

EXPLORE ACADEMY

Application

Application Cover Sheet

School Name:	Explore Academy
School Address:	Unknown
School Location:	Albuquerque, NM
School District:	Albuquerque Public Schools
Grades to be Served:	9-12
Projected Enrollment Cap:	500

Primary Contact Person:	Justin Baiardo
Address:	2720 Avenida Corazon
City, State, Zip:	Rio Rancho, NM 87124
Telephone:	(505) 306 5283

Charter School Founder:	Justin Baiardo
-------------------------	----------------

Justin Baiardo, the Explore Academy founder, is a National Board Certified teacher with eight (8) years experience in the classroom. During his time in education, Mr. Baiardo has gained significant experience in the creation and implementation of diverse forms of education, including general education, special education and college preparatory curricula.

Mr. Baiardo is a strong proponent of differentiated instruction and has been responsible for extensive levels of curriculum development that have successfully incorporated diverse methods of instruction for students from all backgrounds, specifically those who are college-bound. This experience has lead him to propose the Explore Academy charter, whose vision of a differentiated curriculum separates itself from any educational philosophy seen within the state.

EDUCATION PLAN

A. SCHOOL SIZE

SCHOOL SIZE

State the projected enrollment, grade levels to be served and student/teacher ratio.

ACADEMIC YEAR	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	GRADE LEVELS	STUDENT/TEACHER RATIO
Year 1	250	9-10	15:1
Year 2	375	9-11	15:1
Year 3	500	9-12	17:1
Year 4	500	9-12	17:1
Year 5	500	9-12	17:1
At Capacity (Enroll. Cap)	500	9-12	17:1

B. MISSION

MISSION

State the mission of the proposed school.

Explore Academy will provide each student with a personalized educational experience through the power of student choice, allowing each student to create a unique educational pathway in preparation for a college future.

C. STATE AND FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

STATE AND FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

Applicant Agreement Statement

Annually, the school will meet standards if it receives an A or a B on its School Grade Report Card. The school can also meet standards if it achieves a “C” if it shows a proper plan is in place or if accredited by a reputable accrediting agency. It do not meet standards if it receives a “C” and does not have a proper plan in place nor is accredited by a reputable accrediting agency.

Please indicate, by checking “yes” below, the applicant’s agreement with the above-stated performance indicator for purposes of this application and possible subsequent negotiation if this application is approved. ☒ YES

D. GOAL(S) RELATED TO THE SCHOOL’S MISSION

GOALS

D.(1) Goals Related to the School’s Mission

Several goals are outlined in the section below, each of which is focused on a specific area related to the overall student academic achievement. Specific measured values are associated with each goal and are linked to a specific point in time in the first term of the Explore Academy charter. It should be noted that the goals outlined below represent the benchmark set for each year subsequent to the achievement of said goals, and thus it will be the focus of the school and its instructional staff to maintain if not improve upon the measured value for each goal year after year.

GOALS RELATED TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION

GOAL 1 – STUDENT SUCCESS RATE

Specific Objective: 97.5% seminar pass rate by the end of School Year 3 (calculates to one failed seminar per student per year; 39 out of every 40 passed in a given year).

GOALS RELATED TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION

GOAL 2 – EXIT EXAM PERFORMANCE

Specific Objective: the school average exit exam score will measure at proficiency by the end of School Year 3, translating to an average score of 3 out of 4 for every standard tested for every student.

GOALS RELATED TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION

GOAL 3 – PARCC PERFORMANCE

Specific Objective: in School Year 3, 11th grade students (H3) tested will show an increase in proficiency of at least 10% when compared to the surrounding district (Albuquerque Public Schools) in each measured category (math, writing, reading) of the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career) Assessment.

This will establish the school's achievement baseline. In School Years 4 and 5, there will be growth of at least 5% in the proficiency levels for each measured category on the PARCC based on proficiency data from the previous year.

GOALS RELATED TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION

GOAL 4 - ATTENDANCE

Specific Objective: at the conclusion of School Year 3, the annual attendance rate will exceed 95%, translating to each student missing only one day of school per course per 22-day academic term.

GOALS RELATED TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION

GOAL 5 – RECURRING ENROLLMENT

Specific Objective: the following percentages of students will be retained for the following years:

- From School Year 2 to School Year 3: 92% of the student population will be retained (230 out of 250 students)
- From School Year 3 to School Year 4: 94% of the student population will be retained (352 out of 375 students)
- From School Year 4 to School Year 5: 96% of the student population will be retained (480 out of 500 students)

GOALS RELATED TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION

GOAL 6 – COLLEGE READINESS

Specific Objective: of those Explore Academy graduates that enter a four-year university as college freshmen in the fall of 2018, having spent all four years at Explore Academy, 95% will score 18 or better on the ACT exam, thus avoiding the need for developmental (remedial) courses at the college level.

GOALS RELATED TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION

GOAL 7 – GRADUATION RATE

Specific Objective: beginning with its second 4-year graduating class (graduating in 2019), Explore Academy will graduate 95% of its freshmen cohort population.

GOALS RELATED TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION

GOAL 8 – ACHIEVEMENT GROWTH OF LOWEST SCORING 25%

Specific Objective: based on exit exam scores administered at the conclusion of each academic term, no single student will remain in the lowest 25th percentile for more than four (4) consecutive academic terms (one traditional semester)

Specific Objective: based on student satisfaction surveys, provided to students for each seminar at the conclusion of each academic term, student satisfaction levels will increase at a rate of 5% per year.

The following list shows the incremental increase:

- ~ School Year 1: student satisfaction levels will be greater than 75%
- ~ School Year 2: student satisfaction levels will be greater than 80%
- ~ School Year 3: student satisfaction levels will be greater than 85%
- ~ School Year 4: student satisfaction levels will be greater than 90%

“Student satisfaction” will be defined as the number of seminars in which students had a specific interest vs. those for which students had to simply “settle”. A 75% result implies that the student body, on average, found 75% of seminar offerings directly specific to their interests.

D.(2) Explain the rationale, plan, and specific methods of assessment for the goals listed above.

GOAL 1 – STUDENT SUCCESS RATE

Specific Objective (restated): 97.5% seminar pass rate by the end of School Year 3 (calculates to one failed seminar per student per year; 39 out of every 40 passed in a given year per student).

Explore Academy courses, called *seminars*, span only 22 days and thus allow for more focused attention on specific subjects, allowing for greater depth into fewer content areas. Exit exams, taken at the conclusion of each seminar, will be the single summative assessment and will function as the measure for determining a student's grade for the seminar.

Seminars are created to focus on specific academic requirements based on the State's academic standards. For each seminar, students will have, on average, three different versions from

which to choose in fulfilling that seminar requirement. Thus, students are provided with a choice in *how* they want to receive their education, one seminar at a time. This educational model, called the Explore Academy *differentiated curriculum*, allows for an increased level of inherent student interest and commitment, and will thus provide students a greater opportunity for overall success by empowering them with the choice in how they will receive their education. Details on the differentiated curriculum are outlined below.

RATIONALE FOR GOALS
GOAL 2 – EXIT EXAM PERFORMANCE

Specific Objective (restated): the school average exit exam score will measure at proficiency by the end of School Year 3, translating to an average score of 3 out of 4 for every standard tested for every student.

The seminar-based model employed by Explore Academy divides courses into shorter time spans, called *seminars*, each of which concludes with an exit exam that measures student comprehension within that seminar, and thus certifies a student as proficient for the standards contained within that seminar.

The exit exam grading system is explained in detail below, but to summarize, exit exams award each standard addressed within the seminar in question with a score depending on the level of comprehension demonstrated by the student. A passing score for a given standard will be 3 out of a possible 4, with a score value of “3” demonstrating proficiency in the standard in question and a score of “4” demonstrating mastery. A specific exit exam score is the average of all the standards assessed within a given exit exam, usually 8-12 standards in total.

The exit exam system allows Explore Academy to gain greater insight into student comprehension when compared to traditional and other non-traditional academic models. In the traditional semester-based system, a student is not held accountable for each standard; in fact, the scores students receive at the completion of a given course do not specifically reflect the academic standards required by the State. As a result, students can easily pass courses, and thus gain credit for the standards contained within those courses without appropriate accountability for the standards contained therein.

Explore Academy’s model provides specific accountability. Because each standard is specifically measured on the exit exam, specific student comprehension can be assessed. Furthermore,

students must demonstrate proficiency in *each* academic standard to pass an exit exam, and its corresponding seminar, thus certifying them as actually proficient in standards required by the State. Students will not gain credit for courses unless a level of proficiency is met in *all the standards* contained therein.

It is one of the school's goals that by the end of School Year 3, students should, on average, be meeting proficiency in each required academic standard. This average score also translates to more students achieving mastery (exit exam score: 4) than those who are nearing proficiency (exit exam score: 2).

RATIONALE FOR GOALS
GOAL 3 – PARCC ASSESSMENT

Specific Objective (restated): in School Year 3, 11th grade students (H3) tested will show an increase in proficiency of at least 10% when compared to the surrounding district (Albuquerque Public Schools) in each measured category (math, writing, reading) of the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career) Assessment.

This will establish the school's achievement baseline. In School Years 4 and 5, there will be growth of at least 5% in the proficiency levels for each measured category on the PARCC exam based on proficiency data from the previous year.

The New Mexico Public Education Department will fully implement the Partnership for Assessments of Readiness for College and Career Assessment beginning in the 2014-15 school year. This test, replacing the SBA/HSGA, will represent a significant component in evaluating school performance based on the new A-F grading model. The PARCC exam will further become a graduation requirement for all high school students in the state, ensuring that each student graduating from a New Mexico high school is proficient in the required competencies. School Year 3 will be the year that Explore Academy's first freshmen class will take the PARCC exam and will thus measure the effectiveness of the Explore Academy academic model.

Explore Academy students will receive several benefits from the school's educational model, all of which will provide heightened levels of success on the PARCC exam:

1. Education will be individualized. With the school's differentiated curriculum, providing students a choice in how they receive their education, there will exist a greater level of interest in classes, student educational commitment, and overall comprehension.
2. Assessments and accountability will be more specific. The 22-day, seminar-based approach adopted by Explore Academy will provide specific data on student comprehension, including the specific identification of what areas they failed to show proficiency. Students who do not show proficiency in all standards at the conclusion of a seminar must retake that seminar. Thus, as students pass through their coursework, Explore Academy can guarantee its students will be competent in those areas assessed on the PARCC exam. The semester-based grading model can provide no such guarantee.
3. PARCC review can be more specific. Explore Academy operates under an academic model which utilizes shorter, more specific courses (seminars). Because of this, it allows for an easy implementation of specific seminars as needed. One such seminar, or rather series of seminars, will be the PARCC prep seminars, required of every junior in the early spring of their junior year, just prior to taking the PARCC exam. These seminars, three in total (math, writing, reading) will focus on reviewing the scope of information from the specific content areas relevant to the PARCC exam.

Because student performance on the PARCC exam is the primary component behind both school evaluation (A-F system), it is vital that students are held accountable for each academic standard required by the State prior to their taking of the exam. The system described above and detailed below will hold students more accountable for higher levels of proficiency than what is currently offered in the traditional academic setting, thus resulting in better performance on the state-mandated assessment.

The baseline for the above-mentioned goal will be drawn from the surrounding district in the 2016-17 school year. As Explore Academy is a charter school, providing an option for students and parents, it is essential that the school improves student achievement when compared to the surrounding public school district.

Specific Objective (restated): at the conclusion of School Year 3, the annual attendance rate will exceed 95%, translating to each student missing only one day of school per course per 22-day academic term.

Given the rigorous and succinct timeframe in which the courses at the Explore Academy will operate, increased attention will be placed on tracking, reporting, and enforcing student attendance. Research suggests that attendance is one major factor in dictating student success, with those students who habitually miss class showing greater risk for failure and dropout (Bradley, 2009). As such, a system will be implemented to track, report, and address student attendance rates to not only quickly and effectively notify parents, but to deter student ditching and overall truancy in the future. As attendance is one of the metrics used in the A-F Grading System, it is vital that students be motivated in their attendance, and with the Explore Academy system utilizing shorter, more concentrated courses, students will be less likely to miss as many days due to the potential academic impact.

The student information system, the specific type or brand of which has yet to be officially adopted, will provide the school with a communication method for alerting parents via cell phone, text message, and/or email if a student is not in class at the moment attendance is taken (at the beginning of class). The Explore Academy attendance policy will be strict, with students recording more than two excused absence within the scope of a seminar will not be allowed to take the seminar's exit exam.

Specific Objective (restated): the following percentages of students will be retained for the following years:

- From School Year 2 to School Year 3: 92% of the student population will be retained (230 out of 250 students)
- From School Year 3 to School Year 4: 94% of the student population will be retained (352 out of 375 students)
- From School Year 4 to School Year 5: 96% of the student population will be retained (480 out of 500 students)

The Explore Academy's academic model strives to provide students with greater opportunity to pursue their interests, and as such, it is expected that students experience greater engagement and overall satisfaction from the classes in which enroll.

One area in which the school can measure its success in this area is through its retention of students from year to year with the assumption that students with higher levels of engagement in a curriculum are more academically satisfied and thus less likely to switch schools or drop out.

Research trends suggest that charter schools, on average, possess higher rates of student attrition in comparison to public or private schools (Finch, 2008), and thus it is one of the goals of Explore Academy to preserve and maintain its student body by promoting a choice-based, individualized form of education which, in turn, will promote greater student interest and involvement, and thus lower attrition rates. The overall effectiveness of the Explore Academy philosophy will be measured in the retention of students (grades 9-11) from year to year.

As the New Mexico A-F Grading System analyzes student growth from year to year, it is essential that all schools place significant emphasis in retaining students from year to year, and with the uniqueness of the Explore Academy system, it is even more vital to retain and develop students within the academic culture that the school will create.

RATIONALE FOR GOALS

GOAL 6 – COLLEGE READINESS

Specific Objective (restated): of those Explore Academy graduates that enter a four-year university as college freshmen in the fall of 2018, having spent all four years at Explore Academy, 95% will score 18 or better on the ACT exam, thus avoiding the need for developmental (remedial) courses at the college level.

The effectiveness of a college preparatory program can best be measured by the success of its graduates as they enter college. While there are many available metrics by which success at the college level can be measured, one specific in the preparation for students for college is in the enrollment of students in developmental courses. These courses are designed for those students who fall below expected proficiency in specific academic areas (usually math and English) as compared to their peers. Developmental courses exist at a pre-college level and are required prior to students taking credits that will ultimately count toward their degree. College developmental courses enroll

those students who failed to learn or retain information they received in high school, and thus represent an area of failure for those respective high schools.

For incoming freshman entering UNM for fall 2011, 30% tested into developmental math and 24% tested into developmental English courses (UNM Office of Institutional Research, 2012). These data are also representative of a broader, national trend showing similar percentages (30%) of students requiring such remedial courses upon entering college (Ashburn, 2010). With studies showing that students who take developmental/remedial courses show a much higher likelihood of dropping out, there is cause for great concern (NCES, 2004; Ashburn, 2010).

Explore Academy will attempt to mitigate the need for developmental college courses through the employing of three basic strategies in preparing students for college:

1. Better long-term comprehension based on a restructured educational model. Using shorter, more specific courses, Explore Academy students will be learning within a system designed for better long-term comprehension.
2. Increased college-level rigor while still in high school. As students proceed into their sophomore, junior, and senior years, they will receive increasing exposure to college-level academics.
3. Dual-enrollment courses required for graduation. Dual-enrollment courses are not specifically required by the New Mexico Public Education Department; instead, they exist as an option among several types of courses (online, Advanced Placement) from which students can choose to satisfy the State requirement. Explore Academy students will be required to enroll in at least one semester of dual credit coursework and will thus gain valuable experience in the taking of a college course.

Most universities, including the University of New Mexico, use the ACT as the basis for determining placement in math and English courses for college freshmen, and as such, it will be used as the standard by which Explore Academy will measure its effectiveness in college preparation.

The collection of research, supporting the three strategies mentioned above, as well as the overall design of the Explore Academy curriculum, is described in detail in the Research/Data section below, section E.(2).

Specific Objective: beginning with its second 4-year graduating class (graduating in 2019), Explore Academy will graduate 95% of its freshmen cohort population.

The Explore Academy curriculum will provide students with the option to choose specific classes tailored to their academic strengths and interests, and as such, it is expected that student interest, engagement, and commitment in school will be above average when compared to traditional high schools. This academic model will result fewer dropouts and transfers, retaining student populations from their inception at the ninth grade level through the time of graduation.

Because the State's A-F grading system utilize graduation rate as one of its measured components, it is an area of focus for any high school, and the Explore Academy system will demonstrate exceptional graduation rates.

RATIONALE FOR GOALS
GOAL 8 – ACHIEVEMENT GROWTH OF LOWEST SCORING 25%

Specific Objective: no single student will remain in the lowest 25th percentile for more than four (4) consecutive academic terms (one traditional semester)

While there will always be a lowest scoring 25th percentile in any measured academic population, it is critically important that such a population never remains composed of the same group of students. To this end, at the conclusion of each term, exit exam scores will be analyzed to compile those students in the lowest 25th percentile, comparing the list with students from the previous term's lowest 25th percentile highlighted for focus.

For the current term, those teachers who inherit students who measured in the lowest 25th percentile from the previous term will be specifically notified of the group of students enrolled in their seminars. This allows for more specific monitoring of students during the current seminar.

Because the Explore Academy schedule builds in daily remediation time (the academic flex period, explained below), in addition to their lunch period, students will have an additional hour each day to focus on their studies. While this period is structured but generally left to the student's discretion, those students who fall within the lowest 25th percentile for *two consecutive academic terms* will be required to attend tutoring during their academic flex time, the frequency of which will be

directly proportional to the number of seminars in which that student scored below proficiency from the previous seminar session. For example, if a student has scored below proficiency in math seminars across two consecutive academic terms, he or she will be assigned tutoring for math in the next academic term.

Data analysis (described below) will be performed by the school's academic director and the dean of students will manage tutoring sessions throughout the day. Tutoring sessions themselves will be provided by upperclassmen as part of their academic service requirement and will take place in either an empty classrooms or a common area.

This system builds in time for convenient and focused remediation for students who have been identified as struggling in their academic progress, and works to ensure that those areas in which said students struggle can be addressed and remedied in a timely manner.

RATIONALE FOR GOALS

GOAL 9 – STUDENT SATISFACTION

Specific Objective (restated): based on student satisfaction surveys, provided to students for each seminar at the conclusion of each academic term, student satisfaction levels will show the following results:

- ~ School year 1: student satisfaction levels will be greater than 75%
- ~ School year 2: student satisfaction levels will be greater than 80%
- ~ School year 3: student satisfaction levels will be greater than 85%
- ~ School year 4: student satisfaction levels will be greater than 90%

Core learning standards will be designed into 4.5-week seminars, ensuring a concentrated focus on the standards and enabling students to choose their path of greatest interest. Seminar-version offerings will be extensive, thus allowing students to choose the modality or focus that best fits their learning strengths and interests. Students will be surveyed at the completion of each academic year to obtain statistics on the satisfaction of the course offerings, both for core and elective seminars, and to offer suggestions for new versions of any given seminar. These data will be used to develop new offerings for future versions of seminars as well as to modify current offerings to adapt to student instructional needs.

At the conclusion of each year, adjustments will be made, as dictated by student feedback and seminar-version enrollment figures, to optimize the diversity of course offerings so that the core curriculum can be continually adapted to best suit the strengths and interests of the student body.

RATIONALE FOR GOALS
ADDRESSING THE A-F GRADING SYSTEM

Several of the goals described above apply directly to the Public Education Department's A-F Grading System. The goals in question are listed below as they apply to the A-F system:

- ~ Goal 3 – PARCC assessment: 30% of A-F score (+30% additional for growth of students from H2 to H3)
- ~ Goal 4 – Attendance: 3% of A-F score
- ~ Goal 6 – College Readiness: 15% of A-F score
- ~ Goal 7 – Graduation Rate: 17% of A-F score
- ~ Goal 8 – Achievement of Lowest Scoring 25%: 15% of A-F score
- ~ Goal 9 – Student Satisfaction Surveys: 5% of A-F score

E. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND CURRICULUM

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND CURRICULUM

E.(1) Describe your school's educational program and curriculum that supports your school's mission and guides instructional and curricular decisions.

The curricular approach and educational philosophy employed at Explore Academy has three areas of focus:

- OBJECTIVE 1: Greater student accountability using a standards-driven system in course design and academic reporting
- OBJECTIVE 2: Selectivity and student choice for *all classes* to promote both a customized and individualized form of education
- OBJECTIVE 3: College preparation through the implementation of a curriculum which increasingly resembles and simulates college academics in structure, rigor, and content.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND CURRICULUM

OBJECTIVE 1: FOCUSING ON THE STANDARDS

The primary objective specifically focuses on the standards in an attempt to develop all students in *each one* of the core academic areas for which they are responsible as high school graduates, especially as recent research presently suggests a concerning decrease in the comprehension of core concepts among American adolescents across the four primary areas of study (Hess, 2011). To combat this concerning trend, and given the recent trends in education which holds schools and teachers more accountable in the proficiency of their students, the curriculum at Explore Academy will promote strong, foundational core knowledge and increased student accountability for every core standard, and will thus ensure that every Explore Academy graduate will leave as a well-rounded educated citizen and that the school itself will be successful in the current educational climate.

The school's curriculum (explained in more detail below) will be divided into smaller increments of instruction, called *seminars*, each of which spans 22 days in length. These seminars will be the Explore Academy's courses, and will be formed around a group of common academic standards

(Shakespeare, photosynthesis, polynomials, etc.). As an example, instead of a student taking a traditional English course which would include a unit of study on Shakespeare, Explore Academy students will take a specific seminar devoted to Shakespeare, its own individual course, taught over the span of a 22-day period.

Using the NM Common Core standards in the areas of English and math, the NM State Standards in the areas of history and science, the entire curriculum for all four core subjects will be divided into these smaller, more focused areas of study. These will be the seminars. The preliminary calculation results in eighty (80) core seminars, analogous to and covering the same standards as the traditional sixteen core courses (four years of math, science, social studies, English) one would find at a traditional high school program.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND CURRICULUM

OBJECTIVE 1: FOCUSING ON THE STANDARDS – SPECIFIC ACCOUNTABILITY

This approach will attempt to focus instruction on an area which receives little to no focus in a traditional academic setting: specific student academic accountability. In a traditional academic setting, a student receives a final grade for a semester of work, covering dozens of standards; yet the final grade that student receives does not accurately reflect nor describe in what standards, within the scope of the class, he or she showed proficiency or lack thereof. That student who passes his or her class, even with a grade as low as 60%, a level far below what is considered proficient, is deemed by the school and the State to be proficient in *all* the standards contained therein. With the incorporation of the new A-F grading model and the new teacher evaluation system, schools and its staff members, specifically its teaching and administrative staff members, are being held accountable for student performance on the State-mandated exams. Yet those schools, and their staff members, exist within a system, under the traditional academic model (as mentioned above), which does not specifically hold students accountable for all the information they are required to know. Schools operating under the traditional educational model are thus held accountable for students who are themselves not held accountable for their academic proficiency.

It is the Explore Academy philosophy that grading periods must become more frequent, and thus more specific, to hold students accountable for *each* of the academic standards. This benefits all parties, for with greater specificity comes a more resolute image of student comprehension.

Examinations at the conclusion of each seminar (exit exams) will be directly tied to each of the standards within the seminar, with each exam question based directly on one of the academic standards around which the seminar is focused. Thus, at the conclusion of a given seminar, students, parents, teachers, and the State of New Mexico, will know, with precision, in which *specific* areas each student has shown proficiency. Further explanations on exit exams, exam scoring, grades, and grade reporting are provided below within the description of the curriculum.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND CURRICULUM

OBJECTIVE 2: DIFFERENTIATION

The second objective aims to focus on another shortcoming of the traditional public educational framework: educating the *individual*. In the current traditional educational format, a teacher is forced to employ differentiated instruction in attempt to provide some specific learning method for each student. Differentiated instruction is defined as the process of ensuring that what a student learns, how he or she learns it, and how the student demonstrates what he or she has learned is a match for that student's readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning. Thus, all students within a given class would be provided with forms of instruction and assessments that are specifically tailored to their individual learning needs. This theory of instruction is ideal, yet in practice, with student-teacher ratios at their highest levels, this approach can never be realistically implemented. The focus of Explore Academy is to move away from the unrealistic goals of differentiated instruction and instead change the focus to a systemic form of individualized instruction: *a differentiated curriculum*.

For each seminar, there will exist up to three versions from which students can choose, with each version possessing its own emphasis and providing its own forms of instruction. These will be called *seminar-versions*, and it will be through this differentiation that students develop the freedom for academic choice. Each version within a given course will be taught through a different theme, using different learning styles or modalities, and will thus allow students, for the first time, the freedom to choose how they will fulfill the academic standards set forth before them. It should be stated, to both clarify and to avoid misconception, that regardless of which version of a given seminar a student chooses, he or she will still be receiving instruction over the same standards as the alternate versions; the difference is *how they will be learning*.

This idea of a differentiated curriculum is at the core of the Explore Academy philosophy: that *all classes can be elective in nature*. Because all versions of a given course will share a common exit exam, on which the awarding of credit is based, Explore Academy will be able to verify that all students who are receiving credit show proficiency in all of the required standards, regardless of the curricular path they chose.

Through the model as described above, students will more effectively learn the core content for which they are responsible. More effective learning takes place when students can apply their knowledge (Gibbons, 2002), or show interest in what they are learning, and by providing them with the options for learning content how they desire, they will be more likely to invest themselves in their learning, apply it to their interests, and retain that knowledge over the long term, thus adequately preparing them for summative assessments such as the PARCC or college entrance exams such as the ACT, as well as reducing the need to re-learn that information again through developmental/remedial college courses.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND CURRICULUM
OBJECTIVE 3: COLLEGE READINESS

The third facet of the Explore Academy's academic philosophy involves preparing graduates for success in college. There are three components to the Explore Academy's college readiness approach.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND CURRICULUM
OBJECTIVE 3: COLLEGE READINESS – ACADEMIC SPECIALIZATION

As students fulfill their academic obligation within the core standards, they will enroll in an Explore Academy degree program through which they will focus their studies beginning in their sophomore or junior year. Much as a student declares a major at the university level, there will be extensive offerings for areas of emphasis for students to explore their interests (explained further below in the description of the curriculum).

This type of extension will provide three main positive functions. First, it will allow them to pursue their academic interests, leading to greater student commitment, all the while nurturing their academic motivation. Second, this approach allows our upper division elective courses to continually

re-emphasize and reinforce the core standards, allowing students to go deeper in their understanding within a given area. Third, and most importantly, it will serve to develop their college readiness and career selection by not only providing them with a taste of college-level academic rigor, but essential insight into the reality of the careers in they which they potentially see themselves.

Courses within the various degree programs will be designed specifically for this purpose: to prepare students for college. All the seminars within a given degree program will simulate college academics in both content and rigor, and will thus provide extensive experience without the need for Advanced Placement courses. With the glaring deficiencies present in our secondary public schools in providing adequate preparation for college-level rigor (explained above and below), this system will not only provide students with a glimpse of the academic expectations from college courses, but a true understanding of the demands within their prospective field of study.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND CURRICULUM

OBJECTIVE 3: COLLEGE READINESS – INCREASED STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

One major component directly linked to success after high school is the development of students as responsible and independent learners; this is a critical focus of Explore Academy. Current research (Otis, Grouzet, and Pelletier, 2005) suggests that our current educational system does little to promote student independence and individual student responsibility; in fact, studies (Otis, Grouzet, and Pelletier, 2005) have concluded that our traditional education system does quite the opposite in creating a culture of *dependent* learners who are incapable of thinking and acting for themselves. This form of passive education has created students who have become detached and disengaged, waiting for their education to come to them.

The primary causal factors, employed by our traditional educational system, in creating this culture of complacency, is the denial of student choice in education, which, on average, begins in the second grade and continues through high school (Deci, 2005). Yet as students enter post-secondary education (college), they find themselves confronted with levels of responsibility which are foreign and for which they are unprepared, and ultimately fail to adapt to the pressures therein.

By allowing students to choose their curricular path, and make choices in their own best interest, Explore Academy will develop its students as responsible, active learners who will create their own pathway personalized toward their own educational success. Moreover, as students enter their

degree programs, increased responsibilities will be placed on them to work at level of rigor which parallels that which will they find in college.

Research (described below) suggests that the traditional educational system's use of grades has distorted the learning process, shifting the goal of education away from learning toward the achievement of specific letter grades. To combat this trend, and to bring learning back to the forefront, Explore Academy will minimize its use of grades to focus more on learning.

The students in our public schools have become conditioned to perform the work required to achieve the grades with which they are comfortable rather than actually focusing on the learning of information. As a system, we use these grades to qualify and quantify the learning that takes place in classrooms across the country, when in reality, the disproportionate scaling of grades, rampant levels of academic dishonesty, superfluous extra credit, submission of late work, etc. have created students who know how to manipulate the system and can perform the work without learning the material.

For this reason, all work at Explore Academy, both in and out of the classroom, will be done for the purposes of assessing what students know, and will thus be formative in nature. Feedback on student work will be continually provided for the intrinsic benefit of providing students and parents with a measure of where the student stands in the *learning process*, and will thus not calculate into the student's final grade in the class. As a result, the incentive is shifted away from simply completing the work to actually learning what is expected.

At the completion of each seminar (every 22 days), students will take an exit exam which will encompass the information presented within the course (the standards around which the seminar is based). The score on this single exam (described in more detail below) will comprise the student's score within the course and will be the basis for the awarding of credit. Thus, the focus of daily work and homework will shift to help the student measure where he or she is in the *process of learning* rather than using such instruments as summative assessments in and of themselves.

E.(2) Provide research or data that substantiate how this educational program will help your school achieve high outcomes for students

Explore Academy's curricular program has been developed from and is supported by a significant body of research and data, and as such, the format of its instructional model is built for immediate success now and in the future educational climate.

INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH

In the words of the memory researcher Edward Bolles, "We remember what we understand; we understand only what we pay attention to; we pay attention to what we want." This quote closely reflects the Explore Academy philosophy, providing students a choice in how they receive their education.

Extensive research in this area points to three main factors that promote long-term student comprehension: inherent interest, experience, and application (Belding, 2004), all of which represent the three main focal areas of the Explore Academy curriculum. Furthermore, when long-term memory is the objective, as in the creation of an educated student, research specifically details implementation of the following six actions:

INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH – (1) MAKE SKILLS RELEVANT

Studies in the effectiveness of the learning process demonstrate that students read and understand information faster and more thoroughly when it is relevant to them, or rather, when they are interested in the topic at hand (Borowsky, 1993).

Explore Academy students select their own educational pathways, working toward the goal of preparing them for college and career. Explore Academy's environment will be built around providing students with a college experience prior to stepping on a college campus, and as such, it becomes a much more relevant endeavor.

This feature is compounded by the degree programs the school will offer, which will provide students with a glimpse into the field(s) of study they wish to pursue. Thus, their enrollment, and the skills they develop, will become relevant to their future.

INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH – (2) USE LOW-DENSITY TEACHING METHODS

Learning has been proven to be much more effective when the amount of content provided, or rather required of the learner, focuses on fewer objectives (Russell, 1984). Within the same research it is regarded that, for maximum effectiveness in teaching, only 50% of material should be new, and that the focus of learning should be to connect new material with one's previous knowledge.

This principle is further supported in research which illustrates the importance of educational simplicity, with fewer objectives emphasizing depth over breadth, in the quality of learning and the establishment of retention (Shadmehr and Holcomb, 1997).

Explore Academy seminars will be driven by a specific focus in a given content area, however, in accordance to the research mentioned above, each seminar will not be primarily devoted to teaching new material but *establishing connections* between material unique to a given seminar and the material presented within other seminars, thereby creating a more holistic approach in education and thus creating cohesiveness between individual seminars. To this end, Explore Academy seminars will constantly review, reiterate, and reinforce material from other seminars to establish a system of comprehensive education. It will be the goal of each Explore Academy seminar to draw from and connect material from at least five (5) standards outside of those specifically covered within that seminar.

As an example, consider a molecular genetics seminar studying family ancestry analysis using mitochondrial DNA. Such a seminar could easily incorporate historical content by analyzing ancient human patterns of global migration which have been established using mitochondrial DNA, including the examination of when and why humans moved across the globe as they did. In addition, mitochondrial DNA technology has enabled scientists to solve the mystery of Anastasia and the Romanov family, the analysis of which would incorporate content from 20th century European history. Both connections allow for the incorporation of material outside the content area.

The focus on low density instruction operates outside the classroom as well. The Explore Academy schedule is built with the focus that less is more when it comes to student learning, and as

such, students will attend fewer classes per day (five) in comparison to the traditional high school student who must budget his or her time and effort across more courses (seven or eight classes enrolled at a given time). Research suggests that not only do fewer courses lead to greater depth in student learning (Deuel, 1999), but significant improvement in overall student grades, attendance rate, dropout rate (Deuel, 1999) and ACT scores (Lewis, 2005).

SUPPORTING DATA

INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH – (3) USE SHORT CLASSES AND SHORT MODULES

According to research (Belding, 2004), segments of learning should be as concise and specific as possible. The same research further demonstrates that too much information can actually be counterproductive and be detrimental in the learning process, causing a state of information overload where previous information, which has not yet had the chance to solidify, is constantly being replaced by new information (Belding, 2004). The stream of information, to which students are constantly bombarded, does little to establish the long-term retention of information.

Because Explore Academy courses (seminars) will be shorter in length and more specific in their focus, they can better promote the establishment of long-term knowledge. The focus and specificity will additionally serve the school and its teachers by providing a more accurate measurement of each student's proficiency level. This will provide both the school and its teachers with an improved platform on which they can meet the increased levels of accountability as required by the State.

SUPPORTING DATA

INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH – (4) REPEAT THE MESSAGE OFTEN

Reiteration and reinforcement of information have been shown to be critical factors in the establishment of long-term memory (Karpicke and Roediger, 2007). Further research characterizes repetition as a key driving force in moving information from short-term to long-term memory (Belding, 2004) and countering what is known as the *fading effect*, which describes the natural loss of information over time (Spitzer, 1939). Material that is retained over more extensive periods of time, termed *residual memory*, is created directly from repeated exposure (Atkinson, 1971) and is the basis for long-term retention.

The strategy of information repetition is seen between and within Explore Academy seminars. As previously mentioned, Explore Academy seminars will continuously incorporate information from other content areas to continually reinforce other educational topics and will thus create greater

cohesiveness between individual seminars. This reinforcement of ideas extends from the relevant research (mentioned above) and will work to tie the individual seminars into one solid framework.

Connections between seminars, and the concepts therein, creates and develops what is known as neuroplasticity, where the brain physically reorganizes neural pathways as new connections are made between existing areas where information is stored. As one begins to understand a concept from a more global perspective, including its relatedness to other concepts and real-world application, the way that information is stored in brain changes and the longevity of the stored information increases significantly.

By providing a spiraling curriculum, with each seminar constantly drawing on information from other disciplines to apply to new information, information is reinforced and greater levels of long-term memory can be established.

