

**New Mexico Public Education Department  
Options for Parents, Charter Schools Division  
NOTICE OF INTENT TO SUBMIT CHARTER APPLICATION, 2015**

1. General Information

- Name of Proposed School – Diné Learning Academy
- Grade levels to be offered and enrollment projections

Grade Levels to be Offered	Projected Total Enrollment
PreKdg – 2 <sup>nd</sup>	80 students

- Primary Point of Contact

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

Name	Role of Team	Qualifications, Education, Employment, Experience
Justin Jones	Attorney	J.D. in law, University of Kansas; 4 years in education as the Navajo Nation Executive Director for Navajo Education, Executive Director for various schools for 8 years; currently in private practice as attorney. New Mexico/Arizona and Navajo Nation barred.
Berlinda Begay	Linguist	MA.Ed from University of Arizona in Linguistics; MA.Ed. from Northern Arizona University in Educational Leadership; currently in 2 <sup>nd</sup> year of doctorate program from Fielding Graduate University; 20 years in education as a teacher; 3 years in curriculum work and assessment; Developed curriculum and assessment tools for schools using state and common core standards. Arizona and New Mexico Administrator and Teacher Certified.
Dr. Berdina Tsosie	Executive Director	Ed.D. from Arizona State University in Leadership and Policy Studies; MA.Ed. from Doane College in Curriculum and Instruction and from Northern Arizona University in Educational Leadership. 13 years as an elementary and JH teacher; 14 years as an Executive Director, Principal and CEO of various K-8 and K-12 schools. Developed curriculum and assessment tools for schools using state and common core standards; provides training in different educational topics such as curriculum, common core, assessments, school board, policies and procedures, etc. Arizona and New Mexico Administrator and Teacher Certified.
Sherleen Yellowhair	Curriculum Specialist	MA.Ed. from Doane College in Curriculum and Instruction; currently in 2 <sup>nd</sup> year in educational leadership program from Highlands University; 21 years in education as an elementary teacher; 6 years as a Reading Specialist for K-8 <sup>th</sup> grades; developed dual language curriculums for various schools, with specialty in Navajo and English dual language/cultural curriculum; Developed effective instructional programs for schools for academically at-risk students in grades K-12 <sup>th</sup> grades; developed assessment tools to be used for Intervention programs. Arizona and New Mexico Teacher Certified.

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

A holistic Diné Framework of Exploratory Learning for grades Pre-Kindergarten through Second Grades.

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.

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

6. If the charter proposal is replication, identify the school(s) you are replicating and the data that you have that support why this model should be replicated. None

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

**VISION:** The Diné Learning Academy is committed in molding and nurturing students to instill holistic resiliency while becoming self-reliant individuals in a diverse society.

**MISSION:** Our mission is to place students on the path to self-reliance through a culturally sound foundation and academic perseverance.

**Goals:**

- Be successful in a diverse society with a foundation of a bicultural and bilingual education.
- Increase parent involvement and recognition of student success.
- Increase physical well-being to make healthy lifestyle choices.

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 state of New Mexico has three main border town areas where there is a predominant number of Navajo and other Native American students that attend nearby public schools. The Diné Learning Academy will target these students, specifically in the border town areas in either Gallup, Farmington, Shiprock areas.

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

Because the Diné Learning Academy will specifically use Exploratory Learning as the main focus for students in Pre-Kindergarten through Second grades, the targeted student population eligible to enroll in the Diné Learning Academy are the following:

- a. Navajo and/or Native American students with tribal enrollment.
  - b. Students whose home language is English, but would like to learn Navajo or their native language
  - c. Students who are academically at-risk
- Identify where these students are most likely being educated currently and why they are expected to choose them proposed charter school for their future educational needs.

Currently, the targeted student population attend school in nearby public schools as well as Bureau of Indian Education schools.

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).

The team sent out surveys to all the parents of students in the Farmington Municipal Schools, Central Consolidated Schools and McKinley County Schools. Out of the 3000 surveys that were sent out to these parents, we received a total of 543 completed surveys. The surveys asked parents what they felt were important to be taught in the schools their children are attending. 75% of the parents who completed the surveys stated that they would like some type of a dual language school where their children would not only learn their native language, but to learn their cultural teachings as well as the disciplining of such teachings in all content areas. 87% of the parents also stated that because the schools where their children are attending school are so predominantly structured in "western ways" and because schools are not being taught according to the way that their children learn, it is becoming more difficult for their children to keep up academically. As a result, they would like for their children to attend a school where there is holistic education and the school teaches the "whole child", meaning that their academic, emotional, social, physical and spiritual developments are enhanced through such teachings. As a result of these surveys, our team is proposing such a school to meet these needs.

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.).

