



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

**2013 New Charter School Application Kit
Part B. Executive Summary**



Part B: Executive Summary

This section should be two to three pages long and address in a narrative form the following points:

- Your proposed school's name and a description of the targeted student population including key demographic data (academic performance, home languages, special populations) and the targeted geographical area of the proposed school.
- Where the targeted students are most likely being educated currently and why they are expected to choose the proposed charter school for their future educational needs.
- Evidence that there is a community need for a school of this nature in the location proposed. Note: NMSA 1978 § 22-8B-6(L)(5) provides, "[a] chartering authority may approve, approve with conditions or deny an application. A chartering authority may deny an application if...the application is otherwise contrary to the best interests of the charter school's projected students, the local community or the school district in whose geographic boundaries the charter school applies to operate." Evidence of community need is required. Specific data and evidence is required in Section V. Therefore, specific statistical information does not need to be provided here.
- The key innovative and unique programmatic features the school will implement to accomplish its mission (non-traditional school year, longer school day, partner organizations, etc.).
- How you project that the school will be more effective than the schools currently serving the targeted student population, or the founder(s)' plans to improve student achievement and exceed the academic performance of these existing public schools in the targeted service area. Provide a brief summary of any data you have to support this assumption.
- The founders of the proposed school, their background, and expertise.
- If different from the list provided above, the founding governing board.

To complete the following form, click on the text box and begin to type.

Executive Summary

Dream Dine' Charter School, Northern Navajo Agency, New Mexico

The Dream Dine' Planning Team is a group of passionate educators striving to develop an organic, innovative approach to education in the Shiprock area—an approach that reflects the values, goals and aspirations of our community. The proposed school will be located either in the small community of Gahii'ahi, NM (approx. 5 miles west of Shiprock) or within Shiprock, NM. Shiprock is the largest community on the Navajo Nation, located along the banks of the San Juan River in the Four Corners region. In 2010, the population of the town and surrounding area was approx. 8,200. More than 35% of the population is under 18.

Need: For many years there has been a disconnect between many traditional Navajo families in Shiprock and the local school district: Central Consolidated School District #22 (CCSD). Navajo cultural identity has been largely ignored by the schools, where attention has focused on standardized testing. Families have not been valued as equal partners in education. There is no unifying vision about the purpose or process of education for Native youth, and too often the schools have ignored the strengths that exist within the community itself. The result has been poor academic achievement, student apathy, frustrated educators, disenfranchised parents and a persistent belief that our schools and our students are failing.

The Current Context: Most area students attend one of the CCSD schools or the BIE elementary/middle/high school (Shiprock Associated Schools, Inc.—SASI). The total enrollment of CCSD hovers around 7,000 students. While we expect to draw students from throughout the community, with a per-grade enrollment of only 15-20 students, we do not expect to dramatically disrupt the established schools.

For years, Shiprock elementary schools have struggled to reach and maintain 40% proficiency in reading and math, with much lower rates for students labeled as English Language Learners (ELLs). Time devoted to the sciences, history, Dine' language and culture, physical education, music and the arts has decreased dramatically.

There are three district elementary schools currently located within Shiprock itself: Eva B. Stokely, Mesa, and Nizhoni. During the 2010/2011 school year, their total enrollment was approximately 525 students in the AYP-tested grades. 167 students were labeled as ELLs (with Navajo primarily identified as the home language); 69 had been identified as Students with Disabilities, and all but one were considered 'economically disadvantaged.' On the 2012 School Grade Report Cards, Eva B. Stokely received a "D," while both Mesa and Nizhoni received "F" ratings. All three schools have been designated as "Restructuring 2" (R-2) by the state. School

Accountability Reports for the past four years demonstrate fluctuating growth and decline in both Math and Reading proficiency at these 3 schools:

During the 2011/2012 school year, only 36% of Eva B. Stokely students were proficient in math, a decline from 43% in 2010/2011 and 46% the year before that. Only 30% of students scored proficient in Reading in 2011/2012--the lowest proficiency rating in the past four years.

In 2011/2012 only 26 % of Mesa Elementary students scored proficient in Reading, down from a four-year high of 42% in 2010/2011. The 26% of students who were proficient in Math last year was the lowest rate since the 2008/2009 school year.

At Nizhoni Elementary almost 39% of students were proficient in Math last year. This was an improvement from 2009/2010 (27.7%) and 2008-2009 (19.6%), but it was a decline from the 2010/2011 school year, when 43.9% of students were proficient. Reading proficiency at Nizhoni has fluctuated from 46.4% in 2008/2009, down to 33.9% in 2009/2010, followed by a small jump up to 36.8% in 2010/2011, then back down to 33.3% last year.