SUPPORTING DATA

INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH – (5) PROVIDE THE LEARNER WITH MOTIVATION

Learning becomes most effective when the learner has inherent motivation to learn (Glasser, 1998). This intuitive notion is the basis for what is termed *choice theory*, developed by Dr. William Glasser and his culmination of over fifty years of research and practice in the areas of psychology and counseling. The guiding principle in choice theory asserts that behavior is central to our existence and is driven from within, and that we as humans are most successful when we are internally motivated (Glasser, 1998). As it relates to the classroom, Glasser’s theory describes a choice-based education as one in which students are:

- Provided a warm, supportive classroom environment where they are respected
- Asked to perform only useful work (no compulsory homework)
- Pushed to do the best they can
- Continuously asked to evaluate their own work and improve it (feedback)

In addition, a teacher in a choice-based classroom steps into a mentoring role rather than one supervisory in nature, helping to support and drive the learning process rather than simply disseminate information. Such teachers are interested in quality, and must continuously challenge students to nurture that level of quality into existence. Grades thus become less of a focus given that they “tend to turn the process off because the students work for your grade instead of their own judgment of

quality.” (Glasser, 1998). Glasser further argues that, through choice theory, instruction is most effective when it is:

- Directly related to a life skill (relevancy)
- Correlated with what students have the desire to learn
- Seen as especially useful
- Required for college

The theory asserts that there is not one road to quality, but rather several, and when given a choice, the individual will find more success on the road of his or her choosing. This strategy in providing each student with his or her own customized educational pathway is the foundational principle of Explore Academy.

Research has further shown that choice theory in education, as seen in what are termed Glasser Quality Schools, results in overall improvements in academic achievement, lower disciplinary problems, and increased student enjoyment in school (Wubbolding, 2007). These goals directly parallel the vision of Explore Academy.

While Explore Academy is not a Glasser Quality School (nor will it strive to be), it is driven by the same fundamental choice theory research. Explore Academy students are provided with control over their own education, including the freedom to create, for themselves, a custom-fitted curriculum, based on their own personal choices, and tailored to their strengths and interests. This level of choice is the basis for the Explore Academy’s *differentiated curriculum*, where students are provided with a set of options for each seminar in which they enroll.

SUPPORTING DATA

INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH – (6) PROVIDE THE LEARNER WITH FEEDBACK

Research suggests appropriate feedback as a crucial element in the learning process, especially when it possesses the following characteristics: goal-oriented, ongoing, timely, and specific (Bransford, 2000).

Explore Academy focuses on learning as a *process* and not an end in of itself, and thus feedback and guidance become an integral component. With the exception of the single summative assessment at the conclusion of a given seminar (the exit exam), all work will be guided toward the goal of attaining proficiency/mastery through guided, experience-based learning.

Assessments provided within the scope of a given seminar, including homework, in-class work, projects, and quizzes will be formative in nature and thus meant as a mechanism to provide feedback to students and parents. Explore Academy utilizes these assessments as measures *within* the learning process and not as measures in the attainment of learning. It thus becomes in the best interest of the student to not only complete the work, but to understand the work as they complete it.

Because Explore Academy is based on experiential learning, with a significant portion embedded in problem-based scenarios (see below), the teacher takes on a mentoring role where he or she can more effectively assess student learning and provide timely and specific feedback throughout the duration of the learning experience.

SUPPORTING DATA
PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING

“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.”

-Confucius

Problem-Based Learning (PBL), also referred to as *guided discovery*, *model-centered*, *situated*, *case-based*, and *exploratory* learning (Merrill, 2007), deals less with the acquisition of basic skills and more with the application of those skills to real life situations. This method of *experiential learning*, placing students at the center of an *educational experience*, is a pillar of the Explore Academy philosophy.

PBL is open ended; broad questions are posed to students (or developed by the students themselves), and the goal of the learning becomes the development of answers and solutions through information gathering, organization and aggregation of the information, and the synthesis of new information.

Diana Jones, a problem-based learning expert, puts it this way: “The ability to solve problems is more than just accumulating knowledge and rules; it is the development of flexible, cognitive strategies that help analyze unanticipated, ill-structured situations to produce meaningful solutions. (Jones, 1996)”

Sternberg (2008) contends that we need to teach not only for facts, but to go beyond those facts and teach students how to use what they learn. This represents the antithesis of “teaching to the

test", a strategy which is quickly becoming the accepted norm across the nation's educational landscape.

Many researchers and theorists distinguish between the different student-centered methods described above and other methods like project-based or inquiry-based learning; regardless of the label or the specific method, the focus will be on students taking responsibility for their own education. In other words, Explore Academy is focused on the creation of active learners who can, with constant guidance and support, learn for themselves.

Research has demonstrated several advantages of PBL over traditional pedagogy (Jones, 1996; Kerr, 2003):

- An emphasis on meaning, not just memorization of facts
- Increased self direction and self motivation as students take on more responsibility for their education
- Higher comprehension and skill development, with a subsequent improvement in the transferability of those skills to a work environment
- Improved interpersonal skills because of the collaborative nature of PBL
- Increased technical skills because of the research and presentation skills required
- Enhanced teacher/student relationships as teachers become guides and mentors instead of lecturers and directors

The proof of the efficacy of PBL is in the level and complexity of the skills it uses and develops. Traditional didactic (drill and regurgitate) methods, especially when assessed by standardized tests, focus on the lowest of the cognitive skills described by Bloom's taxonomy, namely knowledge and comprehension. The problem-solving nature of PBL requires the student to use higher-level skills in application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, leading to greater mastery. Students not only learn more, but they learn it in a way that lends to long-term retention.

Explore Academy exit exams, on which the granting of academic credit is based, will utilize Bloom's Taxonomy as the basis for determining proficiency (levels 1-3) and mastery (levels 4-6), and as such, problem-based learning is the selected method for developing mastery for its student body (exit exam scoring is described in detail below).

Many students require additional assistance at various times in their academic career, yet unless a tutoring program is implemented effectively, most students, even in need of assistance, will not voluntarily attend. Tutoring programs are commonly implemented as after-school programs, which fail largely due to scheduling conflicts, transportation issues, extracurricular activities/obligations, etc. As a charter school located in the Albuquerque area, with students coming in from various locations around town, this problem would be amplified.

Research has demonstrated that tutoring programs show effectiveness when they are built into the school day (Caskey, 2011), and thus provide students with the greatest chance of attendance and true remediation. The Explore Academy academic model, including its built-in periods of academic flexibility (the academic flex period, explained below), is driven by this research, and will provide students with two open periods within the scope of its seven-period schedule for students to receive tutoring as needed.

For those students who require additional assistance as determined by their teacher, for those who fall into the lowest 25% achievement subgroup for two consecutive academic terms, or for those with special needs (504, ELL/ESL, IEP) who, in the opinion of their case manager, require additional academic assistance, tutoring will be mandatory during a determined portion of a given student's academic flex period (two periods per week, four periods per week, etc.) as dictated by either the teacher, academic director, counselor, or student's case manager.

Of particular concern regarding student success rates is the troubling rates of truancy seen within the Albuquerque school district. According to the Albuquerque Public Schools RDA Department (APS RDA, 2011), eight of the thirteen major high schools in the area (62%) have rates of habitually truant students (students missing ten or more school days, unexcused) greater than 20%, with five of the thirteen schools having rates higher than 30%. UNM's Provost Analytics Team suggests, based on the aforementioned research, that "a key factor in improving academic preparation is ensuring that

student are present, engaged, and ready to learn in high school, and this truancy data highlights a key challenge facing New Mexico.”

Combating truancy is a significant issue, one whose specific causation encompasses many dimensions. However, research suggests specific common themes in why students become truant, and what can be done to remedy those trends:

- *Academic support:* research suggests that of particular concern to 70% of truant students surveyed is the rate at which a school provides academic support, specifically support that is convenient and accessible to all (Bridgeland, 2006).

Explore Academy’s tutoring program will be built into each day and will thus provide a convenient means for assistance to students who may be unable to stay after school.

- *Interesting classes:* Continuing with the aforementioned research, nearly half (47%) of students surveyed stated that boring classes were a major factor in their decision to drop out (Bridgeland, 2006).

Further research suggests that student are selective about cutting classes, and that such a selection process is highly dependent on classroom practices (Guare, 2003). Classes with high rates of cutting were those that pushed individual “seat work” including isolated homework and independent silent reading (Guare, 2003). On the other hand, classes that were characterized as more interactive were better attended (Guare, 2003).

Explore Academy seminars will be far from traditional. The academic model it will employ is based on experiential learning, with education changing its focus from providing information to the passive learner to providing an experience to promote the development of the active learner. Such strategies would incorporate more problem-based learning, cooperative and project-based learning, simulations, etc., all of which are meant to involve students as participants in their own education rather than simply passive observers.

Elective offerings have repeatedly been shown to keep kids in school (Jehlen, 2006), and by providing them with extensive pathways to pursue their general interests, as well as their career interests, students will demonstrate greater all-around academic success.

At Explore Academy, *every course is an elective*, and as students will have a choice in the versions of every seminar in which they enroll, they will demonstrate a higher rate of overall academic commitment. As this pertains to choice theory, described above, in

environments when students have a choice in their education, their level of commitment to their work is greater (Glasser, 1998) and thus results in lower rates of truancy.

- *Relevant classes:* continuing with the aforementioned research, a large majority of students surveyed (81%) said if they if they were provided an opportunity for real-world learning, or that which is relevant to their future, they would have stayed in school (Bridgeland, 2006). The Explore Academy educational model is built to prepare students for college, and thus their coursework becomes relevant to their future. While most college preparatory schools work to ease the transition into college, no local school offers the degree of specialized course pathways (the Explore Academy degree programs/majors) that are built into the Explore Academy curriculum.

According to the National Center for School Engagement, one program model particularly effective against truancy is known as the Career Academy model (NCSE, 2007). The Career Academy model represents a program in which a small number of students are working with the same teacher or group of teachers for between three and four years. This aspect of adult support, research suggests, is critical for reducing truancy (Railsback, 2004) as it builds bonds between students and their peers and their mentor teacher. Overall, this model provides students with teachers who are familiar, caring, have high expectations, and who challenge students, leading to significantly lower truancy rates (Bridgeland, 2006; Guare, 2003; Railsback, 2004).

Explore Academy will operate from this Career Academy model by providing students with a three-year track, the individual degree programs, in which they will become teamed with the same student and teacher cohort with whom they will progress in their studies toward a specific academic specialization (a major), completed prior to graduation.

SUPPORTING DATA
DROP-OUT PREVENTION

Of particular concern for schools and parents is the high dropout rate in the state of New Mexico, currently residing between 30-40% (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). Studies suggest that dropout rate is influenced by many factors (described above), both social and economic, yet when it comes to academic causes, one primary factor directly correlated to student drop-out rate is failure rate (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). When a student fails a particular class, social and academic pressures begin to build as the student is now behind in total credits needed to graduate.

One particular benefit of the Explore Academy's seminar-based system is its proactive mitigation of long-term student failure. Not only do students choose their own unique educational pathway, leading to a greater likelihood of academic success, but if, for any reason, a student does fail a seminar, the total social and academic impact is minimized.

In a common academic setting, with semester-based classes, students who fail a course are put at a great disadvantage, both academically and socially, with no easy way to make-up for lost credit. Yet through the Explore Academy model, because students are assessed within shorter spans of time, failing a particular seminar does not create a significant setback for any student. And with different versions of a particular seminar offered more than once per year, a student is provided with many opportunities to regain credits and thus will not lose significant time or ground in his or her academic standing.

Furthermore, credit recovery within the Explore Academy system allows for more convenience than would be seen with options such as night school, online courses, or summer school, all of which can be found as programs existing within a traditional academic model and all of which usually entail burdening out-of-pocket costs from parents.

Explore Academy will operate on a seven-period schedule with students taking five classes and reserving the remaining two periods as *academic flex periods*. With one of these partially devoted to student lunch, a student has the option of utilizing his or her other second academic flex period to enroll in a class for credit recovery. This would entail a student taking six classes instead of five, but would benefit both the student and parents in providing a convenient mechanism for making up lost credits.

SUPPORTING DATA
COLLEGE PREPARATION

Upon entering college as freshmen, student success rate becomes a primary focus of concern within the local Albuquerque-area student population, the majority of which attend the University of New Mexico. According University of New Mexico Office of Institutional Research, student dropout rates are highest after freshmen year, with only 74% of freshmen returning for their sophomore year (UNM Office of Institutional Research, 2011). This statistic illustrates a problem in retention for incoming freshmen, and a lack of overall academic preparedness for these local young men and women as they take this next step in their academic careers. The primary factors for this attrition rate are described within the following subsections.

The causal factor for dropout rates in college freshmen can be attributed to inadequate preparation of exiting high school graduates. According to ACT, who has measured academic achievement since 1959, New Mexico falls below the standards for college preparation. Based on 2012 graduate data, the following percentages of New Mexico graduates meet the ACT benchmarks for college preparation in the following specific academic areas (ACT, 2012):

- ~ English benchmarks: met by 57% of graduates (down from 61% in 2008)
- ~ Mathematics: 33% (remained level since 2008)
- ~ Reading: 45% (down from 48% in 2008)
- ~ Science: 22% (remained level since 2008)

Given New Mexico's significant ethnic diversity, the following data show how the previous percentages decrease by an average of 6% when focusing on the Hispanic/Latino demographic (ACT, 2012):

- ~ English: 49% of graduates
- ~ Mathematics: 31%
- ~ Reading: 36%
- ~ Science: 16%

While Explore Academy does not specifically target Hispanic students, they represent the statistical majority of students (53%) of high school age in the Albuquerque area, and will thus significantly represent Explore Academy's future student population.

Similar below-average trends are seen in New Mexico graduate preparation for those individuals planning to enter areas considered *high-growth careers*, including education, business management, community service, marketing/sales, and computer/information systems (ACT, 2012).

ACT has further pinpointed specific benchmarks that are identified as crucial in preparing students for college, based on actual college student data in typical entry-level credit-bearing courses. ACT then correlated the identified benchmarks with the relative importance placed by New Mexico

educators. Only 41% of high school teachers deemed important those benchmarks which ACT identified as *extremely important* for college preparation (ACT, 2012). Furthermore, only 26% of high school teachers deemed important those benchmarks which ACT identified as *very important* for college preparation (ACT, 2012). Based on this data, it becomes clear that New Mexico teachers do not put an emphasis on the proper benchmarks for college preparation.

As a direct remedy for this, Explore Academy's college preparatory focus will incorporate ACT's recommended benchmarks throughout its curriculum, both within its core and degree program seminars.

An additional concern is raised considering the rates at which students are enrolled in developmental courses upon entering college. Developmental courses are defined as those in which students are placed based on admission testing (SAT/ACT), placement testing (math or English placement exams), and/or assessment of their academic records. Developmental courses do not earn credit hours (but will contribute to a student's full-time status) and thus represent extra courses that entering freshmen must take to pull equal to the academic standing of their peers.

For incoming freshman entering UNM for fall 2010, 30% tested into developmental math and 24% tested into developmental English courses (UNM Office of Institutional Research, 2011). For those graduates specifically from the Albuquerque area, the rates are significantly higher: 48% of students tested into at least one developmental course upon college entry (New Mexico Office of Education Accountability, 2010).

These data are also representative of a broader, national trend showing similar percentages (30%) of students requiring developmental courses upon entering college (Ashburn, 2010). Studies further show that students forced to take developmental courses show a much higher likelihood of dropping out (NCES, 2004; Ashburn, 2010), and thus represent a significant area of concern. Clearly, a better approach to teaching the standards and preparing students for college is needed.

One specific remedy for developmental courses, as research demonstrates, is the implementation of dual-enrollment courses in high school (UNM Division of Enrollment Management, 2011), which decreases a student's likelihood of requiring developmental courses. This is important, as the same research suggests, because students who do not take developmental courses graduate from college at a significantly higher rate than their remedial-course taking peers (UNM Office of Institutional Research, 2011).

The New Mexico Public Education Department does not currently mandate dual enrollment courses as a requirement for graduation, although it is an option among several (Advanced Placement, online courses) that can be used to fulfill the State's requirement. With the above mentioned research, and in the best interest of preparing our graduates for success at the college level, Explore Academy will mandate at least one semester dual-enrollment course as a requirement for graduation (see Graduation Requirements below).

SUPPORTING DATA

COLLEGE PREPARATION – FINANCIAL OBSTACLES

Stemming from a lack of academic preparedness, financial hardship has become a primary reason for student failure at the college level (Ashburn, 2010). While independent factors (social factors) may impact students, financial difficulties often have direct academic causality, such as extending the time for degree completion and/or loss of scholarship or other financial aid.

In the case of the University of New Mexico, students who take longer than four years to complete their undergraduate degree will lose the Lottery Scholarship after their eighth semester (UNM Office of Financial Aid, 2011); yet for the majority of students at UNM, five or six-year degrees are becoming commonplace. According to UNM research, only 15% of students complete their degrees in the traditional four-year timeframe, while a staggering 44.5% do so within a six-year timeframe (UNM Office of Institutional Research, 2011). This rate parallels six-year college graduation completion times of students who specifically graduate from Albuquerque area high schools: 43% (UNM Office of Institutional Research, 2011). At present, UNM's average degree completion time currently sits at 6.2 years

This increased graduation time translates to increased tuition expenses ranging between, on average, \$32,000 and \$67,000, and with the aforementioned eight-semester limit for funding from the New Mexico Lottery Scholarship, students and parents are increasingly forced to cover additional expenses.

As a consequence, students in New Mexico, upon losing the Lottery Scholarship, are much more likely to abandon their schoolwork. Research shows that between 25-35% of freshmen will, on average, lose the Lottery Scholarship within their first semester (Legislative Finance Committee, 2010), with only 15% of those who lose their Lottery Scholarship graduating within a six-year timeframe (LFC, 2010). Furthermore, a staggering 10% of students who receive the Lottery Scholarship will keep it for the full four-year term (LFC, 2010).

The loss of scholarship in this case is directly tied to academic performance, specifically grade point average. The average freshmen GPA is currently measured at 2.69 (UNM Office of Institutional Research, 2011), dangerously close to the eligibility mark for maintaining the Lottery Scholarship (2.5). Given this data, a correlation between freshmen preparedness, loss of scholarship, and college drop-out becomes evident.

Given that Explore Academy's program is based on achieving proficiency and/or mastery, its students will not earn credit for any course (seminar) until such time that they demonstrate proficiency or mastery. Because the achievement of proficiency and mastery confers higher academic grades, all students who graduate from Explore Academy will be eligible for the New Mexico Lottery Scholarship, guaranteeing them financial security in their college future should they choose to remain in-state.

SUPPORTING DATA
COLLEGE PREPARATION – STUDENT FUTURES

One specific factor directly influencing financial hardship is extended time in college. As previously mentioned, the average UNM freshman will take over six years (twelve semesters) to complete his or her degree, yet the New Mexico Lottery Scholarship, on which most UNM students depend, only covers tuition for eight semesters.

To this end, a primary contributing factor for the extended time in degree completion is the changing of majors. Recent research shows that students, on average, enter college without a thorough understanding of their potential career, including the nature of the related occupation as well as the required coursework. The following statistics, based on a study performed by the University of California-Irvine (Shoemaker, 2007), report why most students select their college major:

- ~ 64% - it sounded interesting
- ~ 46% - it will lead to a high-paying job
- ~ 30% - well recommended by parents

In addition, according to the same research, only 16% claimed that they knew “a lot” about their college major, with 15% knowing nothing about the major at all when selecting it. These decisions, and the basis on which they are made, are leading to ill-informed and ill-prepared college freshmen, and as a result, 60% of all students change college majors at least once within their college career (Shoemaker, 2007). Recent studies (Shoemaker, 2007) attribute this to the following reasons:

- Students did not like the courses within the major (54% surveyed)
- Students had academic difficulties within the coursework (44% surveyed)
- Students found the courses harder than expected (31% surveyed)

When asked about considering a new major, 57% of students responded that they had an interest in changing majors within their first year (Shoemaker, 2007), while of those considering a *second* major change, 51% of students responded that an academic advisor was the most helpful resource in the process of planning their college future (Shoemaker, 2007). These statistics demonstrate that proper academic and career guidance is not initially present for students entering college, and that, with proper guidance, well-informed decisions can be made to provide students with a well-placed academic pathway. As such, strong advisement and guidance counseling will be a strong component of the Explore Academy educational model (see the description of the curriculum below).

Sarah Howard, an academic advisor at the University of North Carolina, best summarized this systemic problem, stating that,

“With many high schools having to cut back to the bare-bones subjects (mathematics, basic sciences, English, history/social studies, and foreign language) due to budget issues, most students don't have the opportunity to explore other academic disciplines before they arrive on campus. Many decide on a major by reverse method: I know I don't like this, this, or that, so I guess my option is X. Once they are exposed to other options, they begin to realize that their original choice may not be the best decision, thus provoking a change of major.”

The University New Mexico enrolls the vast majority of its students from in-state populations, with significant draws from Albuquerque, Bernalillo, and Rio Rancho. Based on 2009 enrollment data, 60% of UNM's total student population, as well as its freshmen population, come from the greater Albuquerque area (UNM Division of Enrollment Management, 2009), and thus the Albuquerque community is one in which significant attention toward academic reform must take place, specifically in the area of college preparation.

From the data presented above, several trends are clear. Students are not prepared for college upon exit of high school, and many are thus forced to take classes covering material previously covered in high school. Students are further unprepared for the academic rigors of college, and thus experience academic difficulty upon entering college as freshmen. In addition, many students are unaware of the reality and are thus unprepared for the demands of their chosen field, and thus change majors at least once throughout their college careers. Each of these factors, independently or in conjunction with one another, leads to greater probability of college drop-out.

Drawing national attention, a recent New York Times article included the University of New Mexico as an example of what economist Mark Schneider calls *failure factories*, given its 42.7% graduation rate (Leonhardt, 2009). Given that UNM's population is overwhelmingly drawn from New Mexico, specifically Albuquerque, this issue has local causation.

It is the duty of a high school to equip its graduates with the tools they need to find success at the next level, yet the above research contends that our schools' effectiveness within this area is disintegrating. It is the goal of the Explore Academy to remedy this trend.

SUPPORTING DATA
COLLEGE PREPARATION – TIME MANAGEMENT

Upon analyzing non-academic factors related to student college dropout rates, lack of appropriate time management skills becomes an area of focus. According to research (Nist-Olejnik, 2012), one primary factor in college dropout rate is the effective management of one's time, specifically as students first enter college and are provided with significantly greater level of freedom. Furthermore, as students work to consolidate their course load (afternoon classes, classes only Tuesday through Thursday), they grant themselves significant free time which they have not developed the responsibility to effectively utilize (Nist-Olejnik, 2012).

Similar research further specifies that such levels of freedom are not provided to students prior to entering college, and thus recommends that students should be provided with increasing freedom prior to entering college in order to build appropriate time management skills and learn to handle freedom in a responsible manner (Nist-Olejnik, 2012).

The Explore Academy schedule seeks to focus on this issue through the use of its academic flex period (AFP), built into each school day. The Explore Academy daily schedule consists of seven (7) periods, from which students will choose to enroll in five (5) seminars with the remaining two periods representing a student's academic flex time. This discretionary time, built into the middle of each day,

will provide students the ability to work on homework, receive tutoring assistance, perform make-up work, etc. As students will not be allowed to leave campus, this time period provides students with additional time to perform work as-needed, and promotes them to use it effectively. The academic flex period is further explained in detail below (description of the curriculum).

CURRICULUM

E.(3) Provide an overview of the planned curriculum including a scope and sequence by subject for each grade level you school plans to serve. Insert a Course Scope and Sequence as Appendix A

The curriculum at the Explore Academy will be standards-based. Courses will be downsized from the traditional four or eight-month semester timeframe into smaller increments of study, termed *seminars*, each of which will span twenty-two days (4.5 weeks) and will focus on a specific subset of core academic common standards. The standards themselves will drive the instruction within each seminar, and the level of student proficiency in *each standard* will be the basis for the awarding of credit at the conclusion of each seminar.

The rationale behind this approach attempts to focus on greater concentration of standards and student accountability, with each standard becoming a point of individual academic accountability rather than the ambiguous semester-based grading system currently employed in most traditional high schools.

CURRICULUM

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Seminars will meet every day for the entire 22-day academic term. Table E3.1 shows an example student schedule with the insertion of two academic flex periods, one of which will be used for lunch (the academic flex period is explained further below).

TABLE E3.1 – EXAMPLE STUDENT SCHEDULE (FOR ONE TERM)

Per 1	Math
Per 2	Science
Per 3	Academic Flex Period
Per 4	English
Per 5	Academic Flex Period (Lunch)
Per 6	Academic Major
Per 7	Social Studies

Students will proceed through five seminars per day for each 22-day academic term, after which they will proceed to a new set of five seminars. There will be eight academic terms per year, thus providing each student with the opportunity of attending forty seminars per year (160 after four years). Tables E3.2a and E3.2b display a typical student's yearly schedule, both with classes and without.

TABLE E3.2A – DISPLAYS A TYPICAL STUDENT SCHEDULE (EMPTY), 40 SEMINARS PER ACADEMIC YEAR.

	8/12 to 9/11	9/12 to 10/14	10/15 to 11/13	11/14 to 12/18	1/7 to 2/6	2/7 to 3/11	3/12 to 4/23	4/24 to 5/23
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8
Per 1								
Per 2								
Per 3								
Per 4								
Per 5								
Per 6								
Per 7								

TABLE F3.2B – DISPLAYS A TYPICAL STUDENT SCHEDULE (WITH POTENTIAL COURSES FILLED IN, INCLUDES ACADEMIC FLEX PERIOD , AFP)

	8/12 to 9/11	9/12 to 10/14	10/15 to 11/13	11/14 to 12/18	1/7 to 2/6	2/7 to 3/11	3/12 to 4/23	4/24 to 5/23
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8
Per 1	Math	Math	History	AFP	Science	Math	Math	English
Per 2	English	English	AFP	History	AFP	Science	English	Math
Per 3	Science	Science	Science	Math	History	AFP	Science	Science
Per 4	AFP	History	AFP	Science	Math	Spanish	AFP	AFP
Per 5	AFP	AFP	Math	AFP	English	English	AFP	Spanish
Per 6	Phys Ed	AFP	Art	Art	AFP	AFP	History	History
Per 7	History	Art	English	English	Spanish	History	Spanish	AFP

CURRICULUM

TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

Each teacher at the Explore Academy will have two primary responsibilities:

- Instruction of eight core seminars per year, one per term
- Instruction of eight seminars within a given degree program (major) per year, one per term

To prevent instructional overload, no teacher will teach more than two different seminars per term.

An example teacher schedule is shown in Table E3.3.

TABLE E3.3 – EXAMPLE TEACHER SCHEDULE (FOR ONE TERM)

Per 1	Core Seminar
Per 2	Core Seminar
Per 3	Core Seminar
Per 4	Prep/Lunch
Per 5	Core Seminar
Per 6	Degree Program Seminar
Per 7	Degree Program Seminar

CURRICULUM

SEMINAR CALCULATION

Preliminary analysis by Explore Academy’s development team has determined that the New Mexico State Standards for core classes (Common Core State Standards for English and math and the New Mexico Standards for Excellence in science and social studies) can effectively be dissected into 80 seminars (20 per core subject area, described more the curriculum overview below) although this number may be altered slightly as the curriculum is officially developed during the Planning Year. Adding in additional requirements (art, physical education, foreign language, academic major/degree program, etc.), the total seminar credits required for each student comes to 151. The summary of seminars required for graduation is shown below in Table E3.4.

The preliminary scope and sequence for all core academic areas are described in Appendix A.

TABLE E3.4 – GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

SUBJECT AREA	SEMINARS REQ'D TO FULFILL
English (core requirements)	20
Social Studies (core)	20
Science (core)	20
Mathematics (core)	20
Foreign Language	12
Health	2
Art	8
Physical Education	8
PARCC Review	3
SAT/ACT Test Preparation	1
College Preparation	1
Academic Service	8
Dual Enrollment	4
Scholar Requirements	8
Degree Program (Major)	16
TOTAL SEMINARS REQUIRED	151 (out of a possible 160)

Each teacher at Explore Academy will be responsible for one version of each of the eight (8) core seminars for which he or she is responsible, called a *seminar-version*. There will be three versions of each seminar from which students can choose, each of which will be taught by a different. Each version of a given seminar will possess unique characteristics, employing a specific theme/focus, using different learning styles, modalities, etc. (see below). This is the basis of the Explore Academy's differentiated curriculum, where students will choose their own academic pathways and thus, in essence, create their own curriculum.

An example will help illustrate.

Within the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics, there exists a section titled Statistics and Probability, encompassing standards S-ID.1 to S-ID.9, S-IC.1 to S-IC.6, S-CP.1 to S-CP.9, and S-MD.1 to S-MD.7. Traditionally, this topic would be found as a unit within a traditional math course. Students would sign up for this math course, be randomly placed with a specific teacher, and learn the standards through the methods and strategies employed by that teacher.

Or would they be learning?

As previously mentioned, the semester grading system is inadequate to truly measure whether a given student actually becomes proficient in the statistics standards mentioned above, given that a student can easily fail a particular unit, a statistics unit for example, yet still gain credit for that particular course and be certified as proficient in all areas included therein, including, in this case, statistics. This is the reality of the outdated and ineffective traditional semester grading model.

Now compare the Explore Academy system, where students are in control, and accountability is specific. Within the Explore Academy system, the standards mentioned above would not exist within a course; these standards would constitute their own course (the “Statistics and Probability” seminar). Because of the school’s concentrated focus and specific assessment model, students who earn credit for this course would be certified as being proficient in each one of the standards on which the course is based. The accountability is comprehensive, yet specific.

Yet that is not where the divergence ends. When a student goes to register for this statistics seminar, he or she will have three different options (versions) from which to choose in fulfilling this course requirement. Regardless of what version they choose, all students would be engaging the same standards and would take the same exit exam as students in other versions of the same seminar. This ensures that no matter *how* students choose to learn, they are all required to achieve the same learning objectives. This differentiation model, called the *differentiated curriculum*, provides all students with the power to follow the path to learning that best coincides with their strengths and interests, and thus provides them with significantly greater chances of success.

Each seminar-version will be constructed around a different theme or focus, and will use a specific set of learning styles and modalities compared to the other seminar-versions of the same course. Seminar-versions, and their focus, will be clearly displayed for students in the course registration catalogs to provide for them an overview of the options open to them. Three potential seminar-versions that might exist for the Statistics course mentioned above are (including their title as would be seen in a course registration catalog):

- BOX SCORE BONANZA (Statistics and Probability Version 1)
Focus: statistics from professional sports, including analysis of team and individual player performance numbers
- IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH (SP v2)
Focus: health statistics, including analysis on American nutrition and diet, disease rates, and epidemiology
- WE THE PEOPLE (SP v3)
Focus: consumer statistics including real estate, marketing; and social statistics including political science, sociology, and crime rates

Every teacher, regardless of their subject matter, has an individual strategy or passion which is infused in his or her teaching framework. Explore Academy will harness that instructional fervor and promote teachers to generate a curriculum in which the interests and passions of its staff can be identified and advertised for students to, in turn, identify.

The benefits of the above-mentioned approach are two-fold. First, teachers will be allowed to instruct in a manner that best suits their knowledge and interests, which in turn results in better teaching. To this end, each teacher hired at Explore Academy will be given the freedom to design and develop the versions for seminars within the curriculum that best fit his or her strengths and passions.

Second, and most importantly, a system of differentiated curriculum allows the students to choose the path of their own education within the offered framework, and thus empowers them as academic entities as never before through the power of choice. As previously stated, this psychological approach is termed “choice theory”, developed by William Glasser, and is the basis for Explore Academy’s educational philosophy. According to choice theory (and to once again summarize), an individual is far more psychologically satisfied when he or she has control (choice) over the path of his or her life, and thus demonstrates a substantially higher likelihood of success as a result.

By providing students with the choice over how they will satisfy the standards set before them, an institution allows the student to invest him or herself in an academic curriculum like never before. This not only maintains student interest, creating increased academic motivation, but guarantees a much higher likelihood of comprehension and retention.

Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, the New Mexico High School Graduation Assessment (HSGA), also known as the Standards Based Assessment (SBA), will be replaced by the PARCC

assessment. This exam will be given to every 11th grader as a graduation requirement and will significantly influence a secondary school's A-F grade, and as such it represents an enormous challenge for every high school across the state. The divide-and-conquer approach of the Explore Academy curriculum will allow the school and its teachers to gain significantly clearer insight into student performance as it will be able to effectively identify areas of weakness given the increased scrutiny placed in a standards-based system as compared to a semester-based traditional setting. Furthermore, each standard will be individually scored and will thus provide for specific analysis of each student's academic performance, an aspect which is completely absent in a traditional academic setting.

Having the necessary data to analyze each student's strengths and weakness, or rather the areas in which they show proficiency and deficiency, allows a school and its educators to identify and address areas of concern for each student instead of simply assuming that one semester grade accurately represents a student's knowledge of all the standards within the scope of that semester. The shorter grading periods, as mentioned above, will allow for more specific, and thus more effective and timely intervention and remediation efforts.

By pinpointing areas of academic difficulty, timely remediation can take place, and thus greater overall student success is achieved, translating directly to better performance on the PARCC assessment.

Furthermore, three seminars required for graduation dedicated to PARCC review. During these seminars, taken by juniors early in their spring semester, prior to the PARCC assessment, students will review content from those tested areas (reading, math, writing) in an attempt to better review for the PARCC assessment.

CURRICULUM
DEGREE PROGRAMS

As previously mentioned, each student at Explore Academy will enter a *degree program*, or *career pathway*, similar to a major at the university level, which are designed to allow students to pursue advanced areas of study within their high school career. Sixteen additional seminars will be required for a student to achieve his or her specialized degree, thus contributing to the overall graduation requirement 151 seminars per student. It should be noted that the list of majors is prospective (shown below in Table E3.5); this list will not be formally developed until the planning year.

TABLE E3.5 – POTENTIAL DEGREE PROGRAMS (MAJORS) (INCLUDES HYBRIDS DENOTED WITH *)

SCIENCE	MATH	ENGLISH	SOCIAL STUDIES	OTHER
Biology* Medicine Animal Science Forensics Environmental Sci. Veterinary Sci.*	Engineering* Physics* Aerospace Engin. Civil Engineering Mechanical Engin. Business Admin. Finance	Journalism Creative Writing Philosophy Communications Literature	Government Law History* Sociology Criminal Justice Economics	Art Photography Architecture Computer Science Education Psychology Linguistics Explorer*

In its third year, at full enrollment, Explore Academy will employ twenty-four (24) teachers, each of which will helm/manage one degree program. Each degree pathway will consist of eighteen (18) courses (sixteen required for graduation), spread across three years of study, and as such, students will enroll in their degree program beginning in either their sophomore year or junior year.

CURRICULUM
DEGREE PROGRAMS – CUSTOMIZATION

One exciting benefit of the degree programs are their flexibility and customization to the individual student. At Explore Academy, students will be able to propose their own degree program based on existing curricula from established degree program pathways. In this way, Explore Academy can offer a wider variety of academic focus areas with a smaller total teaching staff.

An example is required to detail and help clarify.

Student A has ambitions to become a veterinarian, yet finds that Veterinary Science is not officially offered as an Explore Academy degree program. This student may propose, to the school's academic director, the creation of a Veterinary Science degree program. The academic director will then consult with the school's counselors, principal, and the teachers of relevant degree programs to determine if a combination of pre-existing seminars can be organized to create the proposed degree program. Such a combination would create a *hybrid degree program* (some of which are already

mentioned above). In this case, two existing degree programs, medicine and zoology, could be combined to create a hybrid of the two, blending together animal science and medical science.

Take, for example, the tentative curricula for the Animal Science and Medicine degree programs (see Tables E3.6 and E3.7).

