible reading groups: O-G has been the proven intervention for over 80 years for students with dyslexia and other language-based reading differences. Early, intensive intervention is optimal for remediating or preventing reading struggles. Desert Willow will provide an Orton Gillingham based reading program that will include phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency practice and spelling. All students will receive this instruction for 90 minutes 4 days a week in groups of 3-6. In this way, every child who show signs of dyslexia will have access to small group reading instruction using Orton-Gillingham methodologies in accordance with state law requiring high-quality intervention no matter the tier of instruction. Furthermore, small groups for all makes it possible to give accelerated reading instruction to students who gifted and talented.
2. Academic Language Therapist(s) trained in O-G methodologies will provide Tier 2 interventions, oversee staff training in reading, and monitor program delivery for fidelity.
3. Holistic curriculum: Many non-traditional learners, including children with dyslexia, are right-brain dominant. They excel at connecting ideas, thinking "out of the box" and seeing the big picture. Therefore,

students will be instructed using thematically integrated units that harness their natural abilities and appeal to their interests according to developmental stages. All teachers will be trained in Enki Education, a holistic curriculum that blends elements from Waldorf, Montessori, and the UN School of Education on a path from immersion to mastery. (See enki.education.org.) Enki Education is being successfully used in schools alongside Common Core in at least one other school in New Mexico and multiple other states.

4. Small class sizes: The cap for a classroom will be 15, 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, underperforming and disadvantaged students.

5. Flexible cross-grade grouping for projects according to student interest.

6. Extended school day with a 4 day academic schedule Monday through Thursday 8:30 to 4:00.

7. Friday enrichment activities designed in collaboration with community volunteers to find, explore and build new areas of strength that will in turn increase self-confidence and motivation. These may include visual arts, weaving and textiles, gardening, cooking, dance and archaeology, to name a few strengths of our community and its member volunteers. Teacher planning and collaboration and parent meetings will take place on Fridays.

8. Specific time each day to gather both as a school and in classrooms to connect, motivate and celebrate.

9. Optional 6th grade for those not ready for middle school in a class that would become a 5th/6th section beginning in Year 2. This idea anticipates the possibility that some students may enter Desert Willow School in a later grade and may need another year of small-group reading instruction to close the gap.

10. Emphasis on building relationships to empower parents and families: Part of our vision is to create a true partnership among child, parent and school so that all parties share an appreciation and an understanding of students' strengths, learning styles and accomplishments so families are empowered to effectively support their children. This could take the form of learning fairs, multiple conferences and enrichment day showcase events.

11. Describe how the school will be more effective than the schools currently serving the targeted student population, and/or plans to improve student achievement and exceed the academic performance of existing public schools in the targeted service area and any data you have to support this assumption.

The current situation is unacceptable. According to the statistics given above, hundreds of children in elementary schools in Grant County are not performing at their potential, and 15-20% need specialized instruction that they are not receiving. Desert Willow will give non-traditional learners what they need to thrive through a unique combination of reading intervention and holistic instruction. We will increase both reading proficiency and enjoyment by providing intensive, small group Orton-Gillingham based instruction which will benefit all students. One O-G program that we might use is the Wilson Reading System. Wilson is a well respected program. In a 1995 study, 200 students in grades 3rd through 12th who had been receiving special education services for several years, but were not improving, were enrolled in a study. When instructed for 1 school year with this program they made the following gains: a gain of 4.6 grade levels in Word Attack, a gain of 1.6 grade levels in Passage Comprehension, and a gain of 1.9 grade levels in Total Reading. Please note that these students received this instruction 2-3 times a week, whereas our students will receive it 4 times. We will improve students' understanding of mathematics and content areas through a hands-on curriculum that encourages investigation and critical-thinking, is sensitive to child developmental stages and in accordance with the CCSS. A secondary benefit of this multisensory style of instruction is that it will reinforce short-term memory, an area that is typically weak in struggling readers, according to Dr. Sally Shaywitz of the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity. We will motivate and inspire children through activities that give them the confidence and personal connections essential to higher-order thinking. By providing such a learning environment with smaller class sizes, Desert Willow will offer parents an educational option that is in contrast to the lack of progress their children have had in existing traditional public schools in Grant County.

Please Note: Should your charter be awarded, the founding governing body could undergo a background check to determine if it qualifies to be a board of public finance in the state of New Mexico.

Signature of founder(s)

Emily Aversa Emily Aversa

Date: 1/8/15

Signature of founder(s)

Fiona M. Bailey
Fiona M. Bailey
[PRINT NAME]

Date: Jan. 8; '15

Signature of founder(s)

Pamela Gibson
Pamela Gibson
[PRINT NAME]

Date: Jan. 8, 2015

Signature of founder(s)

William Knuttinen
William Knuttinen
[PRINT NAME]

Date: 1/8/15

Signature of founder(s)

Alicia Eowmus
Alicia Eowmus
[PRINT NAME]

Date: 1/8/15

Signature of founder(s)

George F. Lundy
GEORGE F. LUNDY
[PRINT NAME]

Date: 01-08-2015