**Exploratory learning** is defined as an approach to teaching and learning that encourages learners to examine and investigate new material with the purpose of discovering relationships between existing background knowledge and unfamiliar content and concepts. All exploratory learning approaches are based on the following four principles:

- Learners can and should take control of their own learning;
- knowledge is rich and multidimensional;
- learners approach the learning task in very diverse ways; and
- it is possible for learning to feel natural and uncoaxed, that is, it does not have to be forced or contrived.

Through the holistic Diné framework of Exploratory learning, students will use their natural process of learning because this is the type of learning people do right from the very beginning of their life. (Babies are natural learners' years before they know anything about teachers, lessons, tests.)

Exploratory learning proposes several features in such a growth process. The very way a person goes about evaluation and reflection is rooted in their core assumptions. We have certain ways of going about things. Transformative learning, then, amplifies uncertainty. Uncertainty creates disequilibrium. As attractive as certainty necessarily is to a person, when one engages an exploratory learning process, it's the attitude of discovery, exploration, and playfulness that supports the learner's ability to 'play around' with the shedding of the usual constraints. More amazing is why this is so. Just deciding to take a different approach shakes and alters some of our assumptions. It's as if, having worn our favorite hat over and over again, one day we put on a different hat and our entire experience starts to change. This isn't strange, really.

Experiential processes in the mode of exploration and discovery are powerful. Collaborations amps the process. The interplay of persons exploring and discovering together has a tremendous rippling effect. Other people in the process turn over a rock and what they discover doesn't necessarily make sense for them, but what they discover happens to be of fantastic import for each individual child.

One of the marvelous discoveries people report after they've become more adept at this kind of learning is, 'Hey, I'm finding out about stuff I knew but I didn't know I knew it!' Such reports speak to a common quality of intentional engagements of processes which takes us out of our habitual, ordinary, certain approach: we learn about how we know what we know. Awareness about our own process of learning is itself an expansive, vital and creative capability.

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 ad any data you have to support this assumption.

We are proposing that the Diné Learning Academy begin the first year of implementation as a Pre-Kindergarten through Second Grade institution. The Academy is proposing to use Exploratory Learning through a holistic Diné framework of Principles. Because children's learning and development is holistic, advancing simultaneously in the areas of health, cognition, personal and social development, and well-being, it is crucial that their learning and development is advanced when they are provided with opportunities, support and engagement within their families and in partnership with early childhood professionals. It is also crucial that these opportunities are advanced through acknowledging each child's identity,

culture, and spirituality, and responding sensitively to their emotional states, and building each child's confidence, sense of well-being and safety and willingness to engage in learning.

The framework proposes to use a set of principles set the highest expectations for every child and identifies five learning outcomes for all children who will be attending the Diné Learning Academy.

- Children have a strong sense of identity
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children have a strong sense of well-being
- Children are confident and involved learners
- Children are effective communicators.

Children learn from birth and their learning and development at each stage of life forms the foundation for the next. During the period from birth to eight years, children experience more rapid brain development and acquire more skills and knowledge than in any other period in their lives. By the time they enter school, children have already developed key communication, learning and thinking skills; learned to build and maintain relationships; and formed a strong sense of their own identity. These skills and knowledge are the foundation for learning at school, and for lifelong learning. This framework also proposes to identify eight Practice Principles for learning and development which describes the most effective ways to facilitate learning and development.

#### **Practice Principles for Learning and Development:**

This principle is based on the understanding that when teachers establish a caring and respectful relationship with children and families they are able to work together to deliver effective learning and development experiences relevant to children in their local contexts. These experiences gradually expand children's knowledge and understanding of the world and promote their health, safety and well-being. They are interrelated and arranged into 3 categories:

##### **1. Collaborative:**

- a. family centered practice – children learn in the context of their families and families are the primary influence on children's learning and development. Teachers engage in family-centered practice by respecting the pivotal role of families in children's lives.
  - i. Use families' understanding of their children to support shared decision making about each child's learning and development
  - ii. Create a welcoming and culturally inclusive environment where all families are encouraged to participate and contribute to children's learning and development experiences
  - iii. Actively engage families and children in planning children's learning and development
- b. partnership with professionals- Teachers come from diverse professional backgrounds, therefore, they use multidisciplinary approaches to provide better support to families and draw on the skills and expertise of their peers.
  - i. Work collaboratively to share information and plan to ensure holistic approaches to children's learning and development
  - ii. Acknowledge each other's practices, skills and expertise and make referrals when appropriate
  - iii. Build on child's prior learning and experiences to build continuity for their learning and development from birth to 8 years of age.
- c. high expectations for every child – Every child has the ability to learn and develop. Having high expectations is especially important in achieving better outcomes for the most valuable children. Some children require additional support and different learning experiences and opportunities to help them to learn and develop.
  - i. Commit to high expectations for all children's learning and development
  - ii. Ensure that every child experiences success in their learning and development
  - iii. Work with families to support children's learning and development at home and in the community