TABLE E3.6 – EXAMPLE OF SEMINAR COMBINATION FOR A HYBRID DEGREE PROGRAM

ANIMAL SCIENCE CURRICULUM	MEDICINE CURRICULUM
Evolution	Skeletal, Integumentary, Muscular Systems
Animal Classification	Respiratory, Circulatory, Lymphatic Systems
Animal Behavior	Nervous, Endocrine Systems
Invertebrate Zoology	Reproductive System
Animal Physiology	Digestive, Excretory Systems
Developmental Biology	Pathology
Arthropods	Bacteriology
Fishes	Bacteriology II
Amphibians	Virology
Reptiles	Clinical Pathology
Birds	Human Physiology
Mammals	Human Nutrition
Mammals II	Medical Investigations
Ecosystems	Molecular Genetics
Zoonotics	Genetic Diseases
Comparative Anatomy	Epidemiology

By combining relevant courses from each program, the academic director can, in effect, create an entirely new degree program composed from pre-existing curricula, and can thus provide many more options for students. This allows for fewer teachers to create a broader selection of degree programs from which students can choose to specialize their studies.

The creation of the Veterinary Science degree pathway is done in this way, taking eight seminars from both Animal Science and Medicine (see Table E3.7).

TABLE E3.7 – THE FORMATION OF A HYBRID DEGREE PROGRAM
(COURSES IN BOLD REPRESENT THOSE PULLED INTO THE HYBRID CURRICULUM)

ANIMAL SCIENCE CURRICULUM	VET. MEDICINE CURRICULUM	MEDICINE CURRICULUM
Evolution	Skeletal, Integ., Muscular Systems	Skeletal, Integ., Muscular Systems
Animal Classification	Resp., Circ., Lymphatic Systems	Resp., Circ., Lymphatic Systems
Animal Behavior	Nervous, Endocrine Systems	Nervous, Endocrine Systems
Invertebrate Zoology	Reproductive System	Reproductive System
Animal Physiology	Digestive, Excretory Systems	Digestive, Excretory Systems
Developmental Biology	Bacteriology <i>or</i> Virology	Pathology
Arthropods	Medical Investigations	Bacteriology
Fishes	Clinical Pathology	Bacteriology II
Amphibians	Animal Physiology	Virology
Reptiles	Amphibians	Clinical Pathology
Birds	Reptiles	Human Physiology
Mammals	Birds	Human Nutrition
Mammals II	Mammals	Medical Investigations
Ecosystems	Mammals II	Molecular Genetics
Zoonotics	Zoonotics	Genetic Diseases
Comparative Anatomy	Comparative Anatomy	Epidemiology

CURRICULUM
DEGREE PROGRAMS – EXPLORATION

While there may exist students that are prepared to embark in a specific field of study upon entering college, many students may not be. In fact, it is recommended that all students explore areas in which they might have interest *prior* to entering college. What if a student doesn't know what he or she wants to do, or in what areas they're interested? What if they can't make a decision on what type of degree program they want to commit to?

Explore Academy is committed to help these students as much as any other by letting them, put simply, explore what's out there and get a feel for what areas may interest them. To this end, one degree program offered is simply called *Explorer* (see Degree Program list above). Explorer is nothing more than an assembly of sixteen (16) seminars from various degree programs, pieced together by the student based on his or her interests. Whether students know they want, or whether they want to use

their degree program requirements to pursue a number of fields in which they have interest, they have the opportunity to do both at Explore Academy.

In addition to their degree program, students are required to earn at least six (6) credits for their Scholar requirement (see Graduation Requirements). These six additional seminars are required to encourage students to seek out other areas of interest just to explore other options in addition to the degree pathway they have selected. These six seminars must be non-core seminars that are part of a degree program other than the one they have selected.

**CURRICULUM
ADVISEMENT**

For a system as specialized as described within this application, it should be noted, as a support feature, that a significant emphasis will be placed on student advisement, not only in the selection of core seminars and degree programs, but in overall college preparation and readiness. Advisement and guidance is essential and represents a cornerstone of the Explore Academy model.

Beginning in its second school year, Explore Academy will employ two full-time counselors (one counselor will exist during School Year 1). These counselors will serve all counseling functions, both academic and emotional, and will provide assistance to any student within any grade level as needed. For a more-personalized relationship, it is preferred that counselors track with the same students over their four-year high school career. To this end, the student population will be divided alphabetically into two equal groups with each counselor managing 250 students. This ratio complies with the student-counselor ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association.

While counselors will be available for any service at any time, the following elements will be the focus of counselors:

- Introduction and orientation to the school's curriculum and registration process (summer prior to freshmen year or for any new student enrollment, will take place during days of student registration).
- Managing of preliminary testing for student learning styles: freshmen will have the option to take an at-home, computer-based learning style inventory prior to registration. This test is meant to identify particular learning styles and cognitive strengths for each particular student. This will aid students, parents, and counselors in the seminar-version selection process. The goal in freshmen advisement is to help students become familiar with the

school's curricular framework and to aid them in choosing the seminar-versions in which they will be most successful.

- Developing and continually adapting student Next Step Plan: this will draft out the student's basic 4-year schedule including their perceived degree program interest(s). As students continue through their four-year journey, this will become a vital aspect with which to document student planning.
- Career interest survey: each student will take a career interest survey prior to beginning their sophomore year. Counselors will work with students within their freshmen year as well as in the summer prior to their sophomore year during specifically-designated registration days to assist students in choosing the degree program that best fits their career interests.
- Graduation progress: counselors will continually track students' credit accumulation to verify they remain within the timeline for graduation. This will occur once per year starting at the end of a student's sophomore year. A major verification checkpoint will occur during registration prior to a student's senior year.
- Basic college preparation: the first attempt at the ACT or SAT will be recommended for students in the spring or summer of their junior year. Counselors will work with students to register for one or both of these college entrance exams.

An additional college counselor will be hired on a part-time basis (with part-time teaching duties as well) to primarily advise seniors in the specific areas of college preparation including: college selection, college entrance exams, completion of college applications, financial aid, etc.

As students become settled into their degree program, the teacher that manages that degree program will additionally assume an advisory role. Those teachers hired at Explore Academy will have qualifications and experience in their managed degree program, and will thus be further able to assist students in career insight and preparation for college.

Most high school curricula operate within a very strict scope and sequence, with specific classes acting as prerequisites for others. This linear model sets students in specific tracks, with the sequence usually tied to grade level.

The Explore Academy model proposes the opposite approach, with common student tracks eliminated and replaced with a system where each student is empowered to make his or her own choices and thus create his or her own academic pathway.

To this end, the linear approach is abandoned, replaced instead with a spiraled curriculum in which courses (seminars) are constantly drawing on information from one another. As previously mentioned, research suggests that learning and teaching is most effective when 50% of the information covered is new to the learner (Russell, 1984), while the other 50% is composed of previous information that is tied into the new concepts. This approach represents how Explore Academy will spiral both its instruction and its curriculum. This model refocuses its approach from the driving of new concepts to the establishment of connections between new concepts and those previously learned.

This approach lends itself to the choice-based philosophy as courses come to require very little in the way of prerequisites. As the preliminary curricular framework (scope and sequence) has been developed at this time (Appendix A), it consists of seminars which can, to a great degree, act as standalone academic units rather than courses within a specific linear sequence. This promotes the freedom for student choice by allowing them to choose to take the courses when they want, and how they want (based on the versions of the seminars that are offered at specific times throughout the year).

Rather than providing a specific sequence, and thus restricting student choice, core seminars will be separated into tiers numbered 100-400. Courses in the lower tier (100 level) represent more fundamental concepts than those in higher tiers (300, 400). Thus, within a specific tier, each student has flexibility in course selection within that tier, further promoting the philosophy of academic choice. The tier system is intended to be used as a guide for students in course selection and registration; as such, students will still have the freedom to pursue any course at any given time, but it is recommended that they follow the tier system.

An example of the tier system for science courses is shown in Appendix A (Table A.1).

It should be noted that, within the science curriculum as shown in A.1, four tracks exist, representing the four subject areas within the science curriculum. Each track has its own tiered system with lower-tiered courses representing more basic content than those in higher tiers.

It should further be noted that the figure (A.1) includes only required core courses. For those students who choose their academic focus in a topic of science, those courses will exist at the 300 and 400 levels.

The scope and sequence in all four core content areas is shown in Appendix A, Table A.2. As previously mentioned, Explore Academy operates through a philosophy of choice, and as such, each of the core courses, across all content areas, will be offered in three different versions (60 seminar-versions total for each content area, 240 total seminar-versions across all four core content areas).

CURRICULUM

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE – REGARDING THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

While history is typically taught in chronological sequence, current research suggests an equally if not more effective approach: teaching history in themes. Such themes, as which are shown in the history scope and sequence (Appendix A, Table A.2), group themes seen across human history instead of merely covering the major events in human history in a linear fashion. Research suggests that this method builds comprehensive understanding across different eras, and thus provides a more holistic understanding into the content of human societies rather than simply a chronology of events (Connor, 1997). Explore Academy will implement this themed-based model, due to both the relevant research on its effectiveness and in that it lends itself to the Explore Academy’s choice-based curriculum.

CURRICULUM

INSTRUCTIONAL LOGISTICS - DIVERSITY

The goal of Explore Academy and its *differentiated curriculum* is to provide each student with an *individualized* education, where he or she can choose the specific versions of each seminar that best fit his or her strengths and interests. In this way, the Explore Academy model represents a customized form of education where each student’s path to graduation can and will be unique.

The power of this model can be seen through a few simple statistical calculations, shown below.

Example

Take for example a typical high school chemistry class lasting two semesters. At Explore Academy, there will exist five (5) seminars which fulfill the chemistry academic standards (See Appendix A, Table A.1: Chemical Properties, Chemical Reactions I, Chemical Reactions II, Thermodynamics, and Solutions).

Because there will exist three versions of each seminar from which students can choose (fifteen total seminar-versions), there are a variety of combinations of versions of the five seminars one can choose to fulfill the required standards for chemistry. For this example, the mathematical calculation is simple, and effectively illustrates how Explore Academy's differentiated curriculum allows for a customized form of education previously unseen in traditional public schools.

Because there exists three versions of each of the five (5) seminars within the area of chemistry, there exists in total 243 (3^5) individual combinations of versions students can pursue as they complete the five chemistry requirements. In comparison to the traditional semester-based model, where students are subjected to the one standard methodology employed by the teacher they receive for chemistry, Explore Academy can be seen to offer, in a sense, 243 unique approaches in the teaching of chemistry, as a culmination of all the different combinations of seminar-versions that exist from which students can choose.

To avoid misconception, it should be emphasized that no matter what versions a student chooses in completing the five seminar requirements covering the chemistry standards, he or she will receive instruction over the *same standards, equal to all other students who have taken the same five required seminars*. The key difference is in *how* a given student *chooses* to receive his or her instruction. It should be further emphasized that, no matter what versions of a given set of seminars a student chooses to enroll, he or she *will not be missing instruction over any of the standards* included in the seminars in question. Instead, it is the theme or perspective within which the content is framed that differs from version to version.

One could easily go further in analyzing all science seminars:

- 20 seminars covering the require science standards
- 3 versions for each seminar
- 3,486,784,401 (3^{20}) unique pathways students can follow in completing *just their science requirements!*

Compound this with the other core content areas (history, English, mathematics), art, and the various degree programs from which students can choose to specialize their studies, and the

customization potential is *infinite*. Explore Academy can truly claim that no two students' academic paths will be the same. Education has become customized.

How Will Explore Academy Manage This Diversity? It does not have to (and it will not). Explore Academy will not calculate the unique academic pathways which students undertake. The school serves the simple function of providing the curriculum, guiding through their studies, and monitoring that students are completing their graduation requirements. How the students ultimately choose their education will be up to them.

CURRICULUM
INSTRUCTIONAL LOGISTICS - TEACHING

At full staffing (School Year 3 and beyond), there will exist five (5) teachers per core content area, each of which will manage six seminars (classes) per day consisting of a mixture of core seminars and those within the degree program he or she will manage.

The curricular goal is to provide all students with a choice of at least three different versions of each seminar from which they can choose. To achieve this, each core content area, consisting of twenty (20) seminars required to fulfill the State's academic requirements, would require sixty (60) seminar-versions in total (20 seminars x 3 versions for each seminar = 60 seminar-versions).

Each teacher will teach eight core seminar-versions per year. With five teachers at the time of full enrollment (School Year 3), this calculates to forty (40) seminar-versions (5 teachers x 8 core seminar-versions per teacher = 40 total seminar-versions per year within a given content area).

Within each degree program, four seminars will count for both a core and degree program credit requirement. This adds in additional seminar-versions from which students can choose to complete their core requirement (5 teachers x (8 core seminar versions per teacher per year + 4 core seminar-versions which can also count toward a given degree program) = 60 total seminar-versions offered per content area, equaling the requirement mentioned above).

The rationale for this model is to provide a teacher, helming a degree program, with the ability to teach the fundamental core concepts to those students as it pertains to the scope of the degree program. For instance, a teacher helming the medicine degree program would find it advantageous to structure core seminars, such as the Cell Biology, Molecular Genetics, and Genetic Inheritance seminars, each of which teaches basic concepts covered in the state standards, but with a medical focus to provide students with a fundamental understanding. These seminar-versions will exist for any student to take, regardless of their major, and will simply fulfill a core academic requirement for those

not in the medicine degree program. For those students within the medicine degree program, such seminars would count towards both core *and* degree program requirements.

Table E3.8 (below) details this layout, showing a teacher's three-year rotating schedule. It should be noted that, year to year, the only aspect of what changes within a given teacher's schedule is the seminars in the degree program they manage, which rotate across a three-year timeframe.

The seminars shown in the table are designated as core (ie Core 3v1 for core seminar 3, version 1), within a degree program (ie DP 9 for degree program seminar 9), or those that can count for credit within both the core and a given degree program (ie Core 1v2 (Core/DP1) for a seminar that will count for both core seminar 1, version 2 and degree program seminar 1).

For those entering a degree program, the four core/degree program dual-credit seminars will be offered each year to provide new sophomores with the same basic level of introduction into the degree program, fundamental to their understanding. As they proceed into the degree program's non-core seminars (DP 4, DP 5, etc.), they will be find themselves with juniors and seniors who are also enrolled within the same degree program, albeit at a different point in their studies.

Because no seminar within a given degree program (DP 4, DP 8, DP 12, etc.) has a prerequisite, sophomores can enter a degree program at any point in the three-year rotation as shown below. Students will need to earn credit for 16 of the 18 offered seminars to complete their degree program.

School Year 1 is an exception to this model, where the teaching schedule will be slightly restructured. Due to fewer students and thus fewer teachers hired for those students, in comparison to the school's final projected enrollment, no degree program seminars will be offered in School Year 1, however, as mentioned above, four core seminar-versions will count towards degree program requirements. In addition, students will only have the option to take sixteen (16) of the twenty (20) total seminars within a given content area (20 seminars are required for graduation for each content area (math, English, etc.)).

It is assumed that, because the school is enrolling only 9th and 10th graders in School Year 1, sixteen seminar offerings should be adequate to provide them choice in their scheduling options. The remaining four seminars for each content area will begin phasing in beginning in School Year 2.

The rationale behind this modification is to remain true to the school's philosophy of choice by providing students with three versions of each seminar, even in School Year 1. By postponing degree program seminars in the school's first year, teachers can focus on providing a greater diversity of core

seminar-versions and thus provide students with the level of choice that drives the school's educational philosophy. The calculations for School Year 1 are shown below:

- 16 seminars available from which students can register
- 3 versions for each seminar = 48 seminar versions from which students can choose
- 3 teachers per content area x 16 core seminar-versions per teacher = 48 seminar versions per content area available
- 48 seminar-versions offered = 48 seminar-versions from which students can choose

It should be noted that this exception will only occur in the school's first year, and that, beginning in School Year 2, teaching schedules will change to the school's permanent teaching format. Because 10th grade students in School Year 1 will not have the opportunity to earn as many degree program credits, degree program graduation requirements may be altered for that class only (class of 2018).

TABLE E3.8 – THE ROTATION OF A TEACHER’S SCHEDULE (3 YEAR ROTATION AFTER SCHOOL YEAR 1)**School Year 1**

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8
Period 1	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 2	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 3	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 4	Core 1v2 (Core/DP1)	Core 2v2 (Core/DP2)	Core 3v2 (Core/DP3)	Core 4v2 (Core/DP4)	Core 5v2*	Core 6v2*	Core 7v2*	Core 8v2*
Period 5	Core 1v2 (Core/DP1)	Core 2v2 (Core/DP2)	Core 3v2 (Core/DP3)	Core 4v2 (Core/DP4)	Core 5v2*	Core 6v2*	Core 7v2*	Core 8v2*

Note: this schedule for teachers will only occur during School Year 1

** In School Year 1, teachers will not teach degree program seminars and will instead offer additional core seminar versions from which students will choose*

School Year 2

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8
Period 1	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 2	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 3	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 4	Core 1v2 (Core/DP1)	Core 2v2 (Core/DP2)	Core 3v2 (Core/DP3)	Core 4v2 (Core/DP4)	DP 5	DP 6	DP 7	DP 8
Period 5	Core 1v2 (Core/DP1)	Core 2v2 (Core/DP2)	Core 3v2 (Core/DP3)	Core 4v2 (Core/DP4)	DP 5	DP 6	DP 7	DP 8

School Year 3

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8
Period 1	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 2	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 3	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 4	Core 1v2 (Core/DP1)	Core 2v2 (Core/DP2)	Core 3v2 (Core/DP3)	Core 4v2 (Core/DP4)	DP 9	DP 10	DP 11	DP 12
Period 5	Core 1v2 (Core/DP1)	Core 2v2 (Core/DP2)	Core 3v2 (Core/DP3)	Core 4v2 (Core/DP4)	DP 9	DP 10	DP 11	DP 12

School Year 4

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8
Period 1	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 2	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 3	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 4	Core 1v2 (Core/DP1)	Core 2v2 (Core/DP2)	Core 3v2 (Core/DP3)	Core 4v2 (Core/DP4)	DP 13	DP 14	DP 15	DP 16
Period 5	Core 1v2 (Core/DP1)	Core 2v2 (Core/DP2)	Core 3v2 (Core/DP3)	Core 4v2 (Core/DP4)	DP 13	DP 14	DP 15	DP 16

Note: no teacher will manage more than two different seminars within a given academic term.

CURRICULUM

INSTRUCTIONAL LOGISTICS – SCALABILITY

Explore Academy's system easily scales with the school's size as its population grows. In its first three years, the school's teaching staff will grow to accommodate an increase in student population as the school expands to incorporate higher grade levels. Table E3.9 shows the number of course offerings per core content area for each of the first three school years.

TABLE E3.9 – SEMINAR OFFERINGS PER CONTENT AREA PER YEAR

	# Seminar Offerings	# Core Seminars Per Teacher	# Teachers	# Seminar Versions
School Year 1	16 of 20	16	3	48 (3 per seminar)
School Year 2	18 of 20	12	4	48 (2.6 per seminar)
School Year 3+	20 of 20	12	5	60 (3 per seminar)

As previously described, in School Year 1, only 16 of the 20 courses required for graduation will be offered for 9th and 10th graders. Because the school will not offer seminars for its various degree programs in School Year 1, all teachers will be teaching only core seminars, resulting in three (3) versions of each seminar from which students can choose.

In School Year 2, given the implementation of degree program seminars, teachers manage only twelve (12) core seminars per year (the remaining four will be exclusive to the degree program managed by each teacher). 18 of 20 seminars required for graduation are offered in School Year 2,

resulting in a dip in seminar diversity: 2.6 versions per seminar (in other words, three versions offered for 66% of seminars, with two versions offered for the remaining 33% of seminars).

In School Year 3, as the teaching staff reaches its final projected scale, all twenty (20) seminars will be available from each content area for students to meet their graduation requirements. Teachers will continue to teach twelve (12) core seminar-versions per year, resulting in three versions for each seminar from which students can choose.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

E.(4) If the curriculum is not fully developed (beyond the scope and sequence), provide a timeline outlining the curriculum development process during your school's planning year.

The scope and sequence described in Appendix A is an initial draft and is considered prospective. It was drafted by the school's development team, consisting of the school's founder and a group of teachers representing all core content areas. These teachers have been instrumental in developing the Explore Academy curriculum at the time of this application, and it is assumed that these individuals will continue as the Explore Academy's inaugural staff members who will continue to formally develop the school's curriculum during the Planning Year.

Upon approval, Explore Academy will begin advertising for its head administrator. Once the school's head administrator position has been secured, the administrator can begin to officially hire the school's staff. This process is expected to be completed by the end of January, 2014. Once the inaugural staff is in place, the process of formally, and specifically developing the curriculum can begin. This process will include:

- Approval and/or adjustment of the school's preliminary scope and sequence
- Designing the three versions of each core seminar, specifically 100 and 200-level courses
- Generation of exit exams for all eighty (80) core seminars, required for passing/credit within each course

This process will require completion by May 1, 2014, at which time the scope and sequence/ seminar offerings for the school will be assembled into the first student registration packet (for student registration during the summer months prior to the school's opening).

It should be noted that this curriculum, while developed for the first year of the school's operation, is subject to change and evolution as staff members come and go, or as existing staff

members develop improved strategies in educating students. The collective offering of the versions of each seminar, specifically, has an inherent flexibility and is subject to change as dictated by its student population.

DEVELOPMENT OF SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

E.(5) Provide a timeline for alignment of the curriculum with NM Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Math and NM State Standards for all other subjects, if alignment has not been completed at the time the application is submitted

Because the Explore Academy's courses are, by nature, developed directly from the NM Common Core and NM State Standards, the majority of this development is already completed and displayed in the school's scope and sequence (Appendix A, Table A.2). Specific standard alignment is demonstrated, as example, for the science curriculum only in Appendix N.

This scope and sequence is preliminary, and will officially be developed in the spring of 2014, along with the various versions of each seminar that will be offered for students, once the Explore Academy has hired its full teaching staff.

F. GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

F.(1) Identify your school's proposed requirements for graduation, if applicable, and explain any additional requirements that vary from the state minimum requirements.

The school's graduation requirements are shown below, shown as seminar credits (1 credit = 1 seminar).

SUBJECT AREA	SEMINARS REQ'D TO FULFILL
English (core requirements)	20
Social Studies (core)	20
Science (core)	20
Mathematics (core)	20
Foreign Language	12
Health	2
Art	8
Physical Education	8
PARCC Review	3
SAT/ACT Test Preparation	1
College Preparation	1
Academic Service	8
Dual Enrollment	4
Scholar Requirements	8
Degree Program (Major)	16
TOTAL SEMINARS REQUIRED	151 (out of a possible 160)

The above graphic displays the seminar breakdown, including health, art, PE, and foreign language, as well as the seminars required for a student's degree program. Also included is the PARCC

Assessment preparation course (described above), which will assist students in review core course content prior to the PARCC exam in the spring of their junior year.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS
CORE SEMINARS

The non-traditional framework of the Explore Academy model operates from the same academic standards as any public high school in the state. The core seminars have been derived directly from the NM Common Core (English, mathematics) and NM State Standards (science and history). The standards themselves have been used in the construction of the eighty (80) core seminars (see science example, Appendix N) required of all students to assure that they are demonstrating proficiency in the precise areas designated by the State of New Mexico. There is no standard, across any of the core content areas, not included in one or more of the eighty (80) core seminars, and as such, any student who passes the complete set of eighty (80) core seminars, no matter what versions of each seminar they choose to enroll, is assured as to having fulfilled the core academic requirements as designated by the State.

Explore Academy takes this level of accountability to another level, however, and will improve upon academic accountability by assuring the State that a student who passes the eighty (80) core academic seminars is actually proficient in *each specific standard*, an assurance that cannot be accurately and dependably provided by a traditional high school operating on a semester-based approach.

Take, for example, the traditional high school student. At the completion of one semester, he or she receives a grade within a given class, but what does that grade really tell us? What does that grade reveal about that student's level of comprehension? Educators are more than aware of this shortfall, as students can fail multiple components of a given class yet still come out in the end deemed as proficient in *all of* the standards within that class simply by obtaining a minimum overall average of 60% across the 18-week timeframe.

If the goal of a school is to educate students and ensure that they have gained the required competencies, then it is surprising how little accountability is actually placed in determining what students know. *Most schools do not know what their students know.*

Even as traditional schools implement common short cycle assessments, none do so with the mandate that students show proficiency in every standard before gaining credit for a specific course. This is where Explore Academy differs and greatly improves on the existing academic model, for it

certifies that each student who completes the State’s education requirement is *actually certified as proficient* in each of the State’s academic standards. No other school can make such a pledge.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS
DEGREE PROGRAMS

(Described, in detail, above: E.(3))

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS
SCHOLAR REQUIREMENTS

To ensure a more comprehensive education for each student, yet continue with the philosophy of choice, students will be required to take eight (8) seminars from degree programs outside their own (any eight). An engineering student, for example, would be required to take at least one seminar from degree programs within the other three core academic areas (English, science, and social studies), totaling in eight. This will provide students with a chance to explore other topical areas outside their own focus.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS
ACADEMIC SERVICE

An additional graduation requirement will exist for each student to assist in the educational process, helping both teachers and fellow students in a content area that best fits that student’s strengths, or within the student’s degree program. Anytime after their freshmen year, and with the approval of a supervising teacher, students may enroll in an academic service seminar.

Academic service will count as one seminar and will take place under the direction of a supervising teacher. The course can be structured in one of many different ways:

- Tutoring: students will assist in tutoring younger students during designated academic flex periods. These students may be assigned to specific students in need (special education or ELL/ESL students as dictated by their case manager, general education students as dictated by their teacher, or those who are assigned tutoring based on the lowest achieving 25% subpopulation) or may be available for tutoring during a given academic flex period

- Peer mentoring: students would be utilized in helping students during class by providing help in either a general or specific capacity. Such areas of assistance may include help with note-taking, student projects, etc. or in other such areas as designated by the supervising teacher. Students with special needs (those with an IEP or ESL/ELL students) may be assigned a specific peer mentor who works exclusively with that student on an individual basis, meeting with them once per day. Students within the Linguistics degree program would be specifically utilized in assisting ELL/ESL students within class as needed.
- Student internship: students would assist the teacher directly by prepping materials for students in class. This may include the creation of student handouts, assembling presentations, preparing lab materials, etc.

This requirement is intended to build a more cohesive student body, and develop older students as role models for younger students, providing the younger students with a resource they can turn to for advice and help in the future.

In addition, this requirement helps build all students as active learners. When forced to teach a concept, or simply help another person, an individual requires much greater conceptual understanding in order to explain and answer questions, and as such, this requirement will help solidify students in their academic ability.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS
COLLEGE READINESS

Staying to the principle of college preparation, students will be forced to take a college entrance test (SAT/ACT) preparatory seminar, a college preparation seminar, and a dual-enrollment class. The intention is to provide students with the guidance needed for admission to college, as well as a general orientation into the college atmosphere and expectations.

The SAT/ACT seminar will allow students to gain experience from taking practice tests, while learning strategies for success on college entrance exams.

The College Preparation seminar will provide students with the mentoring they need to prepare college applications, compose appropriate application documents, apply for scholarships/financial aid, prepare for college life including time/financial management, etc. Counselors will work closely with students enrolled in this seminar.

The requirement for dual enrollment will help students experience the atmosphere and rigor of a college class. In association with Central New Mexico Community College, students will be required to enroll in one college-level semester class. The requirement is based on the research mentioned above, demonstrating that students who take dual-enrollment courses while still in high school are significantly more likely to avoid college developmental programs (see Research section above).

These three requirements, in addition to those within the academic focus, will provide students significant preparation for college.

GRADUATION WAIVER

F.(2) If you are seeking a waiver from mandated minimum graduation requirements, state what the waiver is and why you are seeking it. Explain how the graduation requirements will support your school's mission, and ensure student readiness for college or other postsecondary opportunities. BE SURE TO INDICATE ANY WAIVER SOUGHT IN SECTION III K. BELOW, BY REFERRING TO THIS SECTION.

Explore Academy will seek no waivers for the minimum graduation requirements.

G. INSTRUCTION

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

G.(1) Provide an overview of the instructional strategies and methods your school will implement that support and are aligned with your school's mission and educational plan, and are directly relevant or necessary to successfully implement the curriculum.

The choice theory model of education, which underlies the philosophy of Explore Academy, is focused on turning each student into an active learner who will increasingly become responsible for his or her own education. By allowing students to choose and personalize their own educational pathway from the diverse curriculum offered by Explore Academy, they will be provided with that ability, and will thus create a more empowered, more successful student population.

The Explore Academy philosophy attempts to take the usage of electives in school to a level previously unseen in public education by incorporating the idea of a differentiated curriculum to provide students with a diversity of educational choices and create individualized, custom educational pathways.

Specific themes for seminar-versions, and their prominent strategies, will be developed by the hired staff in the planning year, and will evolve each year as the levels of success for said strategies are studied through data analysis of exit exams. The school's academic director, in collaboration with content area teachers, will continuously review data from exit exams to measure the effectiveness of all seminar-versions.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES THEMES AND STRATEGIES

Versions of a given seminar will differ from one another in their respective themes and instructional strategies. For the purposes of this application, an *instructional theme* is defined as a specific perspective or manner through which instruction is delivered. In contrast, an *instructional strategy* is the general set of instructional materials and procedures that will be used to elicit particular learning outcomes.

An example will assist in distinguishing the two. Take one of the courses on Wars and Conflict from the social studies/history curriculum (see Appendix A).

Two *themes* through which Wars and Conflict can be presented to students, and thus two potential versions of the seminars, may include:

- Wars and Conflict from a *political* perspective, in which students learn of the society's major conflicts from the perspective of the various leaders and politicians. What societal, industrial, political, economical influences were at work in dictating the progression of such conflicts?
- Wars and Conflict from a *military* perspective, in which students could learn of wars and battles through the strategic movements of armed forces in various geographic theaters, and how those conflicts influenced local populations, policies, etc. What were the major military strategic advances, what were their motivations, and their consequences?

(Note: both seminar versions would receive their own title and will not simply be named as above)

Both themes mentioned above would not be mutually exclusive. While the themes would differ, the content would parallel one another. A student who enrolls in the politically-themed seminar-version would still understand the major military strategy, as those are intrinsically woven into the politics of each period. Likewise, the student who enrolls in the seminar-version with a military focus would still learn of the political and societal factors that influenced the overall strategies within history's various military conflicts.

Both seminar-versions described above would cover the same academic standards, but *how* they cover those standards and what experience they provide students is what will make each unique and thus what will provide students with the option to choose one theme over the other.

In contrast to a theme, around which each seminar-version will be developed and advertised, instructional strategies will be employed to varying extents within different seminar-versions. No seminar-version at Explore Academy will exist through a single-dimensional instructional strategy. For example, there *will not* be a seminar-version specifically designed for lecture, project-based learning, cooperative learning, etc.. The Explore Academy recognizes that, even within a *differentiated curriculum* there still exists a need for *differentiated instruction*. To this end, all seminars will use multiple instructional strategies, including components of lecture, projects, and cooperative learning as

these skills are vital in developing students as active learners as well as preparing them for success in college.

That being said, some seminar-versions may focus on specific instructional strategies more than others. In the seminar-versions mentioned above, one could conceive how the differing themes may influence different levels of implementation of various instructional strategies.

Take again the previous examples:

- Wars and Conflict from a political perspective may utilize the reading of newspaper articles various and political communiqués. In addition, there may be a heavy emphasis on debate within this seminar-version, as students could debate the ramifications of political decisions that resulted in said conflicts. Furthermore, students could engage in persuasive speechwriting to “convince” their fellow class members of specific political proposals.
- Wars and Conflict from a military perspective could, in contrast, become more analytically driven, with students utilizing economic and military data to devise strategic schemes and plan military action. Such analysis could allow students to generate hypotheses and test their predictions using the documented history of the wars and both the effective and ineffective strategies therein. Which choices turned out to be successful and which did not? To this end, cooperative learning could be strongly utilized with students combining into teams, with each team personifying the motivations of one particular force within a given conflict.

In the Explore Academy system, as shown above, *themes will dictate strategies*. In other words, the theme through which a specific seminar-version is presented will specifically incorporate certain instructional strategies more than others. These prominent instructional strategies will be listed with each seminar-version’s course description so as to advertise to students which instructional strategies are more prominent within a given version, and thus allow for greater student awareness when they choose which theme *and* which styles create the best success for learning.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

No matter what version of a given seminar students choose, the focus will always be on *experiential learning, or learning by doing*. While experience in lecture is vital for success in college,

and independent reading and writing are vital practices in developing student literacy, Explore Academy will not lean heavily on either approach in lieu of providing a student-centered education. The Explore Academy objective is to break students out of the traditional role of passive learner and make education something they can experience.

To this end, a great deal of what Explore Academy will offer students will be *problem*-based learning (PBL) scenarios with the focus on student achievement through active problem solving and critical thinking (explained in section E.(2), Research).

A PBL philosophy emphasizes students working to pursue their “own” answers, all the while utilizing the three higher domains within Bloom’s Taxonomy (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation). These three components represent the basis for the determination of mastery for each student within each seminar.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES
EXIT EXAMS

The assessment system at Explore Academy has a built in track of short-cycle assessments (SCAs) to track student comprehension. Each seminar will conclude with an *exit exam*, analogous to a short-cycle assessment, and required to gain credit for the given seminar and its inclusive academic standards. These exit exams, numbering forty (40) per year per student (students will take 40 seminars per year), will better assess each student’s specific competency in *each* of the academic standards set forth by the Public Education Department.

The key difference between a typical SCA and the Explore Academy exit exams is that students will be required to demonstrate proficiency in each standard to pass the exit and exam *and* the exit exam will be required to gain credit. While the State is currently looking at implementing End-of-Course (EOC) Assessments as exit exams for traditional courses, the State, as of yet, does not mandate that a student must a) pass the EOC to earn credit *and* b) demonstrate proficiency for each standard to earn credit. As such, Explore Academy’s assessment system will provide far greater accountability and specificity in student achievement.

Each exit exam for a particular seminar will be common for all the different versions of seminars in which those particular standards are covered. Thus, different versions of a given seminar

which cover the same content, albeit through a different focus, will assess students on the same core foundational information.

Exit exams will dictate whether students receive credit for a given seminar. They will exist as the single summative component of each seminar, used for the purpose of awarding credit. As a result, any work performed throughout the duration of a given seminar (homework, quizzes, projects, etc.) will be exclusively *formative* in nature with a focus on providing constant feedback to the student, teacher, and parent(s) to continually measure student progress. This summative assessment model is analogous to what students will see in college, and is part of Explore Academy's preparation for college success.

The exit exam score will be reflective of direct comprehension of each standard. To this end, exit exams will provide the opportunity for students to prove both basic knowledge (basic comprehension questions) and advanced knowledge (mastery level questions) of the given standards.

Students will earn scores of 1-4 for each standard on the exit exam. The scoring system will range from 1 to 4:

- ~ 1: Not Meeting Standard (Low Proficiency)
- ~ 2: Partially Meets Standard (Nearing Proficiency)
- ~ 3: Meets Standard (Proficiency)
- ~ 4: Meets Standard with Distinction (Mastery)

Scoring will be based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains, which shows classification levels of intellectual behavior important for learning. Bloom's Taxonomy is shown below. Each level (descending) shows higher levels of intellectual understanding over a given topic.

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

- ~ Level 1: Knowledge/Remembering: can the student recall or remember the information?
- ~ Level 2: Comprehension/Understanding: can the student explain the ideas of concepts?
- ~ Level 3: Application/Applying: can the student use the information in a new way?
- ~ Level 4: Analysis/Analyzing: can the student distinguish between different parts?
- ~ Level 5: Evaluation/Evaluating: can the student justify a stand or decision?
- ~ Level 6: Synthesis/Creation: can the student create a new product or point of view?