The Math and Reading proficiency levels among ELL students are dramatically lower at all 3 schools, as are proficiency rates for Students with Disabilities. While there have been areas to celebrate, the data indicates that Shiprock schools struggle to consistently get 40% of their students to score proficient in Reading or Math. The challenge of providing quality education for children across the Navajo Nation is not new. In spite of tireless efforts by hard working students and families, professional educators, and committed administrators, our schools have continued to fall short of the expectations set by the state and those of the community. We believe that educational institutions serving Shiprock need to deeply engage families and the community to align their goals, mission, vision and curriculum. The time has come for an alternative.

Data to support assumptions: Our team has spent a great deal of time researching culture-based school models, visiting and observing such schools and reviewing the mounting data, which has consistently shown that privileging cultural learning can lead to overall academic success for students. Members of our planning team have also been engaging Shiprock-area community members in consultation about the purpose and process of education. We have conducted numerous one-on-one interviews, small group conversations and talking circles, speaking with over 100 educators, local political leaders, elders, parents, and youth. Our intention has been to provide the community an opportunity to voice their aspirations for their own children.

Our many conversations with community members have revealed a deepening concern and waning hope with the current educational system. Repeatedly, we have heard calls for a more holistic, culturally based approach to education—one that addresses student wellness, incorporates local Indigenous knowledge, and prepares students for the rigorous academic

expectations of college and beyond. We seek to meet this challenge by growing Dream Dine': a school that reflects the goals of our students, their families, our community and the state. We plan to continue the community engagement process as we move forward; in fact our success will depend, in part, on our ability to increase parent involvement and investment.

Some of the themes from our community consultations include:

- An educational system where Dine' language and culture are central (ceremonies, stories, songs, and humor were specifically mentioned)*
- A school where student cultural and community identity is seen as a strength*
- An educational system based on the Navajo concept of K'e—clan, kinship, and relations*
- A school where learning experiences are hands-on and regularly take place outside of the classroom*
- Learning that focuses on the protection and use of local natural resources (water, farmland, coal, livestock, etc.)*
- A focus on local economic development and entrepreneurship*

We have compiled this community input directly into our Charter. It guides our work as we create an organic, innovative system of education that incorporates the dreams, values and aspirations of the community.

Philosophical Approach: One of our most fundamental principals in our approach is an educational system that privileges the development of Navajo language and cultural knowledge. The basic facts of Navajo language loss are well-documented. Dream Dine' seeks to reverse the process of language loss by making the development of Navajo language skills and cultural competence an equal partner with the development of Common Core academic content.

Professional Educators: We strive to develop a process of professional development for teachers and staff that is integral to the ongoing mission of the school. We know that to achieve our vision we must create a system in which teachers can continue to develop Navajo cultural knowledge and language skills to better serve the families of the children they teach.

Organizer backgrounds: Most of our volunteer planning team members are highly experienced educators with strong ties to the Shiprock area and to the Navajo culture.

Roselyn and Lula Begay are originally from the Shiprock area and were raised in a Navajo-speaking home. They have each been in education on the Navajo Nation for more than 30 years,

as teachers, Navajo language and culture coaches and administrators. As grandmothers, community members, and through their work they have developed tremendous insight into the values and aspirations of the community, and the challenges that face students across the Navajo Nation.

Rose Fasthorse Nofchissey is also a career educator, born and raised in the Shiprock area. She too has been a classroom teacher, Navajo language and culture coach, school administrator, and a coordinator for the bi-lingual program at Central Consolidated School District. Rose is also a mother and grandmother and has been intimately involved in language and culture revitalization efforts in the Shiprock area.

Michael Thompson was an English/Language Arts teacher and department chairman at Bloomfield High School (a community 40 miles east of Shiprock) for more than 15 years. He is currently teaching Native American Studies and English courses at San Juan College in Farmington, NM. He and his wife have close ties to the Shiprock area and have been active in the cultural and educational activities here. Michael has also worked on the development and implementation of the Common Core standards and is a long-time member of the Bisti Writing Project.

Celeste Yazzie is from Gallup, NM and currently works in Shiprock as an elementary school teacher. She is also involved in the community as an elementary basketball and track coach. She serves as one of the Advisors for the Northern Dine' Youth Committee here in Shiprock and is very engaged in youth and community activities.

Gavin Sosa was a middle school language arts teacher on the Navajo Nation for 6 years. For the past two years he has worked at the Shiprock branch of Dine' College as the Head Cross Country and Track Coach, and as a substitute teacher in the local middle school. He is also an Advisor for the Northern Dine' Youth Committee and is actively involved in numerous community events and activities.

Telletha Valenski is originally from the Shiprock area and currently lives in Kirtland, NM (adjacent to Shiprock). For the past 13 years she has been working with schools and students in and around the Shiprock area as an alternative health specialist.

Terri Deale is originally from the community of Gadii'ahi, NM. She attended the Shiprock public schools and currently lives in the community, works on her family's farm, and is a member of the Northern Dine' Youth Committee.