##### **2. Effective:**

- a. Equity and diversity – Children's personal, family and cultural histories shape their learning and development.
  - i. Children's evolving capacities to learn from birth is supported
  - ii. Ensure that the interests, abilities and culture of every child and their families are understood, valued and respected
  - iii. Identify areas where focused support or intervention is required to improve each child's learning and development
  - iv. Recognize bi and multi lingualism as an asset and support these children to maintain their first language and learn their second language equally
  - v. Promote cultural awareness in all children, including greater understanding of native ways of knowing and being
  - vi. Support children to develop a sense of place, identity and a connection to the land
  - vii. Encourage children to active participants for sustainability, influencing the quality of life now, and for future generations
- b. Respectful relationships and responsive engagement – From birth, secure attachments formed through warm and respectful relationships with familiar adults are fundamental to children's learning and development. These relationships protect, regulate and buffer children. They provide a secure base that helps children to feel secure and confident to try new things and to learn.
  - i. Initiate warm, trusting and reciprocal relationships with children
  - ii. Provide safe and stimulating environment for children
  - iii. Develop learning programs that are responsive to each child and build on their culture, strengths, interests, and knowledge to take their learning and development forward
  - iv. Understand, communicate and interact across cultures by being aware of their own world view
  - v. Respect the views and feelings of each child
- c. Integrated teaching and learning approaches - A gradual shift in emphasis occurs over the first eight years of a child's life, along a continuum from play to more structured learning in formal settings. Early childhood professionals apply strategies to support sustained and shared interactions with children through play to more focused experiential learning. Learning is an active process that must involve children's engagement. Play is essential for its ability to stimulate and integrate a wide range of children's intellectual, physical, social

and creative abilities. Active engagement with, and attunement to children in their play extends and supports their learning. Shared, sustained conversations are also a powerful and important feature of active adult engagement.

- d. **Assessment for learning and development** - Assessment is designed to discover what children know and understand, based on what they make, write, draw, say and do. Early childhood professionals assess the progress of children's learning and development, what children are ready to learn and how they can be supported. All children benefit when assessment reflects a whole-child approach, providing a holistic view of learning and development. A range of assessment tools are used, processes and approaches to build on prior learning, avoid duplication and add value. Families play a vital role in their children's learning and development. The health and wellbeing of the family when planning for the child's learning and development is being made aware of.
    - i. include children's views of their own learning are authentic and responsive to how children demonstrate their learning and development
    - ii. draw on families' perspectives, knowledge, experiences and expectations and consider children in the context of their families and provide support to families
    - iii. when necessary
    - iv. value the culturally specific knowledge embedded within communities about
    - v. children's learning and development and ensure they are transparent and objective, and provide families with information about their children's learning and development, and about what they can do to further support their children
    - vi. gather and analyze information from a wide range of sources to help them assess
    - vii. and plan effectively and provide the best possible advice and guidance to children and their families
3. **Reflective:**
    - a. reflective practice - Children's learning and development is advanced when they experience interactions with highly effective early childhood professionals. Early childhood professionals become more effective through critical reflection and a strong culture of professional enquiry.

#### **Early Years Learning and Development Outcomes:**

The Holistic Diné framework of Exploratory Learning identifies five Learning Outcomes for all children from birth to 8 years of age:

- Children have a strong sense of identity (identity).
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world (community)
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing (wellbeing)
- Children are confident and involved learners (learning)
- Children are effective communicators (communication).

Children learn at different rates, in different ways and at different times. Their development is not always easy or straightforward. For some children and families, learning and development involves considerable struggle and requires much perseverance. Therefore, different kinds of support and engagement will be required. Early childhood professionals use the Practice Principles for Learning and Development to provide the support necessary for every child to learn and develop. The descriptions of the five Outcomes included here are neither exhaustive, nor exclusive. The five Outcomes provide a common language to support collaborative approaches between all early childhood professionals and families.

#### ***Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity:***

Relationships are the foundations for children's construction of identity. In order to form a strong sense of self, children need to build secure relationships first within the family and then with caring, attentive adults in other settings. For babies and young children, strong attachments are critical. Children's positive experiences of relationships and places support their understanding of themselves as secure, significant and respected individuals. A positive sense of identity strengthens children's interest and skills in being active participants in their communities. The maintenance of first or home languages has a significant and continuing role in the construction of identity. This is supported when early childhood professionals respect children's cultures and languages.

- a. Children feel safe, secure and supported.
- b. Children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency.
- c. Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities.
- d. Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect.