To earn academic credit for a seminar, and all of its corresponding standards, a student must earn either a 3 or 4 for *each* standard within that seminar based on the standard-specific questions on the seminar's exit exam.

For students to earn the minimum credit for a given standard (score: 3), he or she will have to demonstrate understanding at Levels 1-3 within Bloom's Taxonomy. This level of comprehension is defined as *basic proficiency*. For students to earn a "4" for a given standard, he or she will have to demonstrate understanding at Levels 1-6 within Bloom's Taxonomy. This level of comprehension is defined as *mastery*.

Students failing to earn passing scores on *all* the included standards will be required to repeat the seminar. To emphasize this point, a student who earns *a 1 or 2 on any standard at the conclusion of a given seminar, no matter what their overall average score, must repeat that seminar.*

Each seminar's exit exam will cover, on average, eight to twelve academic standards. To test for each standard, to the extent described above, will require between 30-50 questions (averaging four questions per standard to determine proficiency or mastery), although exit exam sizes will vary based on the number of standards covered within that particular seminar.

Exit exams will be developed directly from the academic standards within the course, and it is thus assumed that students who achieve proficiency and/or mastery throughout the course will easily demonstrate that proficiency and/or mastery on the exit exam. Students who do not effectively display proficiency in *at least one* of standards within a given seminar, based on their exit exam scores for each standard, will repeat that seminar until such time that they demonstrate proficiency in all the required standards. In other words, to obtain credit, a given student must receive a score of at least "3" for each of the standards covered on the exit exam.

Those questions surrounding Bloom's Taxonomy Levels 1-3 will be more objective in nature, while those covering Levels 4-6 will be subjective in nature. While the composition of exit exams will be primarily based on written work (multiple choice, short answer, extended response, problem solving, etc.), a percentage of questions will employ other formats, although the specific extent to which alternative formats are used, and the specific formats that are utilized will depend on the seminar on which the exam is based. Alternative demonstrations of proficiency/mastery for standards within exit exams may include physical construction, design, demonstration of skills/technique, oral response, etc.

Exit exams will be developed by the first-year staff members during the Planning Year. It is vital that such exams, specifically those set to be administered at the conclusion of the first two academic terms, are ready for the first day of school.

Exit exams will be administered on the last day of each course. During that final day, students will take exit exams from each of their five classes. It is the goal that exit exams will not change from year to year, as it remains important that student cohorts from different school years are consistently assessed on the same material as one another. This goal, while ideal, may turn out to be unrealistic as academic standards continue to change.

Data from exit exams will be continually analyzed by the school's academic director, counselors, and teachers, both within content-specific professional learning communities and the school's Leadership Council. As analysis dictates, such as in the case of corrective action (see below), exit exams will be revisited and reassessed by the school's staff members (academic director, teachers) on an as-needed basis.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES
EXIT EXAMS – SCORE TRANSLATION

In order to establish a platform through which grades can be transferred between academic institutions (between high schools, high school to college), the numerical, standards-based grading system described above must be properly translated to the traditional letter grade system (A, B, C, D, F).

Numerical translation will take place using the earned standards' scores divided by the maximum standards' scores for all the standards that would fulfill the traditional course requirement.

For example: A student earns the following scores on the standards within a given course, based on his or exit exam: 3, 4, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 3. The earned score total is 36, out of a total possible score of 40. Dividing 36/40 calculates to 0.90, and thus translates to an A- (90%).

For high schools and universities requiring more traditional course grades, it will be necessary to combine standard scores for all relevant Explore Academy courses.

For example: for a typical high school biology class, which is composed of approximately 40 standards spread across seven (7) seminars, the course grade will be calculated (as shown above) from the scores of all 40 standards.

Given that a similar 1-4 scale is used for grade point average, GPA calculations for transcripts can be easily performed. In the above example, the specific student's GPA would be calculated based on the total score for all the standards (36) divided by the number of standards scored (10), thus computing $(36/10)$ to a GPA of 3.6.

Because of the sheer bulk of standards required at the high school level, a student's report card will only display scores for the standards earned in the seminars of the most recent academic term. For subsequent academic terms, a student's transcript will simply display a single score (the combined average score of the included standards) for seminars completed in past academic terms. A more detailed student record will be maintained, however, which does display all proficiency scores for all required standards.

In the event that a student fails a particular seminar by not demonstrating proficiency in at least one of the academic standards covered in that seminar, he or she will have to retake the seminar until such time that he or she can demonstrate proficiency in all the included standards. When a student retakes a seminar and earns a passing score for each academic standard, the scores for the included seminars will *replace* those earned from the previous attempt, erasing them from the student's academic record.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES
A HIGHER STANDARD

Courses at Explore Academy will have a higher standard for the earning of academic credit. New Mexico law requires grade averages of 60% for the earning of academic credit, yet this number does not accurately reflect true proficiency, which commonly has a minimal cutoff margin of 70%. To obtain academic credit, each student at Explore Academy must earn either a 3 or 4 (out of a possible 4), and thus demonstrate, at a minimum, 75% proficiency ($3/4 = 75\%$). Furthermore, students who earn scores of 1 or 2 for *any* standard, even if their overall exit exam score averages to a 3 or higher, have not showed *comprehensive* proficiency and will be required to repeat the seminar until proficiency in *all* the standards has been demonstrated.

While this might seem daunting to students and parents, it must be noted that each student will be focused on only five courses (seminars) per session, covering only a limited number of standards. In comparison to semester final exams within the traditional academic setting, in which students are assessed over, on average, *two hundred* or more standards, the divide-and-conquer system as described above is much less daunting in reality.

This Explore Academy model will better ensure that students show strong proficiency in the areas for which they will be assessed on the PARCC assessment, as well as providing a general assurance that students graduating high school *are certified as proficient in each of the standards required of them* by the State of New Mexico, an assurance that no other local academic model can truly provide.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES
COLLEGE FINANCIAL GUARANTEE

The Explore Academy program is focused in providing students the preparations they need to effectively transition to college. One particular aspect of the Explore Academy program, specifically the grading system mentioned above, is that all Explore Academy graduates will exit the school with a minimum GPA of 3.0 (B average).

This guarantee stems from the fact that all students are required to demonstrate, at a minimum, basic proficiency in each academic standard required by the State of New Mexico, translating to an average exit exam score of, at a minimum, 3 out of 4. Because the school's grade point average calculation is based on the same 4-point scale (see above), any student who graduates Explore Academy will do so with a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 (compare this to the traditional grading system where high school students can graduate a minimum cumulative GPA of 1.0, a D average, well below what is considered proficient by academic standards).

For those graduates planning to attend a New Mexico university, this is critically important as they will be provided guaranteed eligibility for the New Mexico Lottery Scholarship, providing them free tuition for up to eight college semesters. Thus, all Explore Academy graduates will have earned the opportunity to receive a local college education *free of tuition costs*.

G.(2) Provide an explanation of how these methods/strategies are effective with your target population.

Explore Academy seeks students who are serious in their preparation for college and have a desire and willingness to challenge themselves and explore their potential. Explore Academy is a public school and as such it will accept all students who are interested in this pursuit, regardless of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or any other specific condition.

The above represents the Explore Academy target population. It does not specify ethnicity, academic experience, or socioeconomic subgroup; it applies to all students. While charter schools have often been mischaracterized as drawing only the strongest of students away from the local public school systems, Explore Academy's philosophy strives to appeal to any student, regardless of his or her specific condition. As described above (Executive Summary), the Albuquerque Public School system provides more effective college-preparation opportunities to those students in specific geographic regions around the city, or to those students with strong academic backgrounds; thus, there exists a considerable need for additional academic institutions to provide the remaining students a place where they can pursue their future goals in higher education.

College preparation aside, Explore Academy will fill a need that is not found within any school around the state (or nation, for that matter): the need for each student to have control in his or her own educational pathway, so that each student, regardless of their background will find a place at Explore Academy because it is designed to fit the needs of all students, individually. As the current local area school models demonstrate, no student is provided a choice in how they learn *every step of the way*.

The school's focus is broad because it can be. The research on which the Explore Academy model is based applies not simply to education, but to the basic human condition, specifically the need for one to control his or her own future. The philosophical concept is simple: where one has choice, one finds the most success. Because of this, a choice-based education applies to all students, regardless of distinction.

The strength of the Explore Academy is that its program satisfies the needs of any population, because it works at the level of the individual. As such, specifically those in areas of great diversity, as seen within the greater Albuquerque community, it has the potential to succeed where other focused educational philosophies will/have not.

To avoid misconception, this point must be clear: at Explore Academy, there is not simply one educational model but rather a foundation on which a student can construct his or her own educational pathway. By giving students the chance to develop their own curricular design, based on their interests and modal aptitudes, each student, regardless of his or her background, will *not be constrained* within the framework of a “one size fits all” educational system. What students make for themselves is an educational pathway unique *to the individual*, and as such, it provides education at the personal level, working for the person with no regard of who that person is or from what background he or she has stepped forth.

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

G.(3) Describe how the instruction will be differentiated based on identified student needs. Provide specific examples.

The approach of differentiated instruction is not merely a component of Explore Academy’s academic philosophy, it is the core component. The basic premise works to take a course and divide it into different versions, each of which comes to possess a different emphasis. Students will choose the emphasis that best fits their academic strengths or interests, and will thus result in greater student commitment and more effective student learning.

Another example, which contrasts interest and motivation in two particular students, may further help clarify. Take, for instance, the Genetic Inheritance seminar within the science curriculum (see Appendix A).

Consider two students: Student A and Student B.

Student A is interested in reading and writing and has no interest in science, while Student B is driven in all things scientific. Both are required to fulfill the science academic standards and thus both students would ordinarily be placed in the same class in a traditional academic setting, with the hope that each discovers enough interest and motivation to become proficient in the standards.

Only at Explore Academy would these two students have the freedom for academic choice and thus provide for themselves a better opportunity for academic success. Student A, having no interest in science, can choose to fulfill the standards by taking a seminar-version that deals with genetics in science fiction literature, learning the required principles through reading and writing using genetic

principles. Student B, on the other hand, can choose the more *scientific* pathway, selecting the seminar-version which offers a more hands-on approach in genetic experimentation.

An outside observer would find both students learning the same concepts, albeit through two different perspectives. This observer would see Student A learning how he or she loves best, through reading and writing, and formulating connections between his or her interest and the subject at hand. Student B would be observed performing real, hands-on breeding experiments with mutant fruit flies, thus gaining valuable experience in the academic field in which he or she is most driven. Both achieve the same result: comprehension of the required standards; yet each achieved that result through different means and in a manner that not only played to their strengths and interests, but one that provided for better long-term retention of that knowledge.

If the goal of an educational institution is to provide each student with the best opportunity to achieve the desired academic outcomes, then the advantages of this choice-based academic system becomes clear. And while it is impossible to offer every content area in a way that is specifically tailored to every individual (such a system would drown in its own diversity), the system mentioned within this application will present students with several distinct options, providing each student with a *significantly better* chance of success through the power of academic choice. Such a model, *systemic* in its origin, provides a greater inherent advantage over any individual teaching strategy.

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

STUDENT VOICES

One feature of the Explore Academy curriculum is its ability to evolve each year through the replacement of ineffective or unpopular seminar-versions. While the seminar structure in place will be established during the Planning Year, and will remain fixed, the *versions* of each seminar are fluid and can be reinvented as needed (discussed more below).

One driving force behind this reinvention is student interest and satisfaction. As students complete their exit exams, at the conclusion of an academic term, they will take a brief survey to rate their satisfaction with the versions of seminars in which they are currently enrolled (see Section D, Goals Related to the School's Mission, above). Data from this feedback, along with the academic achievement data from that seminar-version, will be used in the assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of that seminar-version.

Aside from simple feedback submission, these exit surveys can also be used as a platform for students to propose or suggest alternative versions for that seminar. These ideas will be considered by the school's Leadership Council (discussed below) and evaluated with the academic data from the seminar-version in question. If such suggestions prove fruitful, the proposing student(s) in question will be invited to attend a future Leadership Council meeting to propose a change to the versions of the seminar(s) offered to future students.

Leadership Council meetings will be held twice per month and will be open to any member of the public to attend (students, parents, etc.). While the above scenario represents a response to an exit survey taking at the completion of an academic term, any student or parent may attend a Leadership Council meeting at any time and propose new and innovative ideas for the school's future curriculum. While it is the inaugural group of teachers that initially develops the school's seminar offerings, once the school opens its doors it is the students that become a primary driving force behind the future of the curricular innovation. The focus is on maintaining student interest, year after year, and the mechanism described above allows the school's curriculum to identify and respond to student needs.

The Explore Academy system, both concise and diverse in its educational focus, has nothing but advantages in terms of future adaptability. As some seminar-versions will no doubt be less popular than others, or if a given seminar-version is found to be ineffective in its instructional approach, new versions can be easily formulated each year to continually offer new ways for students to learn. As the school's population changes over the years, as a reflection of society, seminar-versions can easily change to adapt. As such, Explore Academy is built to keep up with the changing educational environment because it is fluid and possesses a curriculum that can evolve.

H. SPECIAL POPULATIONS

SPECIAL EDUCATION

H.(1)(a) Explain the practices and strategies the school will employ to provide a continuum of services, and ensure students' access to the general education curriculum.

The succinct nature of classes, combined with the diversity of personalized course selection, will create an inherent advantage in achieving educational success because each student will possess the ability to choose in what manner he or she would like to learn. Regardless of students classified as requiring “special needs”, the entire system is designed to help *every* student find the educational path best suited to his or her strengths and interests.

That being said, for those students with the documented need for modifications, Explore Academy will comply with all laws set forth under IDEA for students possessing either a 504 or Individual Education Plan (IEP), and will provide the least restrictive environment for all students with disabilities.

The special education philosophy implemented at Explore Academy will be based on the practice of “full inclusion”, in which students with special needs are incorporated into the general education classroom with support provided. It is the goal of Explore Academy to provide all students with the same educational choices and opportunities, regardless of any additional assistance they may require. That being said, all Explore Academy students, regardless of condition, will be held under the same expectations. While the school will provide access to all materials needed to modify its curriculum to accommodate the needs of any given student, *it will not enable students* by lowering expectations.

Special education students will be assisted by all Explore Academy staff members, but will be specifically managed by the school’s special education staff. The special education staff will monitor the progress of the students on their caseloads, and will provide them with special education services as determined through their IEP and special education level (see Table H1a).

TABLE H1A – SPECIAL EDUCATION STAFF FTE

SPECIAL EDUCATION LEVEL	FTE CALCULATIONS
A level (minimum) student (receives sp ed service for 10% of the school day or less)	1/35 or .029 FTE
B level (moderate) student (receives sp ed service 11-49% of the school day)	1/24 or .042 FTE
C level (extensive) student (receives sp ed service 50% or more of the school day)	1/15 or .067 FTE
D level (maximum) student (receives sp ed service 100% of the school day)	1/8 or .125 FTE

Explore Academy teachers will adjust their instruction to support the needs of those students requiring specific modifications and accommodations. In the development of the school's curriculum, each teacher will be prepared for special education students in each of his or her classes, and will create any and all required ancillary materials (typed notes, for example) for all instruction that is provided, be it verbal or otherwise. Because Explore Academy will put an emphasis on learning, and not grading as a token of achievement, all students, including those with special needs, will be given more flexibility to move at their own pace, within the limit of the 22-day course, to work through the course content.

The shortness of Explore Academy courses (22 days), also benefits students with special needs because it relies on focused instruction in one particular area, and will thus lessen the amount of content covered, making it more manageable for students. Because students are assessed specifically over information within the 22-day timeframe, this does nothing but assist students in focusing their attention on the information at hand instead of forcing them to review knowledge from separate content areas in preparation for a comprehensive final exam as seen in the semester-based educational model. In addition, because seminars will average seventeen (17) students, there will exist ample time for teachers to work closely with those students who may require more personalized attention.

The special education teachers themselves will operate under a rotation, per their own design based on the schedules and needs of the students in their caseloads, to move in and out of classrooms throughout the day to monitor and assist students as well as to communicate with teachers regarding levels of student progress. This will constitute the majority of the special education teacher's role.

The school will provide a resource room for special education students to work during class or academic flex time as needed. When not in class with students, special education teachers will reside in this area to work with students who may come to receive individualized attention.

The academic flex period, built into the school day for purposes of providing additional supplemental time, serves a function for all students, but will specifically benefit those special education students who may require extended time and additional attention. As mentioned, this time can be utilized by special education staff to assign tutoring services to students who need additional guidance in a specific subject area, and as such, it will prove a significant benefit for the special needs student population.

SPECIAL EDUCATION
SEMINAR-VERSION RECOMMENDATIONS

Explore Academy's curriculum places no restriction on any student, and will allow any student to enroll in the specific version of a given seminar in which he or she is most interested. However, in the case of the school's special education population, specific versions of seminars will be highlighted as recommended for students with specific needs, such as those which provide more hands-on learning or incorporate less intensive reading and writing practices.

It should be noted that there will *not* exist *special education seminars*, nor versions of seminars that are designed for special education students. Both methods would work against the school's philosophy of full inclusion. It should be further noted that the rigor of the versions offered for a given seminar will be parallel one another, as they all work to achieve the same end result, however the methods employed by a specific seminar-version will provide students with specific modifications greater chances of success. Because special education students vary considerably in their educational needs and modifications, specific versions may prove a better fit for a specific special education student, but not for another. The school's special education and counseling staff will continuously work with the school's teaching staff to identify versions of seminars which may provide greater success for students requiring specific modifications. Such recommendations will be provided to students and parents during the registration process by the school's counseling staff.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

H.(1)(b) Describe how the school will regularly evaluate and monitor the progress and success of special education students to ensure the attainment of each student's goals set forth in their IEPs.

Progress of special education students will be monitored continuously. Special education teachers, in collaboration with general education teachers, will continuously evaluate the progress of special education students in preparation for exit exams. Using continuous formative assessments (both formal (homework, projects, quizzes, etc.) and informal) provided within the duration of the seminar, both the special and general education teachers will have insight into the progress of each student, and can work to modify and adjust instructional methods based on the identified needs of any individual student.

It will be the duty of the special education teacher to provide general education teachers with the required modifications for each student. It will then become a partnership between both teachers to determine the best practices for implementing said modifications as well as monitoring their effectiveness and adjusting the instructional approach accordingly.

At the conclusion of each school year, the special education teachers will collaborate to provide the school's principal and academic director with a report which summarizes the achievement of the special education population, including those seminars (and the versions of those seminars) that showed both above and below-average exit exam scores. These reports will also be provided to counselors for consideration when guiding students through the course registration process.

Each year, the special education teacher will meet with the students and parents from his or her caseload to evaluate the student's performance, assess the student's IEP and the effectiveness of the described modifications, and evaluate if modification to the IEP is necessary.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

H.(1)(c) If applicable, describe the school's plan for graduating students with special education needs.

It is the goal of Explore Academy to graduate all students, regardless of condition, within a four-year time period. For those students who require additional time to fulfill the required graduation credits, Explore Academy will provide continuing education until such time that they can complete their required coursework.

Special education students can take advantage of many of the benefits of the Explore Academy model, including:

- Choice in every course (seminar) in which they enroll, allowing each student to pursue those areas where he or she has interest and/or academic strength
- Two open academic flex periods, per day, totaling over two hours in length, to be used for remediation, additional studying time, collaboration, or credit recovery purposes as needed
- Ongoing assistance and support from teachers (general education and special education), counselors, and student mentors.
- Shorter and more concise periods of study, allowing for more focused instruction

These features of Explore Academy's academic model will provide all students with greater advantage in achieving academic success, but will more specifically provide a system of increased opportunities to those students with special needs than what they would find in a traditional educational environment.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

H.(1)(d) Describe the school's plan for budgeting and staffing for meeting the identified needs and educational plans for students needing special education support/services. Include how the school plans to provide ancillary staff support.

Assuming a 10% proportion of the student body needing modifications in some manner, Explore Academy is planning on hiring one special education staff member in its first year, with an additional second special education staff member beginning in School Year 2. This expectation is, of course, contingent upon the student population itself.

As seen in the revisited table below, special education FTE will depend on the specific levels of its special education student population.

SPECIAL EDUCATION LEVEL	FTE CALCULATIONS
A level (minimum) student (receives sp ed service for 10% of the school day or less)	1/35 or .029 FTE
B level (moderate) student (receives sp ed service 11-49% of the school day)	1/24 or .042 FTE
C level (extensive) student (receives sp ed service 50% or more of the school day)	1/15 or .067 FTE
D level (maximum) student (receives sp ed service 100% of the school day)	1/8 or .125 FTE

As an example, and based on the FTE information provided in the table above, a special education enrollment of ten Level A (0.029 FTE), ten Level B (0.042 FTE) and five Level C (0.067 FTE) students (25 total) would require one special education staff member.

It is possible that students requiring such services may exceed the need for two teachers. In the case where teacher FTE exceeds the legally accepted values for student-teacher caseload ratio, additional hiring for staff will be necessary.

SPECIAL EDUCATION ANCILLARY STAFFING

In order to adhere to state and federal special education requirements, specific ancillary staff members will be contracted through Cooperative Educational Services (CES) to perform duties in assessing and/or assisting students requiring such services as specified in their IEP. Such professionals include but would not be limited to a school psychologist, diagnostician, audiologist, speech/language therapist, ELL specialists/translators, social worker, occupational therapist, etc. These positions are described in further detail in the application's Business Plan section.

The following information, also found in the Business Plan, notes the projected need for ancillary staffing service:

- ~ *School Year 1:* one service provider needed, one and a half (1.5) hours per day for the entire school year (176 days)
- ~ *School Year 2:* one service provider needed, two (2) hours per day for the entire school year
- ~ *School Year 3, 4, 5:* one service provider needed, three (3) hours per day for the entire school year

H.(2) Describe how the school will serve, evaluate, and monitor the progress and success of students with Section 504 Plans.

Any student with modifications, as indicated in a 504 plan, will be provided with the necessary modifications as required by law. Because special education teachers will work closely with students and teachers to both provide and evaluate the success of specific modifications, they will be able to constantly monitor the progress of all students for whom there exists educational modifications. Special education teachers will document the progress of each student on his or her caseload throughout each academic term (22-days in length). This documentation will serve to identify and address areas of success or concern, and how such areas can provide a basis for continued success or remediation in future academic terms.

As such, the monitoring of students who have documented modifications will be continuous and ongoing, and will thus be proactive in nature.

The special education staff will hold annual meetings with each student and his or her family to assess the student's progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the 504 plan.

H.(3)(a) Explain how the school will identify English Language Learners.

The ACCESS for ELL placement test is used in New Mexico to determine the language proficiency level of a given student. It assesses the four domains of English language acquisition: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

During the registration process (June prior to the upcoming school year), the school counseling staff member(s) will administer the ACCESS placement exam to students who have identified themselves as English language learners, based on a submitted student information packet required of all students prior to registration.

Based on their performance on the ACCESS exam, ELL students will be categorized, based on their proficiency, as: Entering (Level 1), Emerging (L2), Developing (L3), Expanding (L4), or Bridging (L5). These specific levels, and their corresponding performance indicators, are shown below:

LEVEL	PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTOR
Level 1 Entering	Pictorial or graphic representation of the language of the content areas Words, phrases, or chunks of language when presented one-step commands, directions, WH-, choice, yes/no questions, or statements with sensory, graphic, or interactive support
Level 2 Emerging	General language related to the content areas Phrases or short sentences Oral or written language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that may impede the meaning of the communication when presented with one to multiple-step commands, directions, questions, or a series of statements with sensory or interactive support
Level 3 Developing	General and some specific language related to the content areas Expanded sentences in oral interaction or written paragraphs Oral or written language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that may impede the communication, but retain much of its meaning, when presented with oral or written, narrative, or expository descriptions with sensory, graphic, or interactive support
Level 4 Expanding	Specific and some technical language of the content areas A variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in oral discourse or multiple, related sentence or paragraphs Oral or written language with minimal phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that do not impede the overall meaning of the communication when presented with oral or written connected discourse with sensory, graphic, or interactive support
Level 5 Bridging	Specialized or technical language of the content areas A variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in extended oral or written discourse, including stories, essays, or reports Oral or written language approaching comparability to that of English –proficient peers when presented with grade-level material

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELLs)

H.(3)(b) Explain how the school will provide services/supports to identified students.

Explore Academy invites any student who seeks a college future for him or herself to enroll, and as such, will make any and all accommodations for students who require English language assistance. The level of assistance will of course depend on the individual student, based on the proficiency levels (Levels 1 to 5) as described in the previous section. As such, the level of required staffing will be dependent on the enrolled student population within any given year, and thus the specific service requirements cannot be predicted.

At a minimal level, depending on the needs of its students, Explore Academy will contract with ELL teachers/specialists or translators through Cooperative Educational Services to fulfill the needs of its ELL student population; at a more significant level there may exist a need to hire a part or full-time ELL staff member, or perhaps, depending on the special education population, a staff member dual-certified in special education and ESL/ELL instruction to serve both populations if each exists at smaller levels. As the enrollment projections for the school solidify during the Planning Year, the specific needs for these services will become clear.

Services for ELL/ESL students will be similar to those provided for special education students and because instructional modifications for special education are similar if not identical in many ways to ELL/ESL, the school's special education staff member(s) and ESL/ELL staff member(s) will work collaboratively.

It will be the responsibility of the school's ESL/ELL coordinator(s) to ensure that each student is receiving the necessary assistance based on their English language proficiency. Similar to special education, students who require additional assistance, in the opinion of the ELL staff member, may be assigned to tutoring based on their needs and/or may receive peer mentoring (see below) as necessary.

The ELL staff member will work with students in and out of the classroom, visiting students throughout the day as needed, communicating with teaching staff, and holding open office sessions in the school's resource room for students who need additional assistance during their academic flex periods.

Just as in the case of special education, academic progress of ELL students will be monitored continuously. The ELL staff member will work in collaboration with general education teachers to continuously evaluate the progress of students in preparation for exit exams. Using continuous formative assessments (both formal (homework, projects, quizzes, etc.) and informal) provided within the duration of the seminar, both the ELL staff member and general education teachers will have insight into the progress of each student, and can work to modify and adjust instructional methods based on the identified needs of any individual student.

It will be the duty of the ELL staff member to provide general education teachers with ELL/ESL language assessment level of each student as well as recommended modifications that will enable the teacher to provide modified instruction for each student. It will then become a partnership between

both teachers to determine the best practices for implementing said modifications as well as monitoring their effectiveness and adjusting the instructional approach accordingly.

At the conclusion of each school year, the ELL staff member will provide the school's principal and academic director with a report which summarizes the achievement of the school's ELL/ESL population, including those seminars (and the versions of those seminars) that showed both above and below-average exit exam scores. These reports will also be provided to counselors for consideration when guiding students through the course registration process.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS
PEER MENTORING

As previously stated, peer mentoring will play a significant role in student learning, and the benefits of this design will reach into the future ESL/ELL populations. Explore Academy plans to utilize two major groups of students to work cooperatively with its staff in addressing the needs of its ESL/ELL population.

The first group consists of those students who had previously exited from ESL/ELL programs at the elementary or middle school level, or are otherwise bilingual, and can now fulfill their academic service requirement by assisting those students still in the program. The level of this assistance will vary, based on the needs of the student in question, but will range from direct assistance within the classroom to tutoring sessions held during the student's academic flex time.

The second group consists of students currently enrolled in the linguistics degree program (see the list of degree programs, section II.F.(3)). These students could perform similar functions to those mentioned above, all the while developing their skills in their area of passion: language.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELL)

**H.(3)(c) Describe how the instruction will be differentiated based on identified student needs.
Provide specific examples.**

ELL instruction will provide modifications for students as required. Such services will begin with the registration process, where students will be guided through the selection of seminars and the versions of said seminars that are most appropriate. In a manner similar to the full-inclusion special education model as described above, there will not exist specific ESL/ELL seminar-versions, however, counselors and the ELL staff member(s) will be able to provide recommendations on which versions of

seminars ELL students should choose based on their proficiency level. Some versions of seminars will no doubt provide more successful basic accommodations for ELL students than others (more hands-on work, less direction instruction (lecture), less intensive reading requirements, etc.), and it will be these versions to which counselors will provide their guidance in the registration process.

An example will help clarify. Suppose that two versions of a given seminar exist, one which is based primarily on reading of various texts (journals, magazines, novels) and one which is largely hands-on and project oriented. Such versions could easily occur within a science curriculum (among others). A counselor who was guiding an ELL student in the registration process would read the course descriptions (perhaps involving teachers in the discussion to provide further insight) and determine that the least language-intensive version of the course would be the one in which the student can learn through the hands-on modality. Not that exposure to the English language would be absent, given that the work required be based in English, but the intensity and dependence on language ability would differ between seminar-versions and would thus assist those students who are in the process of learning the English language.

After the registration process, as students enroll in classes, modifications will continue. Within a given course, it will be the collaborative effort between both the ELL specialist/teacher and general education teacher to provide in-class accommodations, similar to what would be provided to special education students except with specific modifications in the areas of language. Such modifications would include but would not be limited to materials provided in two languages (English and the primary language), increased use of images or diagrams during instruction, written copies of notes, modifications to assessments, extended time on assignments, etc.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELL)

H.(3)(d) Describe how the school will regularly evaluate and monitor the progress and success of English Language Learners?

In a manner similar to special education (described above), the ELL specialist/teacher will officially document student progress throughout each academic term. This documentation, the progress or lack thereof shown within, will provide guidance for remediation (tutoring, peer mentoring, etc.) or continued success within the context of future courses. Any remediation efforts will be implemented based on the ELL staff member's recommendation and/or student request.

Within the courses of a given term, the ELL specialist/teacher will work closely with general

education teachers in assisting ELL students, helping create modifications, etc., and as a result, will continually be evaluating the progress of the ELL population.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELL)

H.(3)(e) Describe how the school plans to budget and staff itself to meet the needs of ELL students.

Given that the Albuquerque school district shows a 9.3% ELL/ESL population, it is estimated that the school will need to hire one staff member as its ELL/ESL specialist. The Explore Academy budget designates for this position with 1.0 FTE. This projection will be adjusted accordingly as the school's enrollments its student population.

I. ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

I.(1) Identify what measure(s) you will use to indicate your students are making academic progress and the grade levels at which the assessment(s) will be used with an anticipated schedule or frequency of assessing. Ensure that you consider the common core standards, the state-mandated PARCC and SBA, your targeted student population, and how you plan to use the assessments to inform instruction

Explore Academy will implement an assessment model which will hold students accountable for each academic standard required by the State. Students will demonstrate specific proficiency in every academic standard contained within a given seminar, reflected by their exit exam scores, to earn credit for the seminar and its associated standards. Exit exams will be administered for each seminar at the conclusion of each academic term (five seminars per academic term, eight academic terms per year).

It will be these exit exams that will chart student proficiency and prepare them for the State's proficiency assessments (PARCC). Students who fail to demonstrate proficiency will be identified for remediation (see below, section I.(2)). As these students enter the remediation process, which includes tutoring and credit recovery components, students will be assisted in those areas in which they failed to demonstrate proficiency. Subsequent exit exams, at the completion of the remediation process, will be used to chart student progress in the remediation process.

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

ASSESSMENTS – FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

While the exit exam exists as the primary assessment for credit determination, each teacher will use formative assessment techniques throughout each course to measure student progress and identify areas of concern for individual students.

Every teacher will utilize classroom response systems (CRS, or "clickers") for polling, surveying, and formative quizzing throughout the scope of a given seminar, and will function as a standardized form of assessment within each seminar. With the immediate data analysis and feedback features of the CRS, both teachers and students can immediately and comprehensively identify specific areas of

misconception and/or deficiency for both groups of students and individuals. This process will allow teachers to adjust instruction quickly and specifically as needed within the scope of a given seminar.

Aside from the exit exams, all forms of assessment *within the duration of a given seminar* will be formative in nature, designed to provide feedback in the learning process. Such formats will vary dependent on the seminar-version, but can include but are not limited to: projects, presentations, simulations, debates, practice problems, additional quizzing, etc. The data from these assessments will allow students, parents, and of course teachers to chart and monitor each student's progress prior to the time of the summative exit exam.

As previously mentioned, the Explore Academy perspective on learning considers it a process rather than an end in of itself. Within the scope of each 22-day seminar, students will make progress in achieving the goals designed within that seminar, and the formative assessment model described above will allow teachers to effectively guide each student in his or her preparation for the seminar's exit exam.

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY
ASSESSMENTS – INFORMING INSTRUCTION

Assessments at Explore Academy are designed to specifically inform instruction. There are two components to this design: seminar-level and school-level adjustments.

The model of formative assessment described above will assist teachers in modifying their instruction throughout the course of each seminar based on how individual students progress throughout each seminar. Because Explore Academy seminar class sizes will average seventeen (17) students, teachers will have the ability to provide students with more individualized attention to ensure that instructional adjustments (additional assistance, assigning to tutoring, etc.) can be incorporated as needed to ensure that all students will be ready for the exit exam at the conclusion of the seminar.

At the school level, exit exams are vital in measuring the effectiveness of the school's instructional diversity, specifically the different versions of a given seminar. Because students taking different versions of the same seminar will all take the same common exit exam at the end of the academic term, seminar-versions can be compared to one another in overall instructional effectiveness. The goal of the Explore Academy differentiated curriculum to provide options for students in customizing their education, however these options must not only be attractive for students (to make students choose them to pursue their education) but they must also prove to be instructionally effective.

Exit exam scores between different versions of each seminar will be reviewed at the conclusion of each year by the school's academic director, department heads, and teachers to compare the effectiveness of each version. Those versions which are deemed less effective based on the data analysis performed will be reevaluated for the following school year. Such reevaluation may include instructional adjustments within the ineffective seminar-version or the replacement of seminar-version with a new approach. This continuous evaluation of its curriculum is a hallmark of the dynamic and evolving curriculum Explore Academy has to offer (seminar evaluation is mentioned in further detail below).

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY
ASSESSMENTS – STATE-MANDATED EXAMS

The PARCC assessment will provide the school with guidance on the overall effectiveness of its instructional program. Given the higher levels of instructional specificity inherent in the Explore Academy model, the school can specifically address and adjust instruction in those areas which show lower levels of proficiency based on student scores on the PARCC exam. This will benefit all students, at all grade levels, as they prepare for the PARCC exam.

Furthermore, since both 10th and 11th grade students will take the PARCC exam (although only 11th grade student scores count for graduation certification), the school can utilize 10th grade student exam data to help prepare those students for the exam in their 11th grade year. This data can significantly benefit and specifically influence the three PARCC exam review seminars required of each 11th grader in the spring of their junior year prior to taking the PARCC.

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY
ASSESSMENTS – COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS

Practice SAT and ACT tests will be administered (outside of the instructional day) continuously throughout the course of a given school year. Seminar offerings will exist for SAT/ACT preparation to ensure that students may work on improving their scores on these college entrance tests. Each student at the Explore Academy will be required to take at least one seminar of SAT/ACT test preparation (see graduation requirements).

As previously mentioned, the University of New Mexico uses an ACT score of 18 in both the areas of English and math to determine the need for developmental classes for college freshmen. Overall composite scores, such as the composite ACT score, will be utilized to drive instruction in the

area of college readiness.

This will occur specifically using the specific college readiness benchmarks (supplied by both the ACT and SAT testing companies) for which Explore Academy students may show lower proficiency levels, and thus such data analysis can provide for instructional adjustments not only in the SAT/ACT preparation seminar, but in those seminars in which the specific benchmarks are aligned.

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

I.(2) Describe the corrective actions the school will take if it falls short of achieving student academic achievement expectations or goals at the individual (remediation/at-risk students) AND school-wide levels. Explain what would trigger such corrective actions. Who would be responsible for implementing them, and how the school will assess their effectiveness?

Corrective action will be data-driven and will be assessed at the conclusion of each academic term (every twenty-two school days). As exit exam scores are compiled at the end of each term, the academic director will perform data analysis to determine the need for corrective action. There are three components in the Explore Academy corrective action plan: remediation, credit recovery, and seminar evaluation.

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

CORRECTIVE ACTION - REMEDIATION

Explore Academy will promote the notion that learning and comprehension can *always* be improved, and that these elements are *continuous processes* rather than finite objectives. Every student has areas in which he or she is challenged, and thus remediation emerges through a continuous, personal reflection of learning rather than a consequence of failure. This facet is central to the Explore Academy philosophy.

The school's schedule structure mentioned above (and displayed below) allows for built-in remediation time during the course of every school day within the academic flex periods. This remediation mechanism will be implemented immediately, as it will be part of the school day, so as to allow students to use the time as needed for any academic purpose, including but not limited to tutoring, homework, enrichment, study sessions, make-up work, extended teaching time, extended

work time (projects, labs), parents-teacher conferences, etc. Remediation will be part of the *daily instructional process*.

Given that the academic flex periods are built into each student's daily schedule (one which will be partially used for lunch), a student could potentially devote one flex period to each class within the scope of a full five-day week. Additionally, this time can help fulfill any additional need or modification for special education or ESL/ELL students, including extra instructional explanation, time in the school's resource room, extra work time, student-teacher review, etc.

Tutoring can be assigned at any point within the scope of an academic term by a student's current teacher. Such assignments will be specific, with the teacher utilizing a tutoring assignment card to identify, for the tutor and the dean of students (who oversees the tutoring process), the precise area(s) in which the student shall receive additional assistance. Once the tutor feels the student has reached the specified goal, he or she will validate the tutoring session as complete and return the assignment card to the dean of students, who will then contact the teacher.

Tutoring assistance may be assigned for an entire academic term based on student performance from the previous term. At the conclusion of each academic term, those students who have fallen into the lowest 25% demographic for two consecutive academic terms will be assigned to tutoring in the academic area(s) in which they showed deficiency during the previous academic term. Tutoring services will be determined based on exit exam score analysis, performed by the school's academic director. Once it has been determined which students require tutoring in which areas, the dean of students will assign those students to their tutors, determine an appropriate schedule for tutoring frequency, and manage the tutoring appointments.

For those students overseen by a case manager, either those under a 504/IEP or those identified as ESL/ELL, tutoring may be assigned on an individual basis based on the recommendation of the case manager.

As a further analysis mechanism, the school's counseling staff will perform their own assessment at the conclusion of each academic term. This process will exist to look for those students who may be having difficulty but go unidentified as they may not score into the lowest 25% subpopulation for two consecutive terms.

At the conclusion of each academic term, counselors will perform an analysis on each grade level to look for those students who:

- Have fallen into the lowest 25% subgroup more than once in the last eight (8) academic terms
- Scored in the lowest 40% for two consecutive terms

These students will be flagged for academic counseling to determine if any remediation efforts should be implemented. In the Explore Academy system, one with greater focus on student comprehension, this intervention can occur in a timely and thus more effective manner.

Such preliminary corrective actions could additionally include testing to determine student learning styles (and thus suitable seminar-versions with a better potential fit), recommendation for alternate seminar-versions using different strategies, lessons on better study habits, etc. With the inclusion of the academic flex period, a specified time for remediation can take place each day, and thus such measures become more proactive than reactive in nature. The specific mechanism of remediation, if required, will be considered on an individual basis for each student and will be implemented at the discretion of the counselors.

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY
CORRECTIVE ACTION - CREDIT RECOVERY

Based on the data analysis (above) process at the conclusion of each academic term, those students who fail a seminar will be identified by the school's academic director and counseling staff. Within the first week at the beginning of the new academic term, counselors will meet with each student in his or her academic flex time to determine a plan in resolving the issue of lost credit.

Explore Academy's schedule provides a convenient path toward credit recovery, having minimal negative impact on the student. The Explore Academy graduation requirements build in "open seminars" which can be used for credit recovery. The proposed graduation requirements mandate 151 total seminar credits out of a possible 160 seminars (40 seminars per year, 4 years). This difference of nine (9) seminars (almost two full academic terms) allows students a buffer in which credit recovery can easily occur without alteration of their four-year academic plan. (It should be noted that Albuquerque public high schools currently require 25 credits (out of 28) on the traditional semester schedule, allowing only three (3) opportunities for credit recovery)

At the time of meeting with the student, the counselor will discuss this credit recovery option, examine future seminar offerings that would fulfill the missed credit, and register that student for a future version of the seminar in question.

A second option available to students is to register for a sixth seminar in a future academic term, thereby making up for lost credit. This allowance is made possible by the two academic flex periods built into each student's schedule, one of which can be "dropped" and replaced by a seminar within a future academic term. A student in such a scenario would take six (6) seminars within the academic term instead of the standard five. This is the only circumstance in which students will be allowed to take more than five (5) seminars per academic term. Because this option may put undue workload and stress on the student, by both adding an additional class *and* removing academic assistance time from the daily schedule, it will be considered as a second option to the method stated above.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the counselor will provide certification to the school's administrator and academic director that a plan for corrective action has been discussed *and* implemented.

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

CORRECTIVE ACTION - SEMINAR EVALUATION

At the conclusion of each school year, each seminar-version will be analyzed for instructional patterns that raise concern, specifically low exit exam scores within a seminar-version or across a seminar itself. Such an instance will dictate a required corrective action on the part of the academic director.

Low exit exam scores or high failure rate *within a given seminar-version* would be indicative of an ineffective seminar-version, the specific causal factors of which may include its academic approach, instructional theme, or other general academic practices. The ineffectiveness may also have instructor-related causation, relating to the instructor him/herself or a specific component of that instructor's educational approach, be it lecturing, classroom management, etc.

Low scores on exit exams seen across *all versions* of a given seminar would indicate an issue with the overall instruction of the seminar, perhaps including the exit exam itself as it is shared by all versions of a given seminar. If such patterns come to exist, the school's academic director will work with the instructors to help identify and evaluate in what area(s) the instructional process has become ineffective. Student evaluation surveys, performed at the conclusion of each seminar, will provide additional insight into this process. If such a problem persists in subsequent academic sessions, administrative corrective action will be taken to change the offerings for the versions for the seminar(s) in question. This process may include both student and parent participation (as mentioned above).

It is expected that some seminar-versions will naturally be more popular and more successful than others, and the continuous evaluation of the versions offered to students will be an ongoing process in the school's evolution and will be a significant component in the work of the school's Leadership Council. This element of the Explore Academy model allows its curriculum to change and remain current within its student population. To this end, it is the goal to continually work to find versions that meet students' satisfaction levels.

As mentioned above, the benefits of the seminar system allow for the real-time, seamless reinvention of new versions of any given seminar each year. Through a continuous analysis over which seminars are providing greatest student success, the school can easily adapt to reinvent/replace those seminars which struggle to educate students. This continuous evolution is but one benefit of the Explore Academy philosophy, allowing the curriculum to truly evolve and continually keep up with its changing student population.

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

CORRECTIVE ACTION - PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

Explore Academy's short-course (22-day) model of instruction has an inherent safeguard against long-term failure. With shorter, more precise measurements inherently built into and at the end of each course, teachers and parents will receive immediate feedback on where students are failing to meet proficiency. This allows for more efficient corrective action against student failure, since the areas of student failure can be more specifically determined and thus more accurately remedied.

The ease with which students can repeat failed seminars (instead of failed *semesters*) will aid in allowing students to make up credit, and thus deter the high risk of student drop-out that is associated with failed classes under the semester-based system (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). The academic flex period (above) additionally aids in the prevention of student failure as it provides a time specifically devoted toward remediation.

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

CORRECTIVE ACTION - EFFECTIVENESS

To monitor the success of the programs described of, the academic director will work closely with the school's counselors to monitor students currently under corrective action. As mentioned above, it is one of the goals of Explore Academy to ensure that no student remain in the lowest 25%

subgroup for more than four (4) consecutive academic terms, and the remediation efforts described above will continuously work toward that end. Such remediation efforts will be considered effective if they meet this goal.

In the area of credit recovery, the mechanisms described above will work to prevent students from falling behind in credits. In this area, the goal is not to specifically deter failure, but deter chronic failure. Using the academic counseling program mentioned above, counselors will work with students to implement a plan after each failed seminar to ensure that the path toward credit recovery will be timely, efficient, and effective. To measure the effectiveness of this goal, student records will be assessed by counselors each year to measure their graduation progress. This annual assessment will assist counselors in considering a secondary level of corrective action, such as the scheduling of six seminars within a given academic term (mentioned above). The chart below displays the minimal number of credits required at the completion of each school year for a student to be considered on-schedule for graduation.

GRADE LEVEL COMPLETED	CREDITS EARNED
9 th Grade	38 credits
10 th Grade	76 credits
11 th Grade	114 credits

The seminar effectiveness component described above represents a critical component in the Explore Academy curriculum for it serves to continuously drive instructional innovation based on student feedback. To this end, the goal of the school (as mentioned above) is to see an increase in overall student satisfaction with the learning options available to them each academic year. As corrective measures are employed, as needed for individual seminars, the success of such mechanisms will be based on student satisfaction levels for that seminar in subsequent years. In other words, it is the goal that student satisfaction rates will increase as a result of seminar evaluation and reinvention when such methods are implemented.

In the event that Explore Academy requires further corrective action, all matters of instruction are open for reanalysis, including, but not limited to:

- ~ Instructional methodologies within *all* of the school's seminars
- ~ Exit exams and the required skills and content included therein
- ~ The daily schedule, including daily and annual instructional hours
- ~ The academic flex period, its utilization, and effectiveness in tutoring and overall remediation
- ~ The instructional staff (teachers) including but not limited to teaching assignments, special education and ELL case management, etc.

I.(3) Describe how your school will report student achievement results to parents, the school's Governing Body, the school's authorizer, and the broader community. Please consider your selected community, their accessibility and communication options when answering this question.

Monitoring of student progress by parents is an important factor in the success of every student. For this reason, great emphasis will be placed in allowing parents the ability to view their children's' proficiency ratings at any point throughout a given seminar. Student scores will be recorded in an online grade book, edited by each teacher, with a read-only version of each student's updated grade viewable from a secured account accessible by both the parents and student. This will allow for constant monitoring of course progress so as to allow for intervention and/or remediation to occur in a timely manner. Accessibility to this system (usernames, passwords) will be provided at the time of student enrollment/registration.

The manner in which student academic progress is reported will depend on the specific method preferred by each parent. By default, all academic information will be provided electronically, either online or via email, at the conclusion of each academic term. Those parents who prefer not to receive information electronically may elect to receive this information via mail. When completing the

required registration information packet, filled out prior to each school year, parents will select their preferred method of grade reporting. No grade reports will be sent home with students.

For progress within an academic term, aside from the online gradebook platform described above, parents can elect to receive automatic emails on student progress at the conclusion of each week. Due to the cost of postage, this method of reporting will not be available for parents to receive through the mail.

For general concerns, such as the need for teacher-parent communication, parents will select a preferred method of contact (email or phone) when completing the registration packet. This will ensure that each parent can elect to receive phone calls regarding student progress if they do not have access to email or the online gradebook as mentioned above.

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY
ACADEMIC REPORTING - GOVERNANCE

The school's academic director and/or head administrator will provide the governance council with monthly academic reports summarizing student achievement, the specifics of which will include student proficiency averages (both between seminar-versions and across content areas), remediation levels and the results of previously implemented corrective action (as described above), attendance, and student satisfaction in course selection. These summaries parallel the goals related to the school's mission (stated above, section D.(1)).

At the conclusion of each school year, an annual report will be provided to the governance council to summarize the areas mentioned above as well to detail the progress toward the school's annual goals (also mentioned above, section D.(1)), which include graduation rate, college readiness, recurring enrollment, and standardized test results (the latter of which may not be available until the beginning of the new academic year).

Additional details on either monthly or annual summaries can and will be provided as requested by the council.

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY
ACADEMIC REPORTING - COMMUNITY

The relationship between Explore Academy, its staff, students, parents, and broader community, operates through complete transparency. Summaries of the school's annual academic performance, the measures of which are specified in the school's goals, will be published on the

school's website. In addition, and as it is assigned, the school's annual letter grade within the State's A-F grading system will be published as well.

Outside of the school's website, parents may elect to receive a semi-annual school newsletter which will summarize the academic information described above. Parents can elect to receive this newsletter via email or mail.

Any member of the community is welcome to attend monthly governance council meetings in which academic summaries, both monthly and annual (as stated in the previous subsection), will be provided to governance council members.

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY
ACADEMIC REPORTING - AUTHORIZER

In a similar manner as provided to the school's governance council, the school's head administrator will provide periodic reports to the school's authorizer which will detail the school's progress in the goals related to its mission (section D.(1)). These reports will be provided at the conclusion of each academic term, approximately every month (4.5 weeks), eight in total for each school year. The frequency of these reports can be adjusted as preferred by the authorizer (quarterly, semi-annually, annually, etc.).

Reports will include progress in those areas measured at the conclusion of each academic term: student proficiency, remediation rates, effectiveness of corrective action, attendance, and student satisfaction in course selection. The final report, provided at the conclusion of the school year, will supply summative data over the areas mentioned above as well as in those areas measured annually: graduation rate, college readiness, recurring enrollment, and standardized test results (the latter of which may not be available until the beginning of the new academic year).

ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY
ACADEMIC REPORTING – STATE

Given the complexity of the school's curriculum and grading system, and in order to meet state accountability reporting requirements (STARS) and to ensure that the school's student information system is implemented in a manner which effectively meets the unique needs of the school and its academic programs, Explore Academy plans to contract with data reporting entity, such as Accountability and Compliance Resources LLC.

ORGANIZATION PLAN AND GOVERNANCE

A. GOVERNING BODY CREATION/CAPACITY

A.(1) Summarize the key components of your governance structure, including the roles and responsibilities of the governing body, number of members, length of terms, offices to be created, committees, grounds for removal from office, and relationship with the school's administration. Explain how and when the governing body will develop its governing documents or "bylaws" if not submitted with application. If complete, attach governing documents as Appendix "B".

The Explore Academy will be overseen by a governing body: the Governance Council. It is this Council's primary responsibility to:

- ~ Ensure the fair and uniform application of all federal, state, and local laws in the operation of the school as well as the school's charter and policies
- ~ Recruit, hire, fire, and set the salary schedule for the head administrator
- ~ Oversee proper financial management
- ~ Establish limits for the school's leadership
- ~ Help establish and monitor school results
- ~ Establish a means to evaluate the effectiveness of the school
- ~ Evaluate its own performance

The Governance Council is the policy-making/policy-approval body for the school, and will thus exercise leadership primarily through the formulation and adoption of policies in accordance with the philosophy of the Explore Academy charter. Explore Academy will operate in complete transparency with all academic and financial policy approved before the public through its Governance Council.

At the time of this submission, the Governance Council does not have a finalized set of governing documents. These documents will be created and finalized by the members of the Explore Academy Governance Council before December 31st in the school's Planning Year.

The Governance Council will consist of appointed members within the community and will represent the Explore Academy, its mission, goals, and operations. There are no specific requirements for an individual to become a Governance Council member; any member of the community is allowed to apply for a position with the Explore Academy Governance Council.

The Council will begin with five members and will consist of at least five members at all times. Future expansion is possible if deemed beneficial by an existing Council.

Each position on the Council will be assigned a number to assist in determining staggered Council terms. Such member terms are two years, with the exception of the first Council, whose terms will be dictated as follows:

- Even numbered positions shall serve a one-year term for the first year but thereafter a two-year term, with all terms expiring on even-numbered years (2014, 2016, ...)
- Odd numbered positions shall serve the normal two-year term, with all terms expiring on odd-numbered years (2015, 2017, ...)

Terms will begin/end on July 1st of the year in question. Council members may hold successive terms, with partial terms counting as one full term. Any member may resign at any time by giving written notice to the president or secretary, and, unless otherwise specified therein, the acceptance of such resignation shall not be necessary to make it effective. Any member may be removed by a majority vote of the Governance Council whenever such removal is in the best interests of the school. Members may be removed by the Governance Council for any reason deemed appropriate, including the following acts or omissions:

- Violation of Governance Council policies and regulations
- Failure to attend three (3) scheduled meetings during the school year (July 1st – June 30th) of the Governance Council, except when such absence is due to severe, unforeseen circumstance

Governance Council members will not receive compensation for their services; however, members may be compensated for reasonable expenses in accordance with the New Mexico Mileage and Per Diem Act.

Members are required to attend all scheduled meetings of the Governance Council unless severe, unforeseen circumstances arise. If a council member cannot be physically present at a meeting due to an unavoidable conflict, he or she may make arrangements to appear by telephone or internet (Skype) in accordance with the provisions of the Open Meetings Act. A member who is unable to attend a Governance Council meeting will notify the president of the Governance Council prior to the meeting and, if he or she intends to appear by telephone, the council member in question shall make arrangements for appropriate teleconferencing. Notice may be made by e-mail as long as it is made four (4) hours in advance of the meeting. If the president cannot attend the meeting, he or she must notify the vice president and forward all information regarding the upcoming meeting to him or her, including notices of non-appearances by other council members.

Within the Governance Council there will exist three roles: president, vice president, and secretary. These roles will be appointed by members of the Council and will change each year.

The President of the Governance Council shall preside at all meetings and shall have the right, as other members of the Governance Council, to make or second motions, to discuss questions, and to vote. The president may not act for or on behalf of the Governance Council without prior specific authority from a majority of the Governance Council to do so. All communications addressed to the president shall be considered by him or her for appropriate action, which consideration may include

consulting with legal counsel, and consideration by the Governance Council. The president shall sign legal documents as required by law and perform such other duties as may be prescribed by the Governance Council. It is the president's responsibility to ensure that Governance Council members uphold their commitments/responsibilities to the school. While any member may offer items to be heard or discussed at any meeting, the president will officially compile, in collaboration with the head administrator, the topics for business to be placed on the agenda.

The vice president shall perform the duties of the president in the absence of the president or at the request of the president. In the event a vacancy occurs in the president position, the vice president will act in the capacity of the president until the office has been filled by a vote of the Council membership.

The secretary shall keep the minutes of the Governance Council meetings, subject to the direction of the president, assure that all notices are given in accordance with the provisions of the charter, Governance Council policies and as required by law; shall countersign, when required, all authorized bonds, contracts, deeds, leases, or other legal instruments; and in general perform all duties incident to the office of secretary and such other duties as from time to time may be assigned to the Secretary by the Governance Council. The Council may appoint a designee to assist with the responsibilities of the secretary as described herein, including recording and transcribing the minutes of the meetings, posting notices and agendas and preparing packets for the Governance Council's review. The Council secretary will review the minutes prior to presentation to the Governing Council for approval. The secretary shall be responsible for presenting the minutes to the Council at meetings.

While not officially considered an officer, the Governance Council will have at least one member serve on the Finance Committee, with the school's principal, to specifically oversee the financial standing of the school (described in greater detail below). This Council member will serve as a financial liaison between the Governance Council and Finance Committee.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOVERNANCE COUNCIL

The authority of the Explore Academy Governance Council is derived from its charter, the laws governing public schools, and the Public Education Department of New Mexico as found in article 5 sections 22-5-1 through 22-5-16 of state statutes. It is subject to all pertinent federal statutes as well

as its rules and regulations, after appropriate approvals, both locally and on a state-wide basis. Furthermore, the Governance Council is responsible for the fair and uniform application of all federal, state, and local laws as well as rules, regulations, and policies of The Explore Academy in the operation of the school in accordance with its charter.

The Governance Council serves to propose, recommend, review, and approve policy in conformance with the philosophy of the Explore Academy charter. It will set annual objectives that continually promote increasing academic excellence within the Explore Academy system. All business undertaken by the Governance Council will be held in public for free and open access to local community members.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE
ADMINISTRATIVE RELATIONSHIP

The Council will maintain a relationship of constant communication with the Explore Academy's administrative staff, specifically the school principal. It has the duty and responsibility to question any and all operations within the school, be them academic, financial, or otherwise.

The relationship between the Governance Council, specifically the president, and the school's principal is of vital importance for the success of the school. The Council will be responsible for the hiring of the school's principal/head administrator. Once hired, the Council will serve to formally evaluate the principal each year.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE
TRANSPARENCY

All actions taken by the Governance Council will be done in open access to the public. All meetings held, and all business presented and considered will be documented and open for public review and commentary. All reports, both financial and academic, provided to the Council by the school's principal and academic director respectively, will further be made open for public review during Governance Council meetings.

The documentation of each meeting will be made available for public review. Both the minutes from previous meetings and the agenda for upcoming meetings will be published on the Explore Academy website for public access.

The Governance Council shall continually maintain a written set of policies for the information and guidance of all employees, students, and members of the broader school community. These policies will be subject to review and revision as needed and approved annually by the Governance Council. Amendments to policies may be placed on the board agenda when two or more council members are in agreement. The specific procedural requirements for amendments will be determined by the initial Governance Council.

The creation of its own bylaws, which will officially document the rules and regulations through which the Governance Council and its members will operate, will be generated during the Planning Year by the inaugural Governance Council members. Members will meet at designated times of their choosing to construct and approve the bylaws prior to summer of the Planning Year.

The Governance Council will hold meetings once per month on specific, recurring dates as designated by its inaugural members. These meetings are intended to communicate news and events within the Explore Academy, review financial and academic information, and take action on proposed changes to Explore Academy policy. All actions taken prior to and within the meeting of the Governance Council will comply with the requirements set forth for all public body meetings through the Open Meetings Act.

All meetings will be held in public for any individual to attend at a location that can accommodate all people interest in attending. Meeting date, time, and location will be published on the school's website no less than three weeks prior a given meeting date, with additional written notice provided to all FCC licensed broadcast stations and newspapers that have provided written request for notice of meetings.

A quorum must be in attendance for any action to be taken at any Council meeting.

For business to be raised within a given council meeting, written notice must be provided to the Council's recorder no less than seven days prior to the meeting in question. Three days prior to the meeting in question, the meeting's agenda will be published on the school's website for public access.

The resulting agenda for a given meeting will include descriptions of the specific items covered within the scope of the Council session.

Any individual may submit business for consideration by the Governance Council if it is done so within these stipulations. In addition, if time permits and if all members are in approval, the Governance Council may allow for open business to be presented, at which time individuals may speak without prior notice having been provided.

The events of each meeting will be recorded in the form of written minutes. This record will include the date, time, and place of the meeting, the names of all attending members, a description of all business considered within the scope of the meeting, and a record of all decisions made within the scope of the meeting. A draft of these minutes will appear on the school's website for public inspection no later than ten days after the meeting date. This record will retain its "draft" status until approval by the Governance Council at the next meeting.

During the scope of a meeting, the Governance Council will hear and consider all business presented. In the event that additional time is needed for consideration, it may vote or postpone consideration of business until the next meeting date. In the event of a vote, each member of the Council will vote "yes" to affirm the requested action, "no" to reject the requested action, or "abstain" to take no position on the action requested. In the event that the Council postpones consideration, it may request further information on the topic at hand prior to consideration or vote.

Under emergency circumstances, defined as those which are both unexpected and urgently required to prevent immediate injury, damage, or financial loss, the Governance Council has the ability to hold an unplanned session. Emergency sessions do not require a pre-published agenda.

In the case where an individual member of the Governance Council cannot attend a meeting, attendance over the telephone is permitted. During such sessions, the telecommunication equipment utilized by this individual must allow for full, uninhibited interaction between all members of the governance council as well as any secondary participants.

The governance council has the ability to hold closed meetings under specific provisions ("Permissible Subjects") mentioned within the Open Meetings Act (10-15-1 (H)). Any specific procedures within a closed session must follow the policies also outlined with the Open Meetings Act (10-15-1 (I) (I)).

A.(2) Provide a list of your proposed initial governing body members and describe the expertise represented on this governing body that demonstrates capacity to initiate the opening of the charter school. The composition of the Governing Body should reflect a wide range of expertise, knowledge and experience, and should demonstrate the capacity to oversee a successful school (i.e., assure student success, develop, implement, oversee the management of public funds, and oversee the school’s compliance with legal obligations).

Each member of the Explore Academy’s inaugural Governance Council brings their own passion for education and professional expertise to create a governing authority with a wealth of knowledge and experience. The Council will consist of five members: Mary Robinson, Barbara Lopez, Jeanette Miller, Nadyne Shimada, and Jesse Pickard.

Mary Robinson is a master teacher who has positively affected the lives of each of the thousands of students that have passed through her door over the years. Although a scientist by trade, she has come to find her place in the teaching of young men and women, preparing them for both college and career with her advanced academic programs. As one of the few founding staff members of Rio Rancho High School, an institution known for its diverse collection of elective courses, she has built one of the most successful professional college and career preparatory program in the state, if not the country.

Over the past thirteen years, Barbara Lopez has worked as a part-time research engineer at the University of New Mexico. In that time, she has worked in association with the National Science Foundation for Advanced Technological Education, including both curriculum development and instructional design for STEM education, with a focus on MicroElectroMechanical Systems (MEMS). Her curriculum development experience ranges from middle school through college level. She has also developed educational materials for technicians and engineers working in the semi-conductor industry.

Before her work at UNM, she worked at Intel Rio Rancho as a capacity engineer. She began her career at NASA, Johnson Space Center, working as an acoustic/vibration test engineer for space station payloads.

Jeanette Miller offers her expertise from a variety of backgrounds including business, education, and community outreach. As a former School to Careers Coordinator at Rio Rancho High School, she has extensive experience in the educational transition from high school to college. As a former Inquiry Facilitator for the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, she has worked

extensively with young men and women in developing themselves as professionals in the areas of science and engineering.

Lately, however, her expertise has brought her to the business world, working as the Director of Marketing and Public Relations for the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History and (currently) as the Director for Marketing and Communications for the United Way of Central New Mexico. Her diversity and wealth of experience is only equaled by her passion for education and the fostering of young men and women into successful adults.

A special educator for the past thirteen years, Nadyne Shimada recently vacated the position of Academic Dean at the Public Academy for Performing Arts. As the Academic Dean, Nadyne was responsible for managing the student information system, development of the master schedule, student course registration, developing and maintaining relationships with educational providers of enrichment, credit recovery and remedial courses, standardized testing, college counseling (including writing letters of recommendation and completing secondary school reports), and ensuring each student was on track for graduation. Nadyne also managed a special education, 504, and SAT case load, and provided remediation, direct instruction, coaching, counseling, and transition services to secondary special education students. While at PAPA, she also taught a variety of courses from Advanced Placement and dual credit CNM classes to middle school math remediation.

Prior to her tenure at PAPA, Nadyne managed the gifted program at Rio Rancho High School for ten years. Her responsibilities included developing and delivering required and elective courses for gifted students, providing college counseling services (including writing letters of recommendation and secondary school reports), and mentoring students through science competitions. Nadyne also served on the RRHS Positive Behavioral Support team, Institutional Review Board, and was the faculty sponsor for the National Honor Society.

Prior to her career in education, Nadyne was a Managing Consultant for an employee benefits consulting company where she specialized in large group health and welfare benefits. She spent sixteen years in human resources consulting and management of compensation and benefits.

Jesse Pickard is the founder and CEO of Apic Solutions, Inc, a corporation designing specialized technological systems for New Mexico business entities. In addition to providing his services to business across the state, Jesse has worked with dozens of schools across New Mexico to help upgrade their electrical and technological infrastructure. He is an active member of his community, involved in

several non-profit foundations, and has worked for several years as a member of financial review committees for the State of New Mexico Public Education Department in its analysis of charter schools and new charter school applications.

As the CEO of his own small business, he has a background in business, finance, and accounting, and will bring this expertise to the school's Governance Council as its financial expert.

GOVERNANCE COUNCIL SELECTION

A.(3) Describe how future governing body members will be selected as vacancies arise. Enumerate the qualifications desired for members that will assure the school's governance is competent to operate a public school.

In the event of member vacancy, the Council will use the school's newsletter system, website, and other community communication methods to notify the public of current vacancies as well as to provide member expectations and responsibilities for potential applicants. Those individuals who apply for a Governance Council position shall be selected based on the following criteria. Such an individual must:

- ~ Be willing to commit attendance to all Council meetings.
- ~ Understand the educational system with the Explore Academy
- ~ Have a firm commitment and loyalty to the philosophy of the Explore Academy as described in its charter
- ~ Possess a strong character and a willingness to abide by all laws, regulations, and policies that govern any staff member or the general populace
- ~ Be willing to participate in state-require governing board/school board training and basic Governance Council orientation

The Council will dictate the period for which applicants will be allowed to submit their requests. Individuals interested in becoming a member of the Governance Council shall submit to the secretary, in writing, their intention to apply for a position, including personal and professional qualifications, within the window specified. Governance Council members will review these submissions and will vote at the next regular scheduled meeting. For in-term vacancies, the term length shall consist of only the unexpired portion of the term of the member being replaced.

The Council will require at least one member with extensive financial experience. If only one such member exists, when a vacancy in that member's position arises, the individual who fulfills that position will be required to have financial experience in addition to the requirements mentioned above.

B. GOVERNING BODY TRAINING AND EVALUATION

GOVERNING BODY TRAINING/EVALUATION

B.(1) Provide an ongoing and comprehensive plan for Governing Body trainings, evaluations, and continuous improvement and complies with state requirements.

Members of the Governance Council will be required to attend mandatory annual training sessions as dictated by the State of New Mexico Public Education Department. Such trainings, sponsored by the New Mexico School Boards Association (NMSBA) and New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools (NMCCS) will include a comprehensive overview of topics that include department rules, policies and procedures, statutory powers and duties of governing boards, legal concepts pertaining to public schools, finance and budget and other relevant matters.

Each Council member will receive annual training, totaling no more than five hours, although the specific training requirements for each member will vary depending on their previous Governance Council experience. In order to be credited with attendance at specific trainings, each attendee will complete a written attendance form, provided by the training authority, to be kept on file with the charter school. Prior to September 1st of each year, the NMSBA or the NMCCS shall provide the school's principal with a list of training hours earned annually by each governing body member as well as the names of those members who failed to attend the required annual trainings.

Spending for these trainings is allocated in the school's budget.

All council members will additionally be required to familiarize themselves with the Governance Council's policies and procedures, and to sign all necessary documents stating their adherence to said policies and procedures. As part of the orientation process, new council members will be specifically required to familiarize themselves with the following key provisions of New Mexico laws:

- Charter School Act (NMSA 1978, Section 22.8B.1 et. seq.)
- School Personnel Act (NMSA 1978, Section 22.10A.1 et. seq.)
- Procurement Code (NMSA 1978, Section 13.1.1 et. seq.)
- Open Meetings Act (NMSA 1978, Section 10.15.1 et. seq.)
- Public School Finance Act (NMSA 1978, Section 22.8.1 et. seq.)
- Applicable rules and regulations issued by the New Mexico PED.

B.(2) Provide a plan for an annual self-evaluation of the governing body that reflects an evaluation of its overall effectiveness.

In holding to the commitment of transparency and the bottom-up philosophy that embodies Explore Academy, the Governance Council will rely on its community to judge its overall effectiveness each year. At one specific monthly meeting, near the end of a given annual term, the Governance Council will allow for both written and oral methods of evaluation from members of its community, be them students, teachers, school administration, parents, or other citizens. Any member will be allowed to voice their commentary on the work of the Council members as it directly relates to the performance of the Explore Academy. Survey forms will be offered at Governance Council meetings, and online surveys will be provided electronically on the Explore Academy website for written commentary and rating of the performance of Council for one month leading up to this meeting.

For the assurance that such commentary is considered and reviewed, each member of the Governance Council will draft a reply to the sum of commentary. All five Council member responses will be published on the school's website prior to the following Governance Council session.

C. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

GOVERNANCE OVERSIGHT

C.(1) Describe how the governing body will monitor operational, financial and academic outcomes on an ongoing basis to ensure that the school is meeting its mission and vision.

GOVERNANCE OVERSIGHT

FINANCIAL

The Governance Council will be responsible for oversight of all financial operations at the Explore Academy. It will not only approve the budget recommendation for each fiscal year, but will work to continually audit the financial standing of the Explore Academy in accordance with the approved annual budget, including but not limited to overview of financial statements of all accounts at each monthly meeting. The annual budget for the following fiscal year will be specifically prepared and presented by the Leadership Council for Governance Council approval prior to the 1st of May.

At least one member of the Governance Council will serve on the Finance Committee to more specifically oversee the financial standing of the school. This member will report back to the Council at each Council meeting.

GOVERNANCE OVERSIGHT

REPORTING

The Explore Academy academic director will provide to the Governance Council a monthly report detailing the summaries of the most recent academic term, summarizing student achievement, the specifics of which will include student proficiency averages (both between seminar-versions and across content areas), remediation levels and the results of previously implemented corrective action (as described above), attendance, and student satisfaction in course selection. These summaries parallel the goals related to the school's mission (stated above, section D.(1)).

At the conclusion of each school year, an annual report will be provided to the Governance Council to summarize the areas mentioned above as well to detail the progress toward the school's annual goals (also mentioned above, section D.(1)), which include graduation rate, college readiness,

recurring enrollment, and standardized test results (the latter of which may not be available until the beginning of the new academic year). Additional details on either monthly or annual summaries can and will be provided as requested by the council.

These documents will be reviewed by the Council and any other interested member of the community who is in attendance.

The Finance Committee, which will include school's principal and at least one member of the Council, will compile a report to the Governance Council each month, detailing the financial standing of the school including but not limited to financial statements, budgetary projections, opportunity for new revenue streams, etc. Such documentation will be available for review by the Council members and any other interested member of the school community.

The school's business manager will assist in compiling these reports for presentation as needed. As is a part of the service commitment of the business manager, he or she will be available, upon request, to attend Council meeting if further discussion is required.

HEAD ADMINISTRATOR

C.(2) Identify the qualifications and leadership characteristics the governing body will seek when employing the head administrator. Describe the job search process and timelines for this process. If the proposed head administrator is a founder or already identified, provide a summary of his/her background and qualifications for this position.

In the original formulation of the school, the Governance Council will hire the school's head administrator: the principal. When evaluating individuals for the principal position, qualified applicants will possess:

- ~ A valid New Mexico 3B Administrators License
- ~ A well-spoken, confident demeanor
- ~ Prior experience in successful school administration, including oversight of curricular and financial operations
- ~ Strong belief in the philosophy of the school: student choice, strong commitment to the standards, and a diversified, elective-based curriculum for courses within both the core and career pathways
- ~ Proponent of teacher creativity and flexibility in offering curriculum in different forms

- ~ Openness and transparency in overall operation and conduct, and a willingness to allow for all members of the school community to aid in the decision-making process, adhering to the school's bottom-up philosophy
- ~ Strong adherence to established policies for student conduct and a firm belief in the consistent enforcement of these policies
- ~ Dedicated passion toward educational reform
- ~ Acclaimed professional and character references

Upon charter approval, the school's founder will immediately initiate the advertised postings for the open administrator position. From the candidates who apply, the founder will gather basic information to provide the Governance Council for further evaluation (interviews, etc.) on or before January 15th, 2014. It is expected that the head administrator will be selected by January 31st, 2014.

HEAD ADMINISTRATOR EVALUATION

C.(3) Describe how the governing body will convey to and delineate the roles and responsibilities of the school's head administrator and how will he/she be evaluated and held accountable for the operations for the school's success. Provide a proposed job description for the head administrator including responsibilities that are significant and unique to charter school leaders. Attach the job description as Appendix "C".

After its initial assemblage, one of the first duties of the Governance Council will be to establish the expectations for the school's head administrator. These expectations will include but will not be limited to:

- ~ Specific method and format of financial and academic reporting at each monthly meeting
- ~ Explanation of any areas showing academic concern, as well as the specific actions to be taken to remedy such areas and to prevent their recurrence (this process will also include the school's academic director)
- ~ Reporting of itemized expenditures as well as an ongoing analysis of the school's budget and future expenditure projections, also provided at each monthly meeting
- ~ Reporting of the school's general operations including facility information

The principal will be evaluated based on the criteria set forth by the Governance Council to include the above contents among any additional as set forth by the Governance Council. The principal will further be assessed on the communication of said information with the Governance Council including the promptness and degree of detail in the reports provided, as well as the responsiveness to questions and concerns posed by Governance Council members.

As the school's operations proceed, it will be vital for the principal to identify, report, and effectively evaluate any areas of concern, be them academic, financial, or operational. The ability of the principal to document, report, and continually devise appropriate strategies to remedy these areas of concern will be a vital component in his or her evaluation. Effective communication between all entities involved, including but not limited to the school's business manager and Governance Council, will be vital toward this end.

The job description of the principal/head administrator is provided in Appendix C.

D. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL

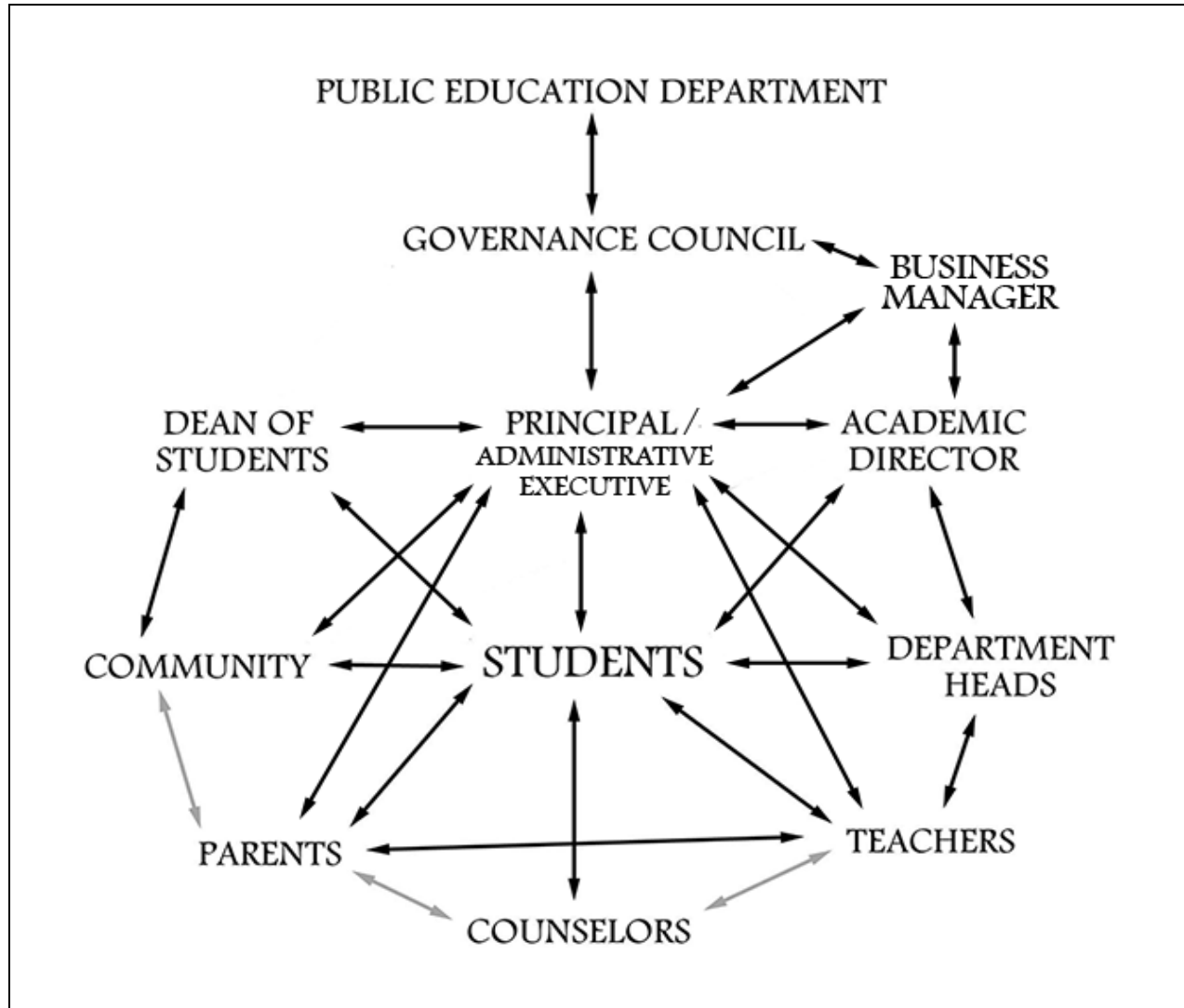
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

D.(1) Describe the organizational structure of the school and provide an organization chart that clearly delineates the relationships between all parties including the administering of the day-to-day activities of the school.

Explore Academy will operate through a bottom-up philosophy, and will be teacher-driven with minimum levels of bureaucracy as necessary to maintain proper administration. To this end, the school's structure is not built in a hierarchical model, but rather a web-like system with the various players supporting one another toward the central goal of student achievement.

The organizational chart is shown below.

EXPLORE ACADEMY ORGANIZATIONAL CHART – A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH



Rather than a hierarchical system, with tiers separating different parties, students are the central focus, with all surrounding personnel working toward the goal of student education.

The school's Leadership Council will be the decisive body within the school, and will be composed of the principal, academic director, dean of students, and department heads. Leadership Council meetings will be held at school twice per month (alternating weeks) with specific dates published on the school's website. Continuous input from the school community will be essential in shaping the school, its policies, and its programs, and as such, any teacher, student, or parent is

welcome to attend and address the Leadership Council at any meeting. Decisions related to the daily operations of the school will be decided within this group, with any approved policy submitted for final approval by the Governance Council.

While the Leadership Council is not formally depicted within the school's organizational chart (above), its constituent members are represented to specifically illustrate the interactions between individual members of the school community. It will be these interactions that drive the school's innovation and will thus be the prominent driving force behind the work of the Leadership Council.

The teachers at Explore Academy are the creators, the inventors. They will establish and continually evolve the academic atmosphere through which students will have full academic choice within both core offerings and degree programs. Each instructor hired at Explore Academy will possess the inherent freedom to create and manage both a set of unique core seminar offerings and the entire curriculum within one degree program.

The school's support teaching staff, which includes special education and ELL teachers will work to support instruction in all academic areas. Support teachers will work collaboratively with teachers and continuously monitor and report the progress of these special populations to the school's administrative staff.

The administrative executive will be instrumental in the operation of the school, providing direct support for all staff, specifically the school's head administrator (principal). This individual will manage secretarial, clerical, and receptionist duties as well as oversight of administrative purchases.

Each core content area (science, math, social studies, English) will be managed by a department head. These individuals, in addition to their full-time teaching duties, will assist in maintaining and developing the curriculum within that particular department, while also offering constant support to all department teachers. They will be elected by department staff members.

The dean of students, while neither an administrator nor a teacher, is responsible for interacting with students to promote educational success and to handle various student supportive tasks including the school's tutoring program, food service, and transportation. This individual will deal with students directly, and more personally, in and outside of the classroom, on academic issues related to remediation (tutoring) as well as non-academic issues related to conduct, behavior, discipline, counseling, etc. He or she will also act as the primary liaison on behalf of the school in association with parents, social services, police, and other community entities.

The academic director is the school's instructional leader, managing the Explore Academy curriculum as a whole to ensure its adherence to the original vision and philosophy of the school. He or she will work closely with both department heads and individual teachers to continually maintain the standards of excellence within both core and career pathways. The academic director is responsible for the school's schedule and course offerings, and will continuously monitor seminar effectiveness based on academic performance, enrollment figures, and statistical feedback from students and parents. The director will supply the Governance Council, either directly or by proxy via the head administrator, with monthly updates on academic progress. He or she will additionally oversee all department budgets and spending, and will work with teachers in promoting innovation within said budgets. The director will be largely responsible for obtaining grants and other alternative funding streams to assist in the school's continuous curricular evolution.

The school's principal is the head of the school and will oversee the general operations of the school, including administration over staff, students, curriculum, budget, etc. This individual will continually analyze the school's academic and financial standing, and will serve as a constant liaison between the Public Education Department, the Explore Academy Governance Council, and instructional staff as it relates to school's overall academic, financial, and operational status. The principal will be primary representative of the school and will continually work to establish and cultivate relationships with groups within the local community.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE
PARENT INVOLVEMENT

One particular area in which the Explore Academy will place great emphasis is the involvement of students' parents and families. It is the school's philosophy that each student is part of greater school community and because of this, parent input and involvement is crucial to the ongoing evolution of the school.

Explore Academy would like to utilize the wealth of diverse knowledge and expertise that exists within the community, specifically from our students' parents. Given the school's college/career preparatory focus, parents will be encouraged to assist, in any way they can, within the various career pathways that may coincide with their fields of expertise. The school values their knowledge and experience, and will provide opportunities for parents to assist in developing our students' career readiness.

There will be ongoing opportunity for parent input at both the Governance Council and Leadership Council meetings. In addition to this, the school will promote the formation of the Explore Academy Parent Council to work with the school in support of its missions and objectives. The specific composition of this organization will be shaped by parent input throughout both the Planning Year and the first year of school's opening.

Constant communication is vital in maintaining a healthy school community. Parents, as well as any other interested community member, will be continually notified of school information through the school's newsletters, broad-scale SMS (text) messaging, and updates to both the school's websites and other social media interfaces (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to which they may subscribe.

As a public institution, a school is entrusted to provide students with the proper foundation for the development of intellectualism and character, and to provide for the cultivation of responsibility and maturity. The Explore Academy is committed to provide its parents with the assurance that their students, their children, will receive the highest standard of academic and social preparation for their respective futures.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE
STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Explore Academy students play a vital role in the shaping of their education and will represent themselves through the Explore Academy Student Council. This group will provide students with a collective voice in the ongoing evolution of the school and will be instrumental in proposing not only curricular changes (described above) but changes in policy. Those students with an interest in government and political science, specifically those who have entered the political science degree program, would be encouraged to represent the student population as a member of the Student Council, although any student is welcome to attend meetings and/or run for a representative position.

Student Council members will represent each grade level and will be elected by their peers. One such representative will act as a student liaison at both Leadership Council and Parent Council meetings.

Any school is a member of a larger school community, supported by parents and other community members, and as such the Explore Academy and its students will help support those organizations within its community.

Community partnerships will take on many forms:

- ~ Community service: in addition to supporting the school community, students may elect to provide assistance to some area of their community (this can fulfill a student's academic service requirement)
- ~ Career internships: as a requirement within specific given degree programs, students will have the opportunity to work with individuals within the community in areas that parallel their career interests (job shadowing, general assistance, etc.)
- ~ Community partnerships: community groups/businesses/organizations will work with Explore Academy in specific areas that relate to both the community, organization, and the school's curriculum (example: students working with local farmers to establish an on-site greenhouse)

A school is a valuable component to any community. Explore Academy, whose purpose is to provide students the knowledge and skill to succeed in college, will do its part in providing its community with intelligent, responsible, well-rounded citizens, many of whom will enter the Albuquerque workforce after graduating from college. By providing opportunities for students to establish and build professional connections with local individuals and entities, Explore Academy will ensure that its graduates have valuable experience prior to embarking upon their careers.

D.(2) Include proposed job descriptions of certified and licensed staff. In addition, if your organization structure included non-traditional roles or positions, explain why these roles are important in implementing the school's mission and educational program. Attach staff job descriptions as Appendix "D".

Attached as Appendix D.

D.(3) Provide a description of a comprehensive evaluation process for educational staff, and how it will be tied to student performance, your school's mission and goals, and the state's requirements.

Teachers of all licensure levels will be considered for employment. All teachers hired by the Explore Academy must hold a state-issued teaching license in accordance with the requirements set forth by the Public Education Department. To remain in compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act, all teachers must further be considered *highly qualified* for their teaching assignment each year.

A Level I license is a provisional license that gives a beginning teacher the opportunity, through a formal mentorship program, for additional preparation in becoming a quality teacher. A Level I teacher must advance to Level II within five years of entering the occupation.

A Level II license is given to a teacher who is a fully qualified professional and who is primarily responsible for ensuring that students meet and exceed department-adopted academic content and performance standards. A teacher may choose to remain at Level II for the remainder of his or her career.

A Level III-A license is the highest level of teaching licensure, granted to those teachers who choose to advance as instructional leaders in the teaching profession and undertake greater responsibilities including curriculum development, peer intervention and mentoring.

The principal will perform two observations on each staff member, and will be responsible for compiling the final evaluation for each staff member based on the metrics described below.

Much of the Explore Academy staff evaluation model is based on the extensive research performed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in its objective to scientifically determine the best model for measuring teacher effectiveness. The Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project, as it is termed, is comprised of over three years of research through the collaboration of dozens of independent research teams and nearly three thousand teacher volunteers from seven public school districts around the United States. This research has demonstrated that it is possible to identify great teaching by combining multiple areas of measurement (Gates Foundation, 2013), and Explore Academy plans to utilize this research and the developed MET model in the implementation of its evaluation process.

The Explore Academy teaching staff evaluation has three components: student performance, student surveys, and teacher observation.

TEACHING STAFF EVALUATION
STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Effectively and accurately assessing teacher performance based on student performance is a difficult challenge for any educational body. The MET project studies utilized several different assessments to analyze factors related to student achievement in tests, and from such analysis two things were emphasized:

- ~ Teachers should be assessed on multiple assessments to measure student achievement including state exams *and* those which measure higher cognitive abilities
- ~ Schools should adjust their achievement gains measures to account for prior test scores of students

Using both these recommendations, Explore Academy will use multiple measurements to assess student achievement as it relates to teacher evaluations. Explore Academy's exit exams, which measure cognitive ability on a range of 1-6 based on Bloom's Taxonomy, assesses cognitive abilities for each seminar's subject area and will be utilized in assessing student achievement. Because each student takes forty (40) exit exams per year, the school has significant data on which to analyze student achievement based not only on current year scores but exit exam scores from previous years, which can be disaggregated for different content areas (although current year scores would apply to 9th graders).

In the area of student achievement, a teacher is considered effective in his or her teaching if his or her students demonstrate proficiency on exit exams (score of 4 or better for each academic standard); however, in the case where a teacher is not effective, each of the teacher's students' exit exam scores will be analyzed and compared to six other metrics (see below). These metrics will hold significant importance in evaluating a teacher if any of a teacher's students fall below proficiency in any standards covered in a given exit exam (and thus fail the seminar).

The six metrics, on which each student's exit exam score will be compared, are:

- ~ The student's scores on all exit exams in the same year
- ~ The student's scores on all exit exams from previous years (does not apply to 9th graders)
- ~ The student's scores on exit exams from seminars in the teacher's subject area (science, math, etc.) from both the current year and previous years
- ~ Other students' scores on the same exit exam from the same academic term (classmates of the student in question)
- ~ Student scores on exit exams from other students in different versions of the same seminar, taught by other teachers in the same school year (comparing other teachers' methods of teaching the same material to the teacher in question)
- ~ Scores on exit exams from students in the same seminar-versions, instructed by the teacher in question, but from previous years

The specific formula on which the comparative analysis of the above metrics will be based will be determined by the school's inaugural teaching staff prior to the beginning of School Year 1. *Explore Academy teachers will determine how they are evaluated in terms of student achievement*, given the criteria above. Changes to this model in subsequent years will require both Leadership and Governance Council approval.

Exit exam questions will be drawn randomly from a question bank. The rationale for this process is to prevent cheating on exit exams between students taking seminars at different times within the same year. As a result, each student's exit exam, while covering questions from the same content areas as other students, will be unique given that it will possess a different combination of questions from the question bank.

The benefit of this process, as it pertains to teacher evaluations, is that teachers will be prevented from simply teaching to the test given that each of his or her students, taking the exit exam at the end of the seminar, will receive a unique set of questions drawn from the question bank.

In addition, for teacher of those subject areas administered on the PARCC assessment (math and English), scores will be utilized for 11th graders (H3 students). The inclusion of PARCC scores may be problematic if PARCC scores do not become available until after the end of the school year (after the teacher's annual evaluation is complete). This is an issue that will be addressed by the inaugural staff in the Planning Year.

Student scores from the PARCC assessment will be compared to two other metrics:

- ~ Student scores from other teachers in the same content area
- ~ Student scores from the same students for the PARCC exam from their 10th grade year (H2)

Once again, the specific formula will be determined by the inaugural teaching staff, both in the calculation of the PARCC component and how the exit exam and PARCC component are calculated together for math and English teachers.

Because a student taking the PARCC exam may only have a specific teacher for one seminar (4.5 weeks), it is inappropriate to evenly assess that teacher's effectiveness in comparison to a student who has had that teacher for multiple academic terms. As a result, such calculations will require a coefficient to compare students to teachers based on the number of academic terms a teacher has had a given student.

In addition, it would be appropriate to disaggregate each student's PARCC exam score to link scores from each academic standard to the specific teacher from whom the student received instruction over that academic standard. This would allow a more effective comparison in linking PARCC data directly to appropriate teachers. The extent to which this level of disaggregation is possible will dictate the school's ability to perform this degree of data analysis.

TEACHING STAFF EVALUATION

STUDENT SURVEYS

MET project data has conclusively shown that students are reliable indicators of good teaching and that a component of teacher evaluations should include a student perceptions component (Gates Foundation, 2013).

The MET project study utilized the survey model developed by the Tripod Project, a collaboration between Cambridge Education, Harvard University, and a widespread network of schools and districts around the United States. Its surveyed approach as demonstrated in its usage in the MET project, utilizing students as evaluators, is highly correlative in predicting effective teaching based on student achievement data (Gates Foundation, 2013), and as such will represent a component of Explore Academy's evaluation model.

The Tripod survey utilizes the “7 C’s” and is shown below. The format of the survey is agree/disagree and can be adjusted to a scoring scale (0: strong disagree, 5: strongly agree).

The 7 C’s	Sample Questions
CARE	My teacher in this class makes me feel that s/he really cares about me.
	My teacher really tries to understand how students feel about things.
CONTROL	Students in this class treat the teacher with respect.
	Our class stays busy and doesn’t waste time.
CLARIFY	My teacher has several good ways to explain each topic that we cover in this class.
	My teacher explains difficult things clearly.
CHALLENGE	In this class, we learn a lot almost every day.
	In this class, we learn to correct our mistakes.
CAPTIVATE	My teacher makes lessons interesting.
	I like the ways we learn in this class.
CONFER	Students speak up and share their ideas about class work.
	My teacher respects my ideas and suggestions.
CONSOLIDATE	My teacher checks to make sure we understand what s/he is teaching us.
	The comments that I get on my work in this class help me understand how to improve.

TEACHING STAFF EVALUATION
TEACHER OBSERVATION

In the area of teacher observation, based on the MET model, the principal does not represent the sole evaluator, but one of many evaluators that will perform observations on teaching staff. MET project data shows that reliability, which represents the extent to which variation in results reflects consistent aspects of a teacher’s practice, increases with the more observations and observers (Gates Foundation, 2013). Explore Academy will utilize the model which, based on the MET data, represents the greatest reliability:

- ~ Utilizes two administrator evaluations per teacher per year (at least 45 min in length)
- ~ Utilizes at least one peer observation per teacher per year (at least 45 min in length)
- ~ Utilizes several shorter peer observations per teacher per year (approximately 15 min in length)

MET data has demonstrated that school administrators and peer observers produce remarkable similarities in their observations of teachers, and that more observations by more observers actually increases data reliability (Gates Foundation, 2013). As such, Explore Academy will use a multi-observer system.

Teachers will observe other teachers during their prep/lunch period. Each teacher will receive a full length observation (45 min in length) from another teacher (who will be assigned at random) at least one time each year. Each teacher will further receive several, shorter (15 min) observations from a number of teachers (three at minimum, assigned at random) each year. The use of videotaping, which was found to be of great benefit in the MET project, is a viable option that teachers can elect to utilize as part of the peer observation process.

The school's principal will additionally perform two observations (45 min in length) for each teacher per year. These evaluations will compile the observation component of the teacher's evaluation.

TEACHING STAFF EVALUATION
TEACHER OBSERVATION – CRITERIA

The MET project compared several different observation models to analyze the reliability in assessing effective teaching. The models analyzed were Framework for Teaching (FFT, Charlotte Danielson, the Danielson Group), Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS, Robert Pianta, University of Virginia), Protocol for Language Arts Teaching Observations (PLATO, Pam Grossman, Stanford University), Mathematical Quality of Instruction (MQI, Heather Hill and colleagues, Harvard University and the University of Michigan), and UTeach Teacher Observation Protocol (UTOP, UTeach program at University of Texas).

When comparing each model, analysis of teacher scores in comparison to standardized test data showed that the Framework for Teaching (FFT) had the greatest correlation between teacher observation scoring and student achievement data across all subject areas. As such, the FFT model will be utilized in the scoring system for teacher evaluations.

TEACHING STAFF EVALUATION
TEACHER OBSERVATION – CRITERIA – FFT MODEL

The Danielson Framework for Teaching model is summarized below. The specific evaluation details can be found in Appendix O.

The table below shows the criteria by which teachers will be evaluated in their observation component.

FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING OBSERVATION SCORING CRITERIA

Criterion 1: centering instruction on high expectations for student achievement	Domain 2: The Classroom Environment 2b: Establishing a culture for learning Domain 3: Instruction 3a: Communicating with students 3c: Engaging students in learning
Criterion 2: demonstrating effective teaching practices	Domain 3: Instruction 3b: Using Questioning And Discussion Techniques Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities 4a: Reflecting on Teaching
Criterion 3: recognizing individual student learning needs and developing strategies to address those needs.	Domain 1: Planning and Preparation 1b: Demonstrating Knowledge of Students Domain 3: Instruction 3e: Demonstrating Flexibility And Responsiveness Student Growth SG 3.1: Establish Student Growth Goal(s) SG 3.2: Achievement of Student Growth Goal(s)
Criterion 4: providing clear and intentional focus on subject matter content and curriculum.	Domain 1: Planning and Preparation 1a: Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy 1c: Setting Instructional Outcomes 1d: Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources 1e: Designing Coherent Instruction
Criterion 5: fostering and managing a safe, positive learning environment.	Domain 2: The Classroom Environment 2a: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport 2c: Managing Classroom Procedures 2d: Managing Student Behavior 2e: Organizing Physical Space

Criterion 6: using multiple student data elements to modify instruction and improve student learning.	Domain 1: Planning and Preparation 1f: Designing Student Assessments Domain 3: Instruction 3d: Using Assessment in Instruction Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities 4b: Maintaining Accurate Records Student Growth SG 6.1: Establish Student Growth Goal(s) SG 6.2: Achievement of Student Growth Goal(s)
Criterion 7: communicating and collaborating with parents and the school community.	Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities 4c: Communicating with Families
Criterion 8: exhibiting collaborative and collegial practices focused on improving instructional practice and student learning.	Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities 4d: Participating in a Professional Community 4e: Growing and Developing Professionally 4f: Showing Professionalism Student Growth SG 8.1: Establish Team Student Growth Goal(s)

TEACHING STAFF EVALUATION
COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION

The degree to which each of the above three components are weighed and calculated into a teacher's overall evaluation has been a specific area of study for the MET project. The three criteria used in this consideration are: correlation with state test scores, correlation with higher order tests and higher cognitive demonstration, and reliability in determining effective teaching.

As a result of the MET project study, several conclusions are clear:

- ~ Varying the percentages of each evaluation component alters the reliability in the determination of effective teaching year after year
- ~ Evaluation models strongly weighing state test scores do produce higher scores on these assessments but score lowest in both higher cognitive demonstration and reliability in determining effective teaching

- Evaluation models that weigh each component equally (33% for each) produce the greatest accuracy in predicting student achievement gains on assessments meant to test higher cognitive levels *and* reliability in determining effective teaching year after year.

Based on these results, each of the three components in a teacher's evaluation will be weighed equally.

STAFFING PLAN

D.(4) Provide a staffing plan that demonstrates a sound understanding of staffing needs and that is viable and adequate for effectively implementing the educational program/curriculum

The Governance Council will hire the school's principal by January 31st of the Planning Year, for contracted work to begin the summer prior to the school's opening^t. The principal will then hire the school's academic director and dean of students. These three individuals will comprise the preliminary Leadership Council, who will then proceed to hire the remaining staff members.

The staffing plan is illustrated in the chart below and discussed in following sections.

POSITION	SCHOOL YEAR 1	SCHOOL YEAR 2	SCHOOL YEAR 3+
Teachers (Gen Ed)*	14	19	23
Teachers (Spec Ed)	1	2	2
ELL Coordinator	1	1	1
Counselors	1	2	2
Academic Director**	1	1	1
Dean of Students	1	1	1
Principal	1	1	1
Admin. Executive	1	1	1
Licensed Bus. Mgr.	1	1	1
Information Tech.	1	1	1

*One teacher from each content area will be elected as department head, but will still maintain a full teaching schedule

**Will teach five classes and is calculated as a member of the teaching staff in the sections below.

Enrollment at the Explore Academy will dictate staffing needs. The assumption is that, for the first year, 250 students will attend in grades 9-10.

In its initial year, the school will employ fifteen (15) total teachers: three per core content area, and one for foreign language, art, and physical education (includes the academic director). Each teacher will instruct sixteen seminars per year, eight core, four within a given degree program, and four which satisfy both core and degree program requirements. Class sizes will have a maximum of eighteen (18) students per course in core academic areas including foreign language, and twenty-two (22) students for art and physical education (the school's facility plan has budgeted for increased space for both art and physical education classes and thus will be able to accommodate larger class sizes).

These class size projections, as shown below, represent a maximum that may be reached in some classes but not all. It is assumed that student enrollment figures will fluctuate between seminars, and the above staffing plan allows for such flexibility. With the above-mentioned figures (18 students per seminar on average), Explore Academy could enroll 341 total students with its staffing plan, thus the planned enrollment of 250 students allows for a 91 student (36%) enrollment margin. This number takes into account that approximately 25% of Explore Academy students (63 out of 250 students in school year one) will be on their academic flex period at any given time. In addition, the academic director is considered a teacher in the above calculations as he or she will teach five seminars compared to the six-seminar load of a full-time teacher.

Given that teachers require one period for lunch/prep, around the periods typically associated with lunches (period 4-6), and students will most likely use one of their academic flex periods to have lunch at the typical lunch times (periods 4-6), student-teacher ratios in seminars during these times will be slightly higher (21 students on average as compared with 18 students described above).

The chart below shows this:

Period	Teachers in Class	Students in Class** (Student-Teacher Ratio)	Number of Students on Academic Flex***	Total Student Accommodation	Enrollment Margin
1	15	278 (18:1)	63	341 students	36%
2	15	278 (18:1)	63	341 students	36%
3	15	278 (18:1)	63	341 students	36%
4*	10*	218 (21:1)	84	302 students	21%
5*	10*	218 (21:1)	84	302 students	21%
6*	10*	218 (21:1)	84	302 students	21%
7	15	278 (18:1)	63	341 students	36%

* Predicted as the typical periods in which teachers will take their lunch and when students will prefer to use one of their academic flex periods for lunch. One third of teachers will take lunch during each of the lunch periods.

** Ratio calculates slightly higher due to art and PE classes having slightly higher class sizes

*** Assumes that each student utilizes one of his/her academic flex periods during the predicted lunch periods (periods 4-6) and one outside of that time

The enrollment margin, providing flexibility in student scheduling, promotes the school's individualized, choice-based philosophy, allowing students to choose the specific courses in which they enroll. This represents one facet of the school's *bottom-up approach* to its educational philosophy, where students are the driving force behind the school's schedule. While class sizes are calculated with the accommodation for 341 students, the school will not enroll more students than what is projected in School Year 1 (250 students), and thus, the 18:1 student-teacher ratio represents a maximum class size.

The chart below shows class sizes without the available margin:

Period	Teachers in Class	Students in Class (Student-Teacher Ratio)	Number of Students on Academic Flex	Total Student Accommodation	Enrollment Margin
1	15	188 (12:1)	63	251	0%
2	15	188 (12:1)	63	251	0%
3	15	188 (12:1)	63	251	0%
4*	10*	172 (17:1)	84	254	0%
5*	10*	172 (17:1)	84	254	0%
6*	10*	172 (17:1)	84	254	0%
7	15	278 (12:1)	63	251	0%

To summarize the projections shown in the chart above, if the school's schedule operated under a top-down approach, where student schedules were determined by the school administration

so that all class sizes would be level and *there would exist minimal student choice in the classes in which they enroll*, then the school's student-teacher ratio would operate at 12:1.

This approach, however, is unrealistic and does not promote Explore Academy's choice-based philosophy. Given that the school's choice-based system allows students the freedom to choose their own educational pathway, flexibility in class sizes must exist, and thus the school must allow for class sizes to vary with the enrollment margin as described above. In this case, the margin exists within the range of twelve (minimum) and eighteen (maximum) students per teacher, and thus Explore Academy sets its average class size at 15 students per teacher.

**STAFFING PLAN
SCHOOL YEAR 2**

In the second year, when enrollment is expected to reach 375 total students, the school will employ an additional teacher for each core content area (four per content area) and one additional art teacher, and thus have a total staffing of twenty (20) teachers (includes the academic director).

The chart below shows this:

Period	Teachers in Class	Students in Class (Student-Teacher Ratio)	Number of Students on Academic Flex	Total Student Accommodation	Enrollment Margin
1	20	366 (18:1)	94	443	23%
2	20	366 (18:1)	94	443	23%
3	20	366 (18:1)	94	443	23%
4*	13*	303 (23:1)	125	428	14%
5*	13*	303 (23:1)	125	428	14%
6*	13*	303 (23:1)	125	428	14%
7	20	366 (18:1)	94	443	23%

Because the above projected once again represents over-enrollment to preserve scheduling flexibility, class sizes represent their maximum values. In School Year 2, class sizes will continue to operate at an average of 15 students per teacher.

**STAFFING PLAN
SCHOOL YEAR 3 AND BEYOND**

In its third year, the Explore Academy will operate at full enrollment with five hundred (500) total students. For this year, the school will be fully staffed with a total of twenty-four (24) teachers

(includes the academic director), consisting of five teachers per core content area, two teachers for art, one for foreign language, and one for physical education. The student-teacher ratio is once again shown as a maximum, with the average student teacher ratio at 17 students per teacher. As this represents the school's projected total enrollment, this student teacher ratio should remain constant for all years thereafter.

The chart below shows this:

Period	Teachers in Class	Students in Class (Student-Teacher Ratio)	Number of Students on Academic Flex	Total Student Accommodation	Enrollment Margin
1	24	465 (19:1)	125	590	18%
2	24	465 (19:1)	125	590	18%
3	24	465 (19:1)	125	590	18%
4*	16*	371 (23:1)	167	538	8%
5*	16*	371 (23:1)	167	538	8%
6*	16*	371 (23:1)	167	538	8%
7	20	465 (19:1)	125	590	18%

SCHOOL CALENDAR

D.(5) State the length of the school day and school year (including a total number of days/hours of instruction). Describe in detail how this schedule supports the school's educational program and how the calendar is optimal for achieving high outcomes for your target student population.

Given eight academic terms, each spanning 22-days, the total school year length comes to 176 days. The semester schedule is shown below.

- ~ Academic Term 1 (8/12 – 9/11/14)
22 instructional days (includes holiday 9/1/14 – Labor Day)
- ~ Academic Term 2 (9/12 – 10/14/14)
22 instructional days (includes fall holiday 10/13/14)
- ~ Academic Term 3 (10/15 – 11/13/14)
22 instructional days
- ~ Academic Term 4 (11/14 – 12/18/14)
22 instructional days (includes holidays 11/27 to 11/29/14 – Thanksgiving)
- ~ Academic Term 5 (1/7 – 2/6/15)
22 instructional days (includes holiday 1/19/15 – Martin Luther King Jr. Day)

- ~ Academic Term 6 (2/9 – 3/12/15)
22 instructional days (includes holiday 2/16/15 – President’s Day)
- ~ Academic Term 7 (3/13 – 4/24/15)
22 instructional days (includes 8 days off, dates TBD – spring break (5 days) and PARCC testing (3 days))
- ~ Academic Term 8 (4/27 – 5/27/15)
22 instructional days

SCHOOL CALENDAR
DAILY SCHEDULE

The school day will consist of seven (7) periods, each 63 minutes in length. From those seven (7), students will register for five (5) seminars with the remaining two periods representing a student’s academic flex time. How a student sets up his or her schedule will be based on seminar availability and personal preference. There are constraints within this process and students will have to decide which available seminars take higher priority. This process parallels what students will witness in college as college courses can often become closed due to enrollment limits.

A student will utilize one academic flex period for a combination of academic work and lunch. Because this period includes lunch, it will not count towards instructional time as stated in NMSA 22-2-8-1.

To satisfy the requirement for consideration as instructional time, a period of time must be considered a school-directed program. This would include:

- ~ Passing periods
- ~ Homerooms and study halls
- ~ Independent study programs
- ~ Approved work-study programs
- ~ Internships
- ~ Mentorships

The academic flex period would qualify as a hybrid of both an independent study program and study hall, in which students are utilizing available time out of class, but during the course of the school day, to perform additional work as assigned by their teachers. In this sense, the academic flex time can

be considered as an extension of the classroom and is considered as instructional time in the calculations below. This applies only to the academic flex period not partially utilized for lunch.

Although they will not count as credit, students will register for both academic flex periods in their schedule, designating one as their lunch period. In the other flex period, they will report to the dean of students to submit their attendance using the classroom response system (“clickers”) mentioned above. Because of teacher lunches, utilized in periods 4-6, and based on the potential overloading of common areas during lunch periods (period 4-6), students will not be allowed to register for more than one academic flex period during periods 4-6.

The daily schedule is shown below:

PERIOD	TIME	DURATION
Period 1	7:15-8:18	63 minutes
Period 2	8:22-9:25	63 minutes
Period 3	9:29-10:32	63 minutes
Period 4	10:36-11:39	63 minutes
Period 5	11:43-12:46	63 minutes
Period 6	12:50-1:53	63 minutes
Period 7	1:57-3:00	63 minutes

Recent evidence has suggested that, in terms of overall instructional hours, *more is not necessarily better*. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, United States students receive the equivalent of more than six weeks additional instruction time compared to average countries, yet still perform far below average on tests such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The five top-performing countries on PISA, in contrast, do not consistently spend the highest amounts of school time on instruction.

Similarly, Penn State University researchers, assessing students based on international tests, demonstrated that, based on statistical analysis, there exists no significant correlation between instructional time and test scores (Stoops, 2007). More is not always better.

Explore Academy will provide instructional time that exceeds the minimum state required hours per year, yet the focus of the school is not in total instructional time, but in *targeted* instruction, resulting in higher quality student learning. Explore Academy will fine tune its teaching, tailoring it to the individual student, and will thus create a higher quality level of overall instruction.

SCHOOL CALENDAR
INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

The total number of instructional time exceeds the state-required mandate of 1080 hours per year. The proposed schedule shown above includes:

- ~ Six (6) periods of 63 minutes (five classes and *one* academic flex period)
- ~ Six (6) passing periods of four (4) minutes each

Total: 402 minutes instructional time per day

- ~ 176 school days per academic year

Total: 1179 hours instructional time per year

The schedule shown above is a modified version of a block schedule, with 63-min classes; because evidence is inconclusive when comparing the effectiveness of block-scheduled instruction (75-85 minutes) vs. typical instruction (45-55 minutes), the proposed system does not opt for one specific model over the other. Instead, the desired schedule will utilize the positive aspects of the block schedule (longer period length) combined with the benefits of an everyday class structure to maintain academic consistency. Longer periods do provide students with greater depth, and thus greater fulfillment of the higher-tiered cognitive objectives within Bloom's Taxonomy (analysis, evaluation, synthesis), and thus longer class length is deemed as a priority.

A five-period day was chosen to focus on depth *and* breadth, as well as to limit the amount of classes a student would visit in one day in order to prevent the potential for instructional overload that can result from seven or eight class periods per day.

D.(6) Describe your professional development plan that supports the successful implementation of the educational plan, mission, and goals and that meets state requirements.

Because each teacher, and the respective seminars for which he or she is responsible, are developed and planned by the teacher, Explore Academy does not operate within the confines of one educational model. In fact, it is the lack of commitment to one specific model that provides the opportunity for the Explore Academy's differentiated curriculum.

It is expected that, prior to its first school year, staff will require basic training on various elements relevant to the school's operation. These training sessions will take place in the few days leading up to the first day of school and will include orientation regarding school policies and procedures, necessary software (gradebook, etc.) and network orientation, and the establishment of effective and cooperative Professional Learning Communities (PLC's). Academic philosophies including Bloom's Taxonomy will also be employed as they will become the basis for effective instruction.

Given the diverse population of students seen at a public high school, especially with the ethnic and lingual diversity seen in the Albuquerque area, and with the limited budget and narrow financial margin preventing a charter school from hiring a broad workforce of specialized teachers (ELL, special education), it becomes crucial to develop *every* teacher within the staff in the basic instructional strategies to best serve these special populations.

To this end, in addressing students who are in special education or ELL programs, and because the school will operate under a full inclusion philosophy, staff members will receive basic training, through their Professional Learning Communities, on effective teaching strategies toward educating these two specific groups. Training in these areas typically involves great overlap, since focused teaching toward both groups tends to involve highly similar strategies, and thus professional development in these areas will often be combined. Furthermore, these strategies will provide nothing but increased benefit in the teaching of all students. Such trainings, as they are required, will be managed by special education teachers and TESOL-certified staff members.

Professional development sessions will be driven through Professional Learning Communities, composed of teachers of similar content areas (science, math, etc.). These groups will meet at least two times per month after school to receive training, exchange ideas, share best practices, and measure academic progress as it relates to both the school's goals and those content-area goals set

forth by each PLC at the beginning of each academic year. The school's principal may elect to utilize this time, as needed, to hold training sessions for the entire staff.

Explore Academy not only is driven to provide a platform for students to explore, but for its staff members to expand their professional experience and bring innovative ideas to drive the school's evolution. To this end, the school has set up funding (budget function 1000-55820) to allow teachers and other staff members to seek out trainings to help further themselves in their profession. For teachers, specifically, this may include attending a local conference or the purchasing of materials to expand their knowledge in a certain area, the results of which can *directly benefit the educational experience* they provide for students. Because teachers represent a significant driving force in the dynamic curriculum Explore Academy offers, it is vital that teachers be allowed the freedom (and provided the funding) to pursue their own interests to better themselves as educational professionals.

To document their professional development, each teacher will be expected to compose an annual Professional Development Plan (PDP). This plan will describe an aspect or aspects of their teaching that they wish to focus their professional development within the given school year. The plan will include a specific outline of the steps taken and measurements used to enact the described plan. At the end of the year the teacher will compose a reflection which describes the results of the plan, showing the supportive data.

Professional development is meant to drive teachers to improve themselves, and as such, the Professional Development Plan *is not an administrative tool*, but rather for the teacher to use to document his or her efforts to improve his or her own instruction. While not a part of the formal evaluation process, submission of the PDP each year will be required as part of a teacher's evaluation in accordance with Title 6, Chapter 69, Part 4 of the New Mexico Administrative Code.

E. EMPLOYEES

EMPLOYEE-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP

E.(1) Provide an explanation of the relationship that will exist between the charter school and its employees. This explanation should include a general description of the terms and conditions of employment for each class of employee (administration, professional staff and administrative staff) and how the school will address employees' recognized representatives.

All certified and non-certified employees are subject to the School Personnel Act, Section 22-10A et. seq. NMSA 1978. Employees are classified as a regular full-time, regular part-time, short-term, or temporary employee. In addition, employees are classified as nonexempt or exempt in accordance with the Fair Labor Standards Act and applicable state law and compensated according to FLSA overtime guidelines. Those employees who work more than 0.25 full-time equivalent (FTE) shall participate in the Educational Retirement Board pension for public educational employees. Explore Academy employees are not covered under any collective bargaining agreement.

Explore Academy employees are not employees of a school district. The school does not intend to have an employee bargaining unit, however, in the event that one is certified, the Governance Council will negotiate a collective bargaining agreement as provided in the Public Employees Labor Relations Act.

PERSONNEL POLICIES

E.(2) Provide proposed governing body personnel policies that comply with all applicable federal and state statutes and regulations (attach as Appendix "E"); or state how and when employment policies and procedures will be developed and how you will ensure that they comply with applicable federal and state labor laws, regulations and rules.

The initial draft of the Explore Academy's personnel policies is found in Appendix E. This draft has the capacity for revision throughout the Planning Year prior to the school's opening, and will reviewed and revised by the school principal and Governance Council as needed prior to July 31st of the Planning Year.

E.(3) Describe a staff discipline process that provides for due process in accordance with state law.

Whether or not an employee's performance, conduct or behavior warrants disciplinary action is within the judgment and discretion of the principal, as is the appropriate type of discipline in a particular instance. All actions taken by the school will be in accordance with the applicable requirements of the New Mexico School Personnel Act. Explore Academy does not intend by these guidelines to create an expectation that any employee will be assured of any particular form of disciplinary action, such as warning or notice, or progressive discipline, prior to discharge. Rather, discipline shall be imposed at the principal's discretion, in consideration of the law and the factors the school deems relevant. In considering or issuing discipline, the principal may and generally should consider an employee's entire work record and disciplinary history, and may rely on all information and documentation relating to the employee in question, whether or not the information or documentation has been shared with the employee.

The school's principal may use a number of tools to motivate, correct, and/or discipline employees, including, but not limited to warnings, reprimands, suspension with or without pay, and discharge, as determined to be appropriate in each individual circumstance. Progressive discipline may be used to correct employee behavioral or performance problems. However, there may be situations where the severity or seriousness of the offense justifies the omission of one or more of the steps in this process. Likewise, there may be situations where a disciplinary step is repeated.

The principal will perform a thorough and unbiased investigation into the incident at hand, the specifics of which will be documented. An employee accused of misconduct may be placed on paid administrative leave pending the school's investigation, if the circumstances warrant. Time designated as administrative leave with pay will not be charged to the employee's paid leave.

The employee will have an opportunity to review the details of the investigation and to compose a formal response to any charges or assertions in question. This response will be included with the documented investigation before the incident is formally reviewed.

Termination of employment is an inevitable part of personnel activity within any organization. The list below describes examples of common circumstances under which employment is terminated:

- ~ Reduction in Force (RIF)
- ~ Non-renewal of Year-Long Contracts and School-Term Contracts
- ~ Resignation – voluntary employment termination initiated by an employee
- ~ Discharge – involuntary employment termination initiated by the organization
- ~ Retirement – voluntary employment termination initiated by the employee meeting age, length of service, and any other criteria for retirement from the organization

Explore Academy will schedule exit interviews at the time of employment termination. The exit interview will afford an opportunity to discuss such issues as employee benefits, conversion privileges, repayment of outstanding debts, or return of school-owned property. Suggestions, complaints, and questions can also be voiced at this time.

The principal determines all involuntary terminations for reasons that may include but are not limited to the following:

- ~ Failure to abide by written policies
- ~ Use of alcoholic beverages or non-prescribed drugs on the school premises
- ~ Appearing for work under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- ~ Fighting, assault or attempting to injure others
- ~ Falsifying or misusing school records including applications
- ~ Conviction of any felony or serious misdemeanor crime
- ~ Theft of school equipment
- ~ Failure to meet the terms of probation including disciplinary probation
- ~ Unsatisfactory performance of designated job position

Employees may at any time terminate their employment voluntarily. An employee must give at least two weeks written notice of intention to resign in order to be considered as having left employment in good standing. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis if a two-week notice was not possible. In such a case, other conditions will be considered, as such as past performance.

Termination of an employee's services by Explore Academy due to reduction of force, budget cutbacks, abolition of position due to reorganization or reassignment of duties, will require Explore Academy to give notice in writing to the employee at least two weeks in advance of termination. Terminations required by a reduction in force shall be carried out pursuant to a Governance Council approved plan.

When more than one employee is involved, the principal shall establish a fair and equitable method governing the order in which employees are laid off *with the programmatic needs of the school as a primary consideration*.

Explore Academy may terminate an employee with fewer than three years of consecutive service for any reason it deems sufficient. Upon request of the employee, the principal shall provide written reasons for the decision to terminate. The reasons shall be provided within ten working days of the request. The reasons shall not be publicly disclosed and the reasons shall not provide a basis for contesting the decision under the School Personnel Act [22-10A-1 NMSA 1978].

Before terminating a non-certified school employee, Explore Academy shall serve the employee with a written notice of termination.

An employee who has been employed by Explore Academy for three consecutive years and who receives a notice of termination pursuant to either Section 22-10-12 NMSA 1978 [recompiled] or this section, may request an opportunity to make a statement to the local school board (Governance Council) on the decision to terminate him by submitting a written request to the principal within five (5) working days from the date written notice of termination is served upon him. The employee may also request in writing the reasons for the action to terminate.

The principal shall provide written reasons for the notice of termination to the employee within five working days from the date the written request for a meeting and the written request for the reasons were received by the principal. Neither the principal nor Governance Council shall publicly disclose its reasons for termination.

The Explore Academy Governance Council may not terminate an employee who has been employed by Explore Academy for three consecutive years without just cause.

The employee's request pursuant to this section shall be granted if he responds to the principal written reasons as provided in this section by submitting in writing to the principal a contention that the decision to terminate him was made without just cause. The written contention shall specify the grounds on which it is contended that the decision was without just cause and shall include a statement of the facts that the employee believes support his contention. This written statement shall be submitted within ten (10) working days from the date the employee receives the written reasons from the principal.

The submission of this statement constitutes a representation on the part of the employee that he can support his contentions and an acknowledgment that the local school board or governing authority may offer the causes for its decision and any relevant data in its possession in rebuttal of his contentions.

The Explore Academy Governance Council shall meet to hear the employee's statement in no less than five or more than fifteen working days after the local school board or governing authority receives the statement. The hearing shall be conducted informally in accordance with the provisions of the Open Meetings Act [10-15-1.1 NMSA 1978].

A person of his choice may accompany each the employee and the principal. First, the principal shall present the factual basis for his determination that just cause exists for the termination of the employee, limited to those reasons provided to the employee pursuant to this section. Then, the employee shall present his contentions, limited to those grounds specified in this section.

The Governing Council may offer such rebuttal testimony, as it deems relevant. The Explore Academy Governance Council, the employee or his representative and the principal may question all witnesses. The Explore Academy Governance Council may consider only such evidence as is presented

at the hearing and need consider only such evidence as it considers reliable. No record shall be made of the proceeding.

The Explore Academy Governance Council shall notify the employee and the principal of its decision in writing within five working days from the conclusion of the meeting.

EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCES

E.(4) Outline a proposed process for addressing employee grievances.

Explore Academy recognizes the rights of its staff and enrolled participants to have open access to mediation. This means they have the right to report problems, concerns or grievances regarding any aspect of their training or other activities, which are within the control of the school.

The grievance policy is intended for all staff and students. Explore Academy will be guided by the following principles when dealing with complaints, grievances and appeals:

- ~ Each complaint or grievance and its outcome will be recorded in writing
- ~ Each appeal is given a fair hearing by an independent person or panel
- ~ Each appellant has an opportunity to formally present his or her case

Each appellant is given a written statement of the appeal outcomes, including reasons for the decision.

Individuals wishing to file a complaint or grievance with another staff member, instructor or student you should use the following procedure:

1. *If appropriate*, identify and discuss the complaint or grievance with the other party. The individual(s) should discuss the best outcome to the complaint or grievance and agree to act to resolve the complaint or grievance. *This may not always be possible (comes from the analysis)*
2. If after talking to the person in question, the complaint or grievance remains unresolved, the individual will approach the principal who will mediate to resolve the problem. Explore Academy will provide the individual with a written statement of the appeal outcome. This process will commence within one (1) week of the complaint being lodged.

Note: The Explore Academy Governance Council reserves the right to hold a hearing and to identify parties to be present at the hearing. The Governance Council further reserves the right to make a decision based on the information submitted by the employee and the principal without a hearing.

F. COMMUNITY/PARENT/EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE

INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE

F.(1) Explain the nature and extent of parental, professional educator, and community involvement in the governance and the operation of your school and how their involvement will help to advance your school's mission.

Explore Academy operates at four levels of governance, all of which allow for involvement from various members of the school community.

The school's Leadership Council, composed of both teachers and administrative staff, will meet at school at least two times per month. Any member of the school community, including but not limited to students and parents, is welcome to attend to listen or speak regarding any school-related issue. Anyone wishing to speak at Leadership Council meetings will be required to submit their intention to the school's administrative executive for placement on the meeting's agenda. Meeting dates, once established, will be published on the school's website and printed in the school's newsletter, which are mailed home twice per school year.

Through the Planning Year and first year of the school's operation, the school will encourage the formation of a Parent Council. Because this group will be supported by parents who will contribute their time on a volunteer basis, this application will not specifically designate the structure and composition of the Parent Council, but rather allow those interested parents to devise its role and structure.

While not specifically designated, it should further be noted that Explore Academy students play a significant role in the school's development, and as such, the school will designate a Student Council to represent its student community. Within the first two years of the school's opening, the Explore Academy Student Council will develop its policies and procedures, formally establishing itself as a voice of the student population.

The school's Governance Council, which oversees and evaluates the operations of the school, will meet once per month, allowing for visitors to attend and listen or speak regarding any school-

related issue. Such intentions will also require advanced notice for placement on the meeting's agenda to guarantee a scheduled time within the scope of the meeting. Without advanced arrangements, it cannot be guaranteed that those who want to speak will have the opportunity within the time constraints of the meeting in question. While any individual is welcome to speak in front of the Governance Council at any time, based on appropriate notice as described above, parents and students who wish to raise business will be encouraged to first direct their business to the appropriate councils (Parent, Student Councils) for initial consideration.

In the interest of efficiency, any proposed changes to school policy or school operations must go through the school's Leadership Council prior to final consideration from the Governance Council. Thus, any proposals that come from either the Parent or Student Councils will be directed at the Leadership Council for initial consideration.

The community in which Explore Academy will operate will be a valuable player in contributing to its evolution. The school values input from all community members, including teachers, parents, and students, and is open to input at both levels of governance.

COMPLAINT RESOLUTION

F.(2) How will you address complaints from the community, parent, or students about the school? Describe a clear resolution process for complaints.

Any concerns or complaints from any member of the community will be considered and thoroughly evaluated in a timely manner. The concern in question will dictate the nature of the resulting evaluation. Such concerns, and their resulting evaluations, might include:

- Curricular concerns, evaluated by the academic director, teacher(s), and school principal
- Student academic concerns, evaluated by the academic director, teacher(s), and principal
- Student behavioral concerns, evaluated by the dean of students and principal
- Administrative concerns, evaluated by the principal and administrative executive, and/or Governance Council member(s)

For every complaint, the administrative authority will preside over the initial investigation. This individual may include the teacher, academic director, dean of students, or principal depending on the

nature of the complaint. The issue will be investigated and a response will be provided to the complaining party within an appropriate timeframe.

If the complaining party is unsatisfied with the response, there will be an additional investigation in which a secondary evaluator will take part. For example, if a parent is unsatisfied with a teacher's resolution of a given complaint, the school's academic director or principal will act as the secondary party who will complete his or her own investigation of the situation in question. At the completion of this investigation, the secondary investigating party will assess the results of the initial investigation and provide his or her own final assessment. At this point, the results of the secondary investigation will be considered the final evaluation of the complaint in question.

G. STUDENT POLICIES

STUDENT DISCIPLINE POLICY

G.(1) Attach as Appendix F a proposed student discipline policy that complies with the Student Rights and Responsibilities set forth in the Public Education Department rules and regulations at 6.11.2 NMAC.

Attached as Appendix F.

SUSPENSIONS/EXPULSIONS

G.(2) Describe how you will provide alternative educational settings for eligible students who are long-term suspended or expelled.

For those students who are habitually non-compliant with the school's disciplinary expectations, and are removed from the educational setting for extended periods of time, Explore Academy will provide several alternative formats.

If a student is removed for a period of time, he or she will be supplied with sufficient materials (lecture notes, handouts, project materials, etc.) to perform the required work at home. The student in question will have the ability to rejoin the class when he or she returns to school, and will take the exit exam with his or her peers at the end of the academic term in question.

One of the technological goals for Explore Academy is the acquisition of video recording/streaming materials for a web-based interface (Skype). Such technology would allow both the video recording of lectures and video conferencing for interaction with teachers and classmates, and will help to provide suspended students with an alternate mechanism for attending class from their home environment.

If a suspension from school carries over the day of the exit exam for a particular academic term, the student's suspension will be postponed for a period of one day for said student to return to school to take his or her exit exams, after which he or she will continue to serve the term of his or her suspension.

There will be no exemptions for the taking of exit exams. Students who miss class, for any reason, will not be provided with accommodations to extend the time or duration of a particular course.

Explore Academy is a strong proponent of each student's personal responsibility when it comes to his or her education and conduct, and it will be the responsibility of the student to utilize the information/materials provided to meet the required learning expectations from home. Given the small-scale nature of each seminar (22 days), requiring a student to repeat a particular course(s) will not be significantly detrimental to his or her educational standing.

Expulsions from school are lengthier and will require increased and specific accommodations based on the circumstances, length of expulsion, etc. Students who miss class will be at a significant disadvantage in passing Explore Academy seminars, although said students will be provided with the appropriate learning materials to help them while expelled. The aforementioned technology, if available, will assist to reproduce the learning environment as much as possible for students who are forced to attend class from a location off-site.

H. STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT

STUDENT RECRUITMENT

H.(1) Explain the plan and specific strategies for student recruitment and marketing to attract students from the school’s targeted population and that will provide for broad circulation of information about the new school. Include a proposed timeline for recruitment and enrollment.

A critical component in the successful establishment of any charter school is the process of recruitment for enrollment, and thus the need for marketing. To this end, multiple means of advertising will be used to spread the vision of Explore Academy. Upon initial approval, the Explore Academy website will go active with information regarding the school’s vision, curriculum, and full admission procedures to allow full access to the public. Although other methods of information distribution will be utilized, the website will contain the most comprehensive information available for interested students and parents to read.

The primary method of advertising will take place through mailings given the varying degree to which the population of the Albuquerque area has access to the internet. The mailings will consist of a tri-fold brochure which will provide a thorough explanation of the school’s philosophy and academic programs, as well as basic contact information and the school’s web address. They will also include the time and date of the first *admissions event*, where parents and students can come to hear more about the school, its offerings, and to meet the school’s founder, members of its Governance Council, and many of the future staff members.

Because Explore Academy seeks to target individuals who are interested in attending college, and because it is impossible to know which students have such an interest, mailings will be sent to *all* current 8th and 9th grade students (current as of the 2013-14 school year) across the Albuquerque area. Because the enrollment process at a charter school is largely based on first-come, first-serve, and so as not to provide advantage to specific individuals, and given the cost of the mailers, there will be *one* bulk mailing early in the month of December in the Planning Year.

It is expected that this will be sufficient to at least begin the process of gathering student/parent interest, particularly as the school plans to hold multiple admission events throughout the spring of the Planning Year. However, other methods of advertising can and will be considered to

increase exposure within the community as needed, based on the feedback obtain from the mailers. Those methods are discussed below.

Explore Academy will join the Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce as a non-profit organization. The Chamber provides semi-monthly gatherings for networking with local businesses, and it is through these meetings that relationships will form with the individuals in the Albuquerque business community. Many business community members within the Chamber, particular media corporations, allow for free advertising for new Chamber members, and Explore Academy will utilize these benefits to the extent provided.

The New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools, of which the Explore Academy will be a part, will provide marketing, advertising, and branding services through their Charter Launch program during the Planning Year.

Explore Academy will additionally use social media networks, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to both advertise and continually update members within the growing school community, as well as blogs, digital newsletters, email listservs, and podcasts which will emanate from the Explore Academy website.

LOTTERY PROCESS

H.(2) Describe the lottery process to be used by the school to allocate seats including tentative timeframes and procedures for conducting the lottery and for maintaining and using a wait list.

Any student will be allowed admission at Explore Academy, regardless of gender, race, religion, disability, academic standing, or any other specific condition. *Explore Academy is a public school and will provide a tuition-free, exceptional educational experience to any individual who desires admission.*

All admission procedures will abide by regulations set forth in the NMSA (1978) 22-8B-4.1. While there are no admission requirements, additional to those required by the state (such as updated vaccination records), parents of such students, as well as the potential student(s) themselves, will have to confirm their understanding of the school's academic and behavioral expectations, as well as *all* the school's policies and procedures prior to engaging in the admissions process. Students and parents will be held accountable in knowing these policies and procedures. Such information will be provided to the parents of interested students prior to course registration so that the school's expectations are made clear to both students and parents prior to their commitment.

Admission will take place on a first come, first serve basis. At the beginning of each month, starting in January, an admission window will open. Students will be allowed to enroll for a period of fourteen days, at which time the window will close for that given month. If, at the close of a given window, a specific grade level is under its enrollment limit (125 students), all those who enrolled within that window will be granted admission. Advertising for enrollment periods will take place in the initial brochure sent out to families in December, and will continue on the school's website to ensure comprehensive public access to information.

Future windows will open for each subsequent month until capacity has been reached. For any period of admission in which a grade level's capacity exceeds its maximum number, the individuals enrolled within that admission window will be entered into a lottery for selected admission. Those individuals selected in the lottery process will gain admission while those selected outside the enrollment limit will be relegated to a waiting list in the order of their lottery draw. Future windows will then be closed for that specific grade level, although the names of interested students will still be gathered and added to a waiting list.

As the admission process proceeds, it is expected that a lottery process will be needed. Within a given admission window, as it becomes necessary for grade levels that exceed capacity, the lottery process will be implemented for that specific grade level and only for individuals who attempted enrollment within that specific enrollment window. Randomly assigned numbers corresponding to prospective students will be drawn by members of the Governance Council at the Council meeting following the close of the given admission window. The lottery process will continue even after grade levels are filled to provide an ordered waiting list for those students not initially selected. This meeting, and the associated lottery, will be advertised during the school's monthly admission events, as well as through email and the school's website.

Lotteries will continue each month, at the conclusion of the corresponding admission window, until such time that all grade levels become filled. At that point, interested individuals may continue to submit their names and will be added to the previously established waiting list. Lottery duties will be

performed by the Governance Council or contracted to a specific individual to set up the lottery process.

ENROLLMENT PROCESS

H.(3) Describe the enrollment process including withdrawals, dis-enrollments, re-enrollments, and transfers that comply with NMSA 1978 Section 22-8B-4.1, and Subsection D of 6.80.4.12 NMAC.

ENROLLMENT PROCESS

ENROLLMENT

As students are selected for enrollment, they will receive a student/parent information packet which describes, in detail, the Explore Academy programs, policies, and expectations. This information will be found in duplicate on the Explore Academy website as the first admission window opens.

Students and parents must sign that they agree to these expectations as a prerequisite for registration.

Upon confirming their commitment to the school and its expectations, students will receive a registration packet which details the course offerings for the upcoming school year. Given that the Explore Academy's curriculum is dynamic and ever-changing, a new registration packet will be produced each year. The registration packet will be made available to students and parents no later than June 30th prior to the upcoming school year, and will also be found in duplicate on the school's website.

ENROLLMENT PROCESS

REGISTRATION

A significant focus of Explore Academy will be placed in the area of student registration. The choice-based philosophy of Explore Academy allows for an elegant system of academic diversity, yet as such, the system is sophisticated and complex, and requires appropriate attention to proper orientation when students consider enrollment.

Registration will take place over the course of 2-3 days during the month of July. These days will operate under a meet-and-greet format, with all teachers available as representatives of their core content areas and degree programs. During this time, parents and students will have the opportunity

to become acquainted with the course offerings and degree programs at Explore Academy by speaking directly with teachers.

Prior to registration, students will have been provided with the current version of the registration packet. Students and parents will be encouraged to read through the basic curriculum framework, the tier-based course system, and degree programs/career pathways prior to registering. This preparation is recommended but is not necessary, for counselors and teachers will be present to provide presentations during registration days. However, given that registration is first-come, first-serve, those parents and students who do become acquainted with the material prior to the registration dates will have an advantage.

It is currently planned to offer an online system through which students can register, but even with the existence of such a system students will be able to register on-site on the designated registration days.

Counselors will manage student registration with help from teachers. Students will be provided with registration cards, which will be filled out and brought to counselors. Working with individuals on a first-come, first-serve basis, counselors will register students in real-time, all the while accommodating seminar-version availability.

One reality of the Explore Academy system is that *seminar class sizes will not be consistent from teacher to teacher*. This is a reality that every teacher working at Explore Academy must accept. Some courses will undoubtedly be more popular than others, as will some degree programs. This enrollment discrepancy is realistic and welcome; it will not deter Explore Academy from offering the vast range of seminar-versions and degree programs. Disproportion is not anticipated to be significant, and as such, no teacher will exceed the maximum student teaching load as designated by the State.

Core content seminar sections will have a limit of 23 students, while art and physical education seminars will allow up to 25 students, and it is below these maximum values that seminar enrollment discrepancies will be tolerated.

The average enrollment, based on sections offered and total students will be 18 students for core content areas and 22 for art and physical education. These average values will be maintained each year from the first academic term when the school is opened. Exceptions will be made only in the cases of specific classes that deal with dangerous equipment, hazardous chemicals, etc.

Within this framework, student registration will be limited by enrollment maximums and thus students must accept the fact that classes will fill. At that point, students will have two options: choose an alternative seminar-version or postpone enrollment of that seminar-version until a later academic

term, be it later within the same year or in the following year. Using the prospective online registration system, as mentioned above, students will be able to monitor seminars for available spots *prior to the first day of school*. Given the short timeframe in which each seminar operates (22 days), no student will be allowed to change his or her current schedule for the current seminar session once the term has started.

At the time of this application, it is theorized that each teacher will teach sections of both core content seminars and degree program seminars in each academic term. If student enrollment demands become excessive for a particular core seminar-version, then this ratio may be adjusted on an individual basis *only if the teacher's core seminar enrollment numbers allow and the core seminar enrollment of the school is not negatively impacted*.

Based on continuous data analysis by department heads and the academic director, seminar-versions whose numbers draw low registration numbers and remain at such levels will be reevaluated and reinvented if necessary. Such "reinvention" would allow the respective teacher to create another seminar-version, based on a different theme, to attract more students.

Counselors will be available during registration days to review student transcripts, monitor graduation progress, and recommend seminars based on transcripts. This period of time will be essential for students to fulfill their counseling advisement requirement.

Student registration will be guided by the tier/track system as described above. The tier/track system will provide students with a concrete framework which can help guide them as they begin to chart their enrollment.

Student will develop their own educational pathway through their four-years at Explore Academy, one which will truly be unique and individualized through the power of choice. Explore Academy will provide guidance, using counselors and teachers, to assist students in their educational pathway, yet it will be the students themselves who will ultimately assume responsibility for their own educational choices.

ENROLLMENT PROCESS
WITHDRAWALS

Students who transfer, disenroll, or otherwise withdraw their enrollment from Explore Academy will be provided with the credits earned for credit transfer to their next school. The tier/track system groups seminars by common core content areas, and thus makes it easy to translate Explore

Academy credits to traditional school credits. Students who do not complete all the seminars within a given track will be provided with half credit if they have fulfilled at least half the courses within a given track.

Students who leave the school will immediately create vacancies for new student additions, and because Explore Academy academic terms span only 22 days, it can easily accept new students at the beginning of any given academic term. Priority for students transferring in will be based on the waiting list compiled during the admission windows each year.

Students may be disenrolled based on chronic truancy. If a student is absent for more than five (5) consecutive days, and if parents have not responded to contacts from the school, the student will be disenrolled. Any student who dis-enrolls and wishes to reenroll will be placed at the bottom of the waiting list for readmission to the school.

I. LEGAL COMPLIANCE

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I.(1) Describe how your governing body will ensure compliance with NMSA 1978 § 22-8B- 5.2(2011), which deals with conflicts of interest. Attach as Appendix G a copy of your proposed Conflict of Interest Policy and a sample disclosure statement of any real or potential conflict of interest.

A proposed Conflict of Interest Policy and Disclosure Statement are included as Appendix G.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I.(2) Describe how your governing body will ensure compliance with NMSA 1978 § 22-8B- 5.2(2011), which deals with conflicts of interest. Attach as Appendix G a copy of your proposed Conflict of Interest Policy and a sample disclosure statement of any real or potential conflict of interest.

Explore Academy will strive for transparency at every level, including its financial expenditures and academic standing. The school's website will be the primary means of disseminating information to the public regarding news, upcoming dates, changes in policy, etc. All dates for both Governance Council and Leadership Council meetings will be published on the school's website.

Academic data will be published to the school website semi-annually. Such information will allow parents, both current and prospective, to examine the levels of success within Explore Academy's diverse program of studies. More specific academic data, regarding data from each academic term, will be presented to the Governance Council by the school's academic director or principal at each of the Council's monthly meetings. This information, while not published on the school's website, will constitute the semi-annual publication as mentioned above. Any individual in attendance of a Governance Council meeting will be granted access to the information within these monthly reports, as requested.

Financial data will operate in a similar manner. The Finance Committee, comprised of the school's principal and one Governance Council member, will provide the Governance Council with a financial/budget summary at each monthly session. While this information will not be published to the school's website, any individual in attendance will be granted access to the information within these

reports, as requested. Finance reports are public information and will be made available through posting on the state's "sunshine" portal.

The collaborative decision-making practices at the school-level will also operate with complete transparency. The school's Leadership Council, meeting at least twice per month after school, will be open for any community member, parent, or student to attend and listen, offer feedback, voice concern, or propose ideas. Access to information can also be requested at any Leadership Council meeting, and will be provided at the following meeting date.

In both Governance and Leadership Council sessions, minutes will be taken by the respective secretaries, and both sets will be posted to the school's website.

The school's daily operations will also be open to the public. The school encourages community members and parents, both current and prospective, to visit the school. Such visits will require prior notice.

J. EVIDENCE OF PARTNER/CONTRACT RELATIONSHIPS

THIRD PARTY RELATIONSHIPS

J.(1) If your school has identified a partner organization or a contractor that is essential to the existence of the charter school, its governance, key instructional, or management functions, provide the following information: name of the entity or person; contact information; a description of the nature and purpose of the relationship with the charter school; and involvement in your school's governance.

Not applicable

THIRD PARTY RELATIONSHIPS

J.(2) Attach a copy of the proposed contract or evidence of the terms of the proposed agreement with the partnership or contractor as Appendix H.

Not applicable.

K. WAIVERS

WAIVERS

K.(1) If your school has identified a partner organization or a contractor that is essential to the existence of the charter school, its governance, key instructional, or management functions, provide the following information: name of the entity or person; contact information; a description of the nature and purpose of the relationship with the charter school; and involvement in your school's governance.

Explore Academy requests no waivers from the New Mexico Public Education Department. The Explore Academy educational program will comply with all state (Public Education Department) requirements.

L. TRANSPORTATION AND FOOD

TRANSPORTATION

L.(1) Describe the school's plans for meeting the transportation needs of its students and plans for contracting services for transportation. (If applicable)

With the school's projected enrollment, a necessary requirement in attaining the desired enrollment is transportation. Within this analysis, it is assumed that most 12th graders, and many 11th graders, will either drive or carpool to school. For the remaining 11th graders, as well as the populations of 9th and 10th graders, there are two options: parent drop-off and bus transportation.

Explore Academy will rent four (4) buses per day for School Year 1 (2014-15), increasing to six (6) at the beginning of School Year 2. Once again, because it is assumed that most seniors will drive, there is no increase in busses from School Year 2 to 3.

	School Year 1	School Year 2	School Years 3, 4, 5
Students	250	375	500
Buses	4	6	6

Each bus will travel to one or two areas of the city, stopping to pick up students at one or two central locations within each area. It will be the responsibility of parents within these areas to drop off their students at the specified place and time for bus pick-up. The current areas targeted for bus pick-up include Rio Rancho and five locations within Albuquerque: the Northeast Heights, West Side, South Valley, southeast, and the Journal Center. The Journal Center pick-up will be located at the stop for the New Mexico Railrunner commuter train service. By utilizing the Railrunner, and supporting local public transportation, students can travel from as far north as Placitas and Bernalillo and as far south as Belen.

Durham School Services will be utilized for bus rentals, and the quote for this service has been provided, by Durham, at \$198 per bus per day. Adjustments to final bus stop locations and bus quantity will be based on the geographic distribution of enrolled students, and as such the estimated need for buses and areas of bus stops speculation at the time of this application.

It is estimated that most freshmen and sophomores, and many juniors will require bus transportation. Realistic estimates predict an average of fifty-five (55) students per bus, although

school buses reach full capacity at seventy-one (71) students. As such, a fleet of four buses can successfully transport more than the necessary number of students to and from school each day.

Explore Academy will utilize state transportation funds to cover this cost, with the remaining cost covered by the school. The table below shows both the cost of buses, based on estimates provided by Durham School Services, and the estimated transportation funds, based on estimates provided by the Public Education Department School Transportation Bureau.

The current estimated expenditure for transportation services, including state and school financial contributions, are shown below:

	School Year 1	School Year 2	School Years 3, 4, 5
Students Enrolled	250	375	500
Buses	4	6	6
Bus Capacity*	220	330	330
Cost**	\$139,392	\$209,088	\$209,088
State Funded	\$136,000	\$205,000	\$205,000
School Funded	\$3,392	\$4,088	\$4,088

*Assumes 55 students per bus

**176 school days, \$198 per day

It is currently predicted that parents will not assist in paying for bus services, however, as bus routes are finalized and funding estimates are more solidified, the school may require parents to assist in this cost. Based on the estimates below, and with the number of potential students being bussed, parent cost would be minimal.

FOOD SERVICE

L.(2) Describe the school's plan for meeting the food services needs of its students and any plans for contracting with approved/appropriate food services vendors. (If applicable.) What are the school's plans for providing food services to students who qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch program?

It will be school policy that no students may leave campus during their academic flex periods, which will include the time they eat lunch. An exception to this may exist for seniors who have earned

credits that put them ahead, students who must leave to attend a dual-enrollment course, or those students who are involved in an internship off campus.

For lunch purposes, Explore Academy intends to investigate the potential for on-site food service each day of the week. Through negotiations with local restaurants and catering services, specific affordable rates for healthy meals (based on USDA nutritional guidelines) will be determined and offered to students in the form of a meal plan. Students will pay an upfront fee for a meal plan, and thus gain the benefit of food service as often as they desire.

The school will not budget for this expenditure, as this service will be funded entirely through student/parent funding, however a school representative (dean of students) will manage the food service programs, to the extent they come to exist, and will thus negotiate with local food service entities for their potential services. To be considered, this service must prove to be cost effective to parents and within the reimbursement values as designated by the USDA's National School Lunch Program (see below) for those students who qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Explore Academy will provide meals to those students who qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch program. The chart below details the reimbursement values for the National School Lunch Program as of the 2012-13 school year:

Free Lunches	Reduced-Priced Lunches	Paid Lunches
\$2.86	\$2.46	\$0.27

It is the intention that different food providers will provide healthy meals to students on different days, thus creating a rotating schedule for both diverse student selection as well as support of a large number of local businesses. These provided meals will promote proper adolescent nutrition and will act in accordance with the New Mexico Healthy Schools Law.

Implementation of the meal plan as described above is entirely dependent on student/parent commitment as no student is required to purchase the meal plan. Such feedback will be gathered during the Planning Year to determine the specific nature of the program. Those not purchasing the service, if it comes to exist, will be required to bring their own lunch.

M. FACILITIES

FACILITIES

M.(1) Attach documentation that the school’s detailed description of the charter’s school projected facility needs, including projected requested capital outlay assistance, has been approved by the director of the New Mexico Public Schools Facilities Authority at Appendix I.

Documentation is attached as Appendix I.

FACILITIES

M.(2) Describe the efforts you have taken to identify a facility for your proposed school.

There have been preliminary efforts to communicate with local building owners for prospective school facility sites around the Albuquerque area. Information gathered from these exploratory measures includes potential renovation cost estimates, construction timeline, lease specifics, etc. At the time of the submission of this application there exists several potential locations but no specific facility has yet been selected.

Prospective discussions and the search for potential school facility locations will continue through the approval of the school’s charter. As described in the school’s Facilities Master Plan, a steering committee has been assembled to further examine potential facility locations after charter approval.

FACILITY FUNDING

M.(3) Describe your plan for funding your school’s facility, including rent, maintenance, equipment, and repairs.

The primary source of facility funding (rent, lease) will come from Lease Assistance Funding through the Public School Facilities Authority, with supplemental funding stemming from State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) money in the first years of the school’s existence. It is imperative that money used from SEG funding is minimized, with the goal for SEG-assistance never rising above 10% of

the Explore Academy's overall SEG budget. Such supplemental funding is predicted to exist at its maximum only in the initial years of school's existence.

The school's budget, seen in Appendix K, provides detailed information on the coverage of both Lease Assistance Funding and SEG monies in providing for Explore Academy's facility. This estimate includes allocations for maintenance/repairs and utilities, all of which are estimated based on buildings of similar sizes (30,000 – 35,000 square feet).

The building lease will be structured with a lease-purchase agreement, allowing the school to qualify as a public building to satisfy the mandates set forth in HB-283. This lease-purchase agreement will be constructed under consultation with and will require final approval by the director of the New Mexico Public Schools Facilities Authority.

While additional funding opportunities will be explored, to remain conservative in this estimation, it will be assumed that no additional funding will exist outside of SEG funds and lease-assistance reimbursements.

Because any facility will require, to a varying degree, tenant improvements to meet the standards of educational occupancy, the costs for tenant improvements will be rolled into the total lease price, assuming once again that no additional funding is available. The capacity for the incorporation of tenant improvement costs will be a requirement in the consideration of any potential facility, and is a common element in the potential facilities under current consideration. It is currently assumed, based on lease estimates from the prospective facilities that currently exist, that the lease price will not exceed twelve dollars (\$12) per square foot, a value which includes potential costs for tenant improvements. This rate estimate is below the average current square footage costs of Albuquerque-area charter high schools (\$15.46/sq ft).

Lease payments are expected to change, however, in the first three years of the school's existence as the school grows. Within this timeframe, the school will require increased use of facility space as it hires more teachers to accommodate its growing student body, and as such, will incur a greater lease payment (although the price per square foot should remain within the levels mentioned above). This increased lease amount will be covered by increased funds from SEG and lease-assistance reimbursements, both of which will increase proportionally as the school grows in its student population.

This capacity to increase area occupancy to align with the growth of the school (over a three-year timeframe) is a requirement in the consideration of any potential facility. Not only will this allow lease payments to remain low due to less utilization of total area (square footage) in the school's initial years after opening, but it allows the increase costs of tenant improvements to be gradually incorporated in three phases over a three-year timeframe, thus reducing their overall impact on the school's annual budget.

Lease-assistance funding is calculated from the previous year's enrollment except in the school's first year where the value is based the estimated 80th-day enrollment. Such calculations are based on a conservative value of \$700 per student. The prospective lease amount and corresponding lease-assistance funding for each year are shown below, as is the amount required from SEG funding (Estimated Shortfall) to compensate where lease-assistance funding cannot cover the full cost of the lease.

	School Year 1	School Year 2	School Year 3	School Year 4	School Year 5
Lease-Assistance Funding	\$ 175,000	\$ 175,000	\$ 262,500	\$ 350,000	\$350,000
Lease Estimate (Annual)*	\$ 240,000 (20,000 sq ft)	\$ 312,000 (26,000 sq ft)	\$ 384,000 (32,000 sq ft)	\$ 384,000 (32,000 sq ft)	\$ 384,000 (32,000 sq ft)
Estimated Shortfall (SEG Funding)	\$ 65,000	\$ 137,000	\$ 121,500	\$ 34,000	\$ 34,000
% SEG Funding Used for Facility Lease	3.7%	4.8%	3.7%	1.4%	1.4%

*Based on estimated \$12/sq ft

Based on the 2013 Charter School Facilities Lease Assistance and Capital Outlay Planning Report (PSFA, 2013), twelve (12) charter schools currently spend more than 10% of their operating costs on lease payments, five of which are Albuquerque-area secondary schools. It is imperative that this 10% level is never reached to maintain financial responsibility in the school's educational pursuits, and with the estimated values as shown above the school will remain financially viable toward this end.

Maintenance requirements, including upkeep, replacement, or repairs of equipment and/or the building itself, will come directly from SEG funding, with such allowances already projected within the school's budget. It is expected that upfront tenant improvement purchases/upgrades will provide more than adequate standards for the facilities equipment (HVAC, plumbing, sprinkler system, etc.) and thus minimize the need for significant repairs in the initial years of the school's existence.

BUSINESS PLAN

A. BUDGETS

A.(1) 910B5

910B5 is attached as Appendix J.

A.(2) 5-Year Budget

5-Year Budget Plan is attached as Appendix K.

BUDGET NARRATIVE

A.(3) Provide a detailed narrative description of the revenue and expenditure assumptions on which the proposed 5-year budget plan is based. Present budget priorities that are consistent with, and support key parts of, the plan including your school’s mission, educational program, staffing and facility. Present realistic evidenced- based revenue and expenditures assumptions.

BUDGET NARRATIVE

REVENUE

There will exist five (5) main areas through which Explore Academy will receive funding:

- ~ State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) funds, provided by the State of New Mexico for the general operating costs of a public school. Specific formulaic factors influence this total.

- Federal funding from programs for particular subgroups, including those that assist schools with economically disadvantaged students (ESEA, Title Programs) as well as those with disabilities (IDEA).
- Grant money, as awarded/obtained, for the purchase of instructional materials and equipment.
- Fund-raising private donations will assist both school-wide and within specific scholastic programs.
- Corporate and non-corporate sponsorships and/or donations will aid in developing specific programs within the school.

While revenue options described above are potential sources, only SEG funding is taken into account in the design of the school's budget. Federal funding programs will be dictated by student enrollment and will not be taken into account to remain conservative in the budgetary projections. While grants, fund-raising, and donations would be beneficial in contributing to the school's academic programs, the design of the operating budget is such that the school can achieve its academic goals without such additional funding.

The revenue assumptions, as shown in the 910B5 projections, use the statewide unit value for fiscal year 2014 (\$3817.55). Additionally, as School Years 2 and 3 show major growth in the school's student body, the 910B5 for both years utilize the growth values and thus show elevated budgets for those years. School Years 4 and 5 represent the final expected annual operating budget for Explore Academy.

BUDGET NARRATIVE
EXPENDITURES

Upon approval, and prior to opening, there will exist a ten-month planning period to prepare the school for operation in the fall of 2014. Although not within the five-year budget, the financial expectations of the Planning Year are nonetheless both significant and influential in the opening of Explore Academy.

Within the planning year, it is assumed that revenue will be generated from two areas: SEG money (in the summer prior to the school's opening) and grant procurement. At the time of this application, Explore Academy is pursuing several grant opportunities, and it is assumed that these

funds will assist in start-up costs required for the school to open its doors in the fall of 2014. These major expenses, required for the school to open, will consist of material/equipment/supply purchases and various contracted services as required.

BUDGET NARRATIVE
OPERATING COSTS

The budgetary calculations are performed under the assumption that State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) funds are the *only* source of assured revenue. SEG calculations for future years were made using the current unit value, and it is assumed for budgetary calculations that this value will remain constant.

It is also assumed that alternative streams of funding (fund-raising, corporate and non-corporate donations) will exist in future years as awareness of the school and its mission grows, although such assumptions are not included in the budgetary projections. Throughout the Planning Year and within the additional five-year timeframe, grant funding is also expected to supplement funding for specific programs within the school's structure and curriculum, yet no estimate for grant revenue was included in the budget calculations. It will be the responsibility of department heads, the academic director, and principal to assist in providing these alternate funding streams.

BUDGET NARRATIVE
FACILITIES

The lease-assistance funds provided by the New Mexico Public School Facilities Authority are assumed to remain stable at no lower than \$700 per student, and thus all assumptions are made with this figure in mind. For facility purposes, Explore Academy is expected to use a portion of SEG funding, to varying degrees, to assist with lease payments, although the percentage of SEG funding devoted to lease payments will never be greater than 10% of the school's operating budget.

Explore Academy understands that it must meet the requirements of the New Mexico Public Schools Facilities Authority. Explore Academy will ensure that all aspects of the facility requirements are in compliance with state laws and regulations.

Given the diversity of core course and elective course offerings within the Explore Academy curriculum, promoting the freedom of educational choice, a significant portion of funding will be appropriately allocated for teacher salaries. The school will require fifteen (15) full-time equivalent (FTE) positions for teaching in its first year, twenty (20) in the second year, and twenty-four (24) for School Year 3 and beyond. Department heads are included in the budget as teaching staff.

In the area of special education, one teacher will be hired for School Year 1 with an additional hired for School Year 2. Special education staffing is based on need, with the budget projecting a 10% special education population and thus a 25:1 teacher-student ratio. While state and federal funding for special education will add to the school's total revenue, this funding will not become available until well into the school year and is thus not indicated in the school's budget (910B5). Furthermore, because the specific composition of the school's special education population cannot yet be determined, it is impossible to ascertain the degree to which state and federal funding will add to the school's revenue.

One teaching position is projected for the school's ELL/ESL coordinator. This position, and the degree to which the school will require an ELL/ESL program, will be based on the enrolled student body. Given the percentage of students in the Albuquerque area who are classified as English Language Learners, one full time position should be adequate.

The budget conservatively projects that all teachers will make higher average salaries. The budgetary assumption for teacher salaries, based on licensure levels, is an average value of \$47,000 per teacher, translating to a 7:3 ratio of Level III to Level II teachers. While Explore Academy welcomes the employment of Level I teachers, the overcompensation for salary, based on higher licensure levels, is done to both provide an overestimate for salary budgeting and to account for potential movement of teachers to higher licensure levels in future years.

Included in the budgeting for teachers are employee benefits which are calculated based on a percentage (36%) of the total teacher salaries. The same percentage is included in the budget for all staff positions, as described below.

Substitute teaching services will also be required. At the typical rate of \$13 per hour, with a conservative estimation that one sub will be needed two days per week (6.5 hours per day) for the 176-

day instructional year, the allowance for substitute teachers comes to \$5,948.80 (shown in section 1000-55915 within the budget under “Other Contract Services”).

BUDGET NARRATIVE
FUNCTION 1000 - ACADEMIC COSTS

The area of highest priority within the Explore Academy budget is teacher innovation. Because each seminar will have up to three versions, each of which will differ in its focus, it will be necessary to provide each teacher with the tools he or she needs to establish his or her vision to provide students the best opportunity for learning in the variety of styles through which he or she plans to offer the curriculum. For this reason, significant funds will be allocated for teachers to not only build their curriculum but continually evolve it, year after year. The school’s curriculum is directed toward providing students with an educational *experience*, relying less on passive learning methods and more on active learning interactions, and as such, will require significant investment to support teacher creativity and ambition in fulfilling this goal.

For this reason, the school is focused to provide as much funding as possible to directly benefit each student’s unique experience at Explore Academy.

The chart below displays funding levels for student instruction per student from PED-approved charter high schools in the last two years, compared to Explore Academy’s student funding.

AVERAGE FUNDING DIRECTED TOWARD STUDENT INSTRUCTION (PER STUDENT FUNDING)					
	School Year 1	School Year 2	School Year 3	School Year 4	School Year 5
Average for PED-Approved Charters	\$167/student	\$227	\$184	\$159	\$127
Explore Academy	\$409/student (+145%)	\$1,834 (+708%)	\$1,854 (+907%)	\$215 (+35%)	\$215 (+69%)

The “General Supplies and Materials” of section 1000 (1000-56118) describes these values. Financial allocation will significantly increase for School Years 2 and 3 due to the enrollment of 11th graders (School Year 2) and 12th graders (School Year 3) and the establishment of additional seminar-

versions as well as the implementation of the school's various degree programs. This increased funding is accommodated by increased revenue based on the school's growth during these years.

It is the goal of Explore Academy to use these general supply funds toward innovation that directly benefits the students while minimizing consumable administrative expenditures. While an administrative budget is established within the budget (see below), provided to the administrative staff for their use, the majority of material costs will go directly to teachers. The academic director and department heads will oversee the budgets for each content area.

A portion of this budget will go toward the purchasing of the school's technological infrastructure, including projectors, computers, and other equipment directly related to student instruction.

BUDGET NARRATIVE

ACADEMIC COSTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Explore Academy will operate off an environmentally conscious, minimalist philosophy with an absolute minimum level of frivolous, wasteful, non-academic expenditures taking place. In addition, the use of consumable materials will be minimized. The "green" mentality of Explore Academy will also work to largely reduce the use of paper. While complete elimination is impossible, the majority of work will operate in an electronic (digital) format, thereby minimizing the use of paper and record-keeping related items. In addition, many administrative areas which utilize significant sums of paper will be cut out, such as newsletters and the reporting of grades, both of which will be transmitted electronically upon the school's opening. An exception to this will be made for parents who wish to receive newsletters and grade reports via mail, although it is assumed that most families that have the capacity for electronic communication will prefer the convenience of the paper-free method.

Money from the "General Supplies and Materials" fund will be set aside each year to continually add to the technological integration of the Explore Academy curriculum, including the goal of providing each student with a laptop for use while at school.

It is also a goal of the Explore Academy to downsize the use of textbooks. While there will be strong emphasis on continually developing students as readers, other sources of material (novels, journal articles, etc.) will be equally represented within the classroom to promote the continuous development of student literacy. Textbooks will not be the basis for instruction at Explore Academy; they will instead exist within a classroom for supplemental instructional purposes, if at all.

FUNCTION 2100 – SUPPORT SERVICES - STUDENTS

Counseling staff will be hired at a student-counselor ratio of 250:1, adhering to the recommendation set forth by the American School Counselors Association. One counselor is budgeted for School Year 1 with an additional counselor budgeted beginning in School Year 2. Counselor salaries are projected at \$50,000, with the assumption that the counselors hired have at least six (6) years experience and thus earn the maximum pay level in accordance to the master's degrees they are required to possess.

An additional staff member will act as a college counselor, and will be responsible for focusing on students' collegiate and career interests. This position, while not designated in the budget, will be part-time and will be filled by a teacher who will have part time teaching duties as well (FTE was designated for a teacher role within the budget).

Also in function 2100 is the budgetary allowance for "Other Professional Services", which includes contracted services in nursing, psychology, diagnostics, ELL translators, speech/language therapy, occupational therapy, audiology, sign language, etc. It is assumed that, for budgetary purposes (shown under the "Other Professional Services" section), each service provider would operate at a rate of \$58.60 per hour, as quoted by Cooperative Educational Services. The following are estimations for contracted services for each of the school's first five years:

- School Year 1: one service provider needed, one and a half (1.5) hours per day for the entire school year (176 days), calculates to \$15,470.40
- School Year 2: one service provider needed, two (2) hours per day for the entire school year, calculates to \$20,627.20
- School Year 3, 4, 5: one service provider needed, three (3) hours per day for the entire school year, calculates to \$30,940.80

FUNCTION 2200 – SUPPORT SERVICES - INSTRUCTION

The dean of students is a non-instructional position which functions to support both teachers and students, as well as manage various services and programs provided to students. This individual will manage the school's tutoring program, oversee transportation and food service, and manage the school's facility.

FUNCTION 2400 – SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

The Explore Academy budget has designated three positions under the area of School Administration.

The head administrator, whose salary is estimated at \$80,000 in School Year 1, will focus on the administration and general operations of the school. The academic director, who will oversee all academic department budgets and will work closely with teachers to manage the school's curriculum, will earn \$70,000 in School Year 1. The school's administrative executive, who will provide support to the school's staff is also included.

FUNCTION 2500 – CENTRAL SERVICES

The school's business manager will be contracted through the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools, or another qualified business manager contractor, at a rate of \$55,000 per year. This position does not require benefits since it is considered contracted work.

Also included in this section is the school's head of information technology as a full time position with benefits.

As an additional contracted service, under Other Professional Services (function 2500-53414) is funding for the data reporting service. The school plans to contract with Accountability and Compliance Resources (ACR), or other data reporting entity, for assistance in meeting the data reporting requirements as required by the Public Education Department.

FUNCTION 2600 – FACILITY

Function 2600 includes allocations for facility management including maintenance and repair as well as utility costs, which have been estimated based on buildings of similar sizes.

Lease payment supplementation from SEG funding, to the degree required as described above, is shown within this section.

Custodial services (Other Contract Services) are budgeted at \$8,000 to pay the cost of a private contractor to clean the facility.

FUNCTION 2700 – STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

As stated above, the school will contract with Durham Bus Services to provide bus service to students around the Albuquerque area. The funding allocations shown in the budget are estimations to supplement state estimated transportation funding.

BUDGET SHORTFALLS

A.(4) Present viable strategies for meeting potential budget and cash-flow shortfalls, particularly for the first year of operation.

In the event of shortfalls in revenue, the school has several mechanisms to ensure financial solvency while still maintaining its educational philosophy. It is assumed that the most significant shortfall in revenue would result directly from an enrollment number below the projected values as described within this application.

BUDGET SHORTFALLS

INSTRUCTIONAL ADJUSTMENTS

The chart below is replicated from section D.(4) (Staffing Plan), showing the basic staffing outline for the projected number of students in School Year 1:

Period	Teachers in Class	Students in Class (Student-Teacher Ratio)	Number of Students on Academic Flex	Total Student Accommodation	Enrollment Margin
1	15	278 (18:1)	63	341 students	36% (+91 students)
2	15	278 (18:1)	63	341 students	36%
3	15	278 (18:1)	63	341 students	36%
4*	10*	218 (21:1)	84	302 students	21% (+52 students)
5*	10*	218 (21:1)	84	302 students	21%
6*	10*	218 (21:1)	84	302 students	21%
7	15	278 (18:1)	63	341 students	36%

The Explore Academy system allows the school flexibility in the event that enrollment does not meet projection. If enrollment falls below its projected value, the margin mentioned above allows the school to still offer its students the same choice-based system.

An example will best illustrate this, using an enrollment of 175 students for School Year 1 (75 students below projection).

Period	Teachers in Class	Students in Class (Student-Teacher Ratio)	Number of Students on Academic Flex	Total Student Accommodation	Enrollment Margin
1	11	188 (16:1)	44	232 students	32%
2	11	188 (16:1)	44	232 students	32%
3	11	188 (16:1)	44	232 students	32%
4*	8*	156 (19:1)	58	214 students	22%
5*	8*	156 (19:1)	58	214 students	22%
6*	8*	156 (19:1)	58	214 students	22%
7	11	188 (16:1)	44	232 students	32%

Such a shortfall in enrollment would directly influence the number of teachers the school could staff. In the example above, teacher staffing is reduced from 15 (three teachers per core content area plus a teacher for art, PE, and foreign language) to 11 (two teachers per core content area plus a teacher for art, PE, and foreign language).

In the above projection, the number of students in class at any given time is once again *over-projected* to allow flexibility in student choice and thus flexibility in class sizes, and because there are fewer students (175), there are also fewer students who are on their academic flex period, which downscales proportionally with the total student population. In addition, class sizes are actually smaller than in the original plan. The enrollment margin, while lower than with the projected enrollment values, still allows the flexibility of a choice-based system translating to flexible class sizes based on student interest and freedom in scheduling.

Note, once again, the chart from section E.(3), describing instructional logistics in School Year 1:

Year 1

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8
Period 1	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 2	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 3	Core 1v1	Core 2v1	Core 3v1	Core 4v1	Core 5v1	Core 6v1	Core 7v1	Core 8v1
Period 4	Core 1v2*	Core 2v2*	Core 3v2*	Core 4v2*	Cpre 5v2	Core 6v2	Core 7v2	Core 8v2
Period 5	Core 1v2*	Core 2v2*	Core 3v2*	Core 4v2*	Cpre 5v2	Core 6v2	Core 7v2	Core 8v2

*Counts for credit in one or more degree programs

In School Year 1, each teacher instructs sixteen (16) seminar-versions. As it currently stands, three teachers would be staffed in School Year 1, leading to a total of 48 seminar-versions offerings. Under the staffing plan mentioned in this application, sixteen (16) seminars (out of the twenty required for graduation) would be offered in the first year for all students, resulting in three (3) seminar-versions per seminar.

In the event where the school must reduce its plan for hiring of teaching staff from three (3) to two (2) teachers per core content area, the resulting diversity in seminar-versions would drop from 48 to 32. In order to maintain the school's philosophy of choice in education, only ten (10) seminars would be offered for students to take per content area, maintaining the goal of three versions per seminar. Reducing course offerings for students (from 16 to 10) has minimal impact given that the 9th and 10th grade students in School Year 1 would generally be selecting classes from the lower-tier offerings anyway.

The chart below compares this alternate plan:

FOR SCHOOL YEAR 1		
	Projected Enrollment	Enrollment Below Projection
Teachers per Content Area	3	2
Total Seminar-Versions Available	48 (16 per teacher)	32 (16 per teacher)
Total Seminars Offered to Students	16	10
Number of Versions Offered Per Seminar	3	3 (<i>remains the same</i>)

In order to avoid hiring more teachers than would be needed, in the event that enrollment numbers come in below projection, the school will wait until such time that enrollment numbers reach their projected values in the Planning Year before hiring the additional third teacher for each content area.

BUDGET SHORTFALLS
BUDGETARY ADJUSTMENTS

To provide for greater financial stability, the school's academic director and department heads will work to obtain grants to provide for teacher innovation and thus assist in reducing the school's primary reliance on SEG funding. While the school's proposed budget is based on SEG funding, any

extra revenue from grants will ensure that the predicted level of funding provided for teachers will at the very least be maintained.

The budget for teaching materials (1000-56118), representing a significant percentage of the school's expenditures, will be available to teachers draw from on a monthly basis. To prevent overspending, especially in the school's first year, teachers will only be allowed to utilize available funds for the current academic terms and not for those terms in the distant future. No funds will be available to purchase for future academic years unless such funding remains at the end of the academic year. As a result, with the funding provided each month, teachers will be forced to plan effectively in their spending, purchasing materials they require as the year progresses.

As a final option, the teaching materials fund (1000-56118) which is provided directly to teachers to produce and maintain the innovative can be drawn upon in the event that such funds are needed in administrative areas relating directly to the school's operation and overall financial solvency. This transfer of funding will require approval by the school's business manager, Leadership Council, and Governance Council, and will be documented accordingly.

SALARY SCHEDULE

A.(5) Attach a proposed salary schedule for licensed and certified staff as Appendix L.

Salary schedule is attached as Appendix L.

B. FINANCIAL POLICIES, OVERSIGHT, COMPLIANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

FINANCIAL POLICIES

B.(1) Provide a detailed plan indicating how the charter school will manage its financial responsibilities that is aligned with and supports your charter’s educational program, staffing plan, and job descriptions, and that demonstrates an understanding of your school’s financial management obligations.

Explore Academy will manage its financial standing at four levels:

- ~ Individual
- ~ Administrative
- ~ School
- ~ Governance

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT INDIVIDUAL

Teaching staff will be provided a budget from which they will fund their seminars, both core and within the degree programs they manage. Teachers will be responsible for utilizing funds in an appropriate manner and to budget spending to ensure that they satisfy the academic needs of those seminars in the current or upcoming academic terms.

Teachers’ budgets and spending will be monitored by the department head of each content area. All teachers will be required to supply a report on their expenditures to their department head each month.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT ADMINISTRATIVE

Department heads will manage the budgets provided to their content area, while the school’s academic director will manage the entirety of the school’s academic budget (all departments), and will oversee all academic spending among the various content areas.

The school's administrative team, the principal and administrative executive, will manage operational funds for non-instructional staff including counselors, the dean of students, and administration team itself.

**FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
SCHOOL**

The school's budget will be reviewed by all members of the Leadership Council each month. This analysis will encompass several areas, including those related to instruction, administrative operation, and the management of the school's facility.

It will be the responsibility of the academic director and principal or administrative executive to provide monthly summaries of both academic and administrative expenditures to the Governance Council's Finance Committee. This practice will be commonplace and will allow the Finance Committee members to review the school's current budgetary status, assess any discrepancies, raise concern, question expenditures, etc.

The Leadership Council will be responsible for producing and approving the school's annual budget. This budget will be generated based on the academic and administrative needs of the school and input from teachers, the school community, and community members throughout the year. The budget will be formulated within school's Leadership Council, and, upon approval, presented to the Finance Committee for approval prior to the Governance Council's final approval.

Explore Academy will contract with the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools (NMCCS), or other qualified business manager contractor, for its business management services. These financial services will include but are not limited to:

- ~ Preparation of financial statements, including budget comparisons
- ~ Preparation of financial documentation in preparation for the school's annual audit
- ~ Presentation and discussion of financial information with the Governance Council
- ~ Preparation of grant and contract financial reports
- ~ Preparation of bank and general ledger account reconciliations
- ~ Preparation of federal and state payroll tax reports
- ~ Processing accounts payable and payroll
- ~ Posting cash receipts and disbursements

- ~ Assistance in preparation of the annual budget for PED approval
- ~ Determination of cash requirements while managing cash flows
- ~ Determination of adjusting entries necessary to assure that accounting records are maintained accurately

The administrative staff (principal, academic director, and administrative executive) will work closely with the school's business manager in maintaining and updating all financial documentation.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
GOVERNANCE

Explore Academy's Governance Council will appoint or elect a Finance Committee to help oversee the financial aspects related to the school's operation. The Finance Committee will consist of at least two members: one Governance Council members and the school's principal.

The responsibilities of this committee will include the following:

- ~ Review the school's financial standing via academic and administrative funding reports as supplied by the academic director and administrative executive, respectively. It is the duty of the Committee to ensure that the school is adhering to its budget and, in the event of financial concern, to raise said concerns with the Governance Council.

This review should include analysis of:

- Monthly bank reconciliation and bank statements
- Bank statements in reference to cancelled checks to ensure proper signatures and authorizations are being followed
- The list of disbursements with supporting documentation to ensure that proper authorization and approvals are being obtained
- Monthly accrual income statement and balance sheet in comparison to the budget

At the conclusion of this analysis, this package will be submitted to the Governance Council.

- ~ Reviewing the fiscal policies and procedures of the school to ensure that safeguards and controls are adequate and effective. In those areas which require changes, the

Committee will propose and recommend such changes to the Governance Council for approval

- Reviewing the school's proposed annual budget, supplied by the Leadership Council. Propose any changes for re-approval by the Leadership Council, prior to recommending the budget to the Governance Council for approval
- Serve as the Audit Committee and make recommendations to the Governance Council on the specific firm for performing the school's annual audit
- Work with the school's business manager to confirm that annual IRS documents are prepared and filed appropriately

Explore Academy's Governance Council will oversee the operations of the school, including its financial standing. The specific responsibilities of the Governance Council include:

- Review the school's financial standing, including monthly financial statements as well as academic and administrative reports as presented by the Finance Committee. This review includes the addressing of any financial concerns as raised by the Finance Committee
- Approve the initial and any future revisions of the school's fiscal policies and procedures (as recommended by the Finance Committee)
- Review and approve the school's annual budget, as proposed by both Leadership Council and Finance Committee
- Review and approve the recommendations of the Finance Committee for the choice of the annual auditing firm

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Explore Academy will comply with all federal and state laws and regulations. All fiscal regulations and financial procedures are subject to and/or subordinate to the laws of the State of New Mexico and the federal government. The administration and Governance Council of the Explore Academy will, at all times, act in accordance with said regulations and procedures, all the while maintaining transparency in its financial operations.

While the administration of Explore Academy and its respective governance council maintain independent responsibility over the school's administrative and financial policies and transactions, the

school as a whole is continually held accountable to the New Mexico Public Education Department. As is required, Explore Academy will contract for any necessary auditing and financial consultation to meet the requirements and standards set forth by the New Mexico Public Education Department.

INTERNAL CONTROLS

B.(2) Provide a description of the internal control procedures your school will utilize to safeguard assets, segregate its payroll and other check disbursement duties, provide reliable financial information, promote operational efficiency, and insure compliance with all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations, and rules relative to your school's procedures.

Explore Academy places a priority on maintaining responsible and ethical business practices at every level. Within the school, three staff members will be responsible for financial oversight. The academic director will manage all instructional budgets and will work closely with department heads and teachers to promote innovation while maintaining a strict accounting of all expenditures. The administrative executive will manage the school's material inventory and administrative supplies, including supplies for non-instructional staff, and will maintain records of all administrative transactions. The school's principal will oversee both areas, administrative and academic, and will remain in consistent communication with both the academic director and administrative executive in regards to the status of the school's financial standing.

To maintain a system of independent accounting, both the academic director and administrative executive will oversee their respective budgets, with the principal independently overseeing budgets in both areas. Each will perform his or her own accounting of all transactions to maintain an internal system of checks and balances. As such, there will exist independent accounting of all monies spent and as a result, a checks and balance system is set in place to prevent fraud or errors due to omission. Review of such records will take place at Leadership Council meetings, held at least two times per month after school.

The school's contracted business manager will further provide external financial oversight and ongoing financial assessment and analysis in addition to the services listed above. Continuous communication between the school's administrative staff and the business manager will be necessary to maintain the Explore Academy goal of financial transparency.

There will exist two types of purchases: academic and administrative; both will require the approval of three individuals. Academic expenditures will require approval from the academic director while administrative expenditures, which will include operational expenditures, will require approval from the administrative executive. All purchases will receive final approval from the school's business manager and principal.

Purchases are defined as any tangible object, such as classroom supplies, or service, such as guest speakers, contract personnel and renting of equipment. All purchases require an approved purchase order before the purchase can be made. Initiating agreements to procure goods or services is not allowed until an approved purchase order has been executed.

For every purchase, employees will first obtain quotes to solidify pricing and then complete and submit a purchase requisition along with any backup information/quotes to the academic director (for academic purchases) or administrative executive (for administrative purchases) via email. The employee's printed name on the purchase requisition will serve as his or her electronic signature.

Upon receiving the purchase requisition, the academic director/administrative executive will verify the legitimacy of the purchase and that there is funding available, after which the purchase requisition will be sent to the school's business manager. Because the business manager will be off-site, the transmission of purchase orders will be done either through fax, scan-to-email, or hand delivery.

Upon receiving the purchase requisition, the business manager will verify that there is budget available for the purchase, insert the chart of account number for each line item, print the purchase requisition and approve the requisition by signature. At this point, once it has received approval, the business manager will generate a purchase order in the school's accounting system.

This purchase order will then be given to the principal for final approval. The principal will approve the purchase order by signature. A copy of the purchase order will be issued to the staff member who submitted the initial requisition, who will then have authorization to make his or her purchase.

The business manager will file the original approved purchase order and the approved purchase requisition until the invoice arrives.

When the merchandise arrives, the staff member will check the contents against the packing slip, note any discrepancies, sign and date the packing slip and forward the packing slip to the school's administrative executive, who will forward it to the school's business manager. If there are any discrepancies, the staff member will contact the vendor to resolve the situation and notify the administrative executive of the outcome.

If there is no packing slip the purchaser will send an email to the business manager, informing him/her what merchandise has arrived, or that the service has been rendered. This email will be attached to the purchase order in place of a packing slip.

The business manager will enter the invoice in the school's accounting system. He or she will staple together the original purchase order, packing slip and invoice together and double check that all signatures are on the purchase order and then stamp the invoice. The stamp will have areas to insert the following information: Fund, Function, Object, Program and Location Codes (which make up the chart of account number), amount to be paid, check number and check date. There will also be an area for both the business manager and principal to initial. The business manager will fill in all but the check number and date paid information and then enter the invoice into the accounting system and file it until it is to be paid.

The business manager will print the warrants, fill in the check number and check date on the stamped area of the invoice and attach the check to the accounts payable (A/P) package. The principal will review and initial the invoices and sign each check. The signed checks will be returned to the business manager who will mail the checks and file the paid invoices.

Two separate procedures will exist for minor and major purchases. Minor purchases will be defined as those whose total encumbrance is less than \$10,000, while major purchases will include all expenditures of \$10,000 or more. Minor purchases can be signed for approval within the school, upon approval from the appropriate administrative staff members (as described above). Major purchases require the additional approval of the Governance Council.

MONEY FROM STUDENTS OR PARENTS

A receipt book will be supplied to staff members who collect money from students and parents for any purpose. When collecting money, the staff member will complete the receipt form with the following information: student name, amount collected, form of currency (cash or check), and purpose of collection. Money will not be accepted without a receipt.

The original receipt goes to the student or parent. The first copy of the receipt gets clipped to the cash/check and turned into administrative executive, who will deliver it to the business manager. The second copy of the receipt will remain in the receipt book. Deposits will not be accepted without the appropriate receipt(s).

Receipt books will be returned to the business manager when they are full or at the end of the school year, whichever comes first.

Money received must be turned in to the business manager at the end of every day regardless of the amount collected.

INVENTORY OF SCHOOL MERCHANDISE

The administrative executive is responsible for maintaining the book inventory as well as inventory on all furniture, equipment, and other building related items. The information technology head is responsible for maintaining all technological inventories including computers, software, and other school technology. Physical inventories are conducted each year.

B.(3) Identify the plan for placing adequate personnel in place to perform financial tasks that is supported by your school's organizational structure and budget. Include job qualifications and responsibilities.

Explore Academy will contract its financial management services to a licensed business manager. The outsourcing of the business management services allows the Explore Academy staff to focus on the task of educating its students. Although there will be administrative individuals (principal, academic director, administrative executive) who will hold financial responsibilities, the school's

business manager, who are experts in the financial management of charter schools, as well as in state and federal laws and regulations, will manage the financial accounts of the Explore Academy.

The services and responsibilities provided by the school's business manager, as described above, are:

- ~ Preparation of financial statements, including budget comparisons
- ~ Preparation of financial documentation in preparation for