#### ***Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world***

Children's connectedness with and different ways of belonging to people, country and communities help them to learn ways of being, reflecting the values, traditions and practices of their families and communities. As children move into early childhood settings and then schools, they broaden their experiences, relationships and communities. Over time and with opportunity and support, the ways in which children connect and participate with others increase. Participating in their communities strengthens children's sense of identity and wellbeing.

- a. Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active civic participation.
- b. Children respond to diversity with respect.
- c. Children become aware of fairness.
- d. Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment.

#### ***Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of well-being***

During early childhood, the foundations for social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing are laid. Wellbeing includes good mental and physical health, feelings of happiness and satisfaction. Relationships that are warm and supportive assist babies to express feelings such as joy, sadness, frustration and fear, and support strong attachments. Children's resilience helps them to regulate and balance their emotions to cope with day-to-day stresses and challenges. The readiness to persevere and 'have a go' when faced with unfamiliar and challenging learning situations provides children with a sense of achievement. It also teaches children to be flexible and adapt to new environments and events. With support and guidance, children can learn to manage disappointments, frustration and loss.

- a. Children become strong in their social, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

- b. Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical well-being.

**Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners**

Children learn in the context of their families and community. Throughout the early years, children acquire knowledge and skills that form the foundations of their later achievement. They learn how to learn and they develop dispositions for learning and a sense of agency, where children are able to make decisions and choices, to influence events and to have an impact on their world. Babies explore the world through touch, sight, sound, taste, smell and movement. Their sensory and physical explorations increase brain development.

When babies and young children are relaxed and involved they express wonder and interest in their environments. When they are encouraged and supported to be curious and enthusiastic participants in learning, they begin to develop positive dispositions for lifelong learning.

Active involvement in learning builds children's understanding of the concepts, creative thinking and inquiry processes necessary for lifelong learning. They can challenge and extend their own thinking and that of others through interactions and negotiations. Children's active involvement changes what they know, can do and value, and transforms their learning.

Long periods of uninterrupted play support children to invent, investigate and discover, using a rich variety of open-ended materials and resources. When provided with many opportunities and a rich supply of natural and manufactured materials and tools, children create, build, sculpt, draw, paint and construct.

Children's increasing understanding of their environment forms the basis for their concept development. As they develop, they generate questions about situations and phenomena, and make predictions.

Children broaden their learning about the world through connecting with people, places, technologies and natural materials. They manipulate objects to investigate, assemble, invent and construct. They explore ideas using imagination, creativity and play, and they use their own and others' feedback to revise and build on an idea.

Children need many opportunities to generate and discuss ideas, make plans, brainstorm solutions to problems, reflect and give reasons for their choices. They investigate what products and systems can do, and how they work. Increasingly, they begin to use information and communication technologies to assist their thinking and to represent what they know and understand.

- a. Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity.
- b. Children develop range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesizing, researching and investigating.
- c. Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another.
- d. Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies, and natural and processed materials.

**Outcome 5: Children are effective Communicators**

Children communicate with others from birth. They begin by using gestures, visual and non-verbal cues, sounds, language and assisted communication in forming relationships. Over time, communication becomes more intentional.

Children's well-being, identity and sense of agency are dependent on their communication skills and are strongly linked to their capacity to express their feelings and thoughts, and to be understood. Children respond non-verbally and verbally to what they see, hear, touch, feel and taste. Through relationships with responsive adults, they take turns to explore sound and movement patterns, sing songs and are exposed to chants and rhymes.

Maintenance of their native language is important for children's identity, well-being, communication and learning. Children can successfully learn their native language as a second language through quality exposure to that language, explicit modelling and language teaching and appropriate time to acquire the new language. Children's rich spoken language, as well as their gestures and actions, underpin the development of basic literacy and numeracy concepts.

- a. Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes.
- b. Children engage with a range of texts and get meaning from these texts.
- c. Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media.
- d. Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work.
- e. Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking.

**Supporting Children's Transitions**

Transitions occur on a daily basis for families with young children. Change is a key feature throughout each of these transition periods. Children need to feel secure, confident and connected to people, places, events, routines and understandings when they move into new environments.

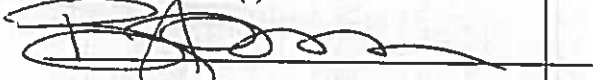
A combination of approaches and processes is required to support effective transition, which is achieved when:

- respectful, trusting and supportive relationships are maintained among all those working with children and their families
- information about the children is well understood, shared and valued
- children have the opportunity to have their say about what is important to them
- processes are adapted in response to the local communities
- children and families who require additional support are identified early, and support is planned and delivered through a collaborative approach.

Children learn everywhere, all the time. It is now well recognised internationally that when children experience learning opportunities that are responsive to their strengths, interests, cultures and abilities, and build on their previous experiences, their learning and development is enhanced.

*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)



**BERDINA TSOSIE, ED. D.**  
[PRINT NAME]

Date: 01-11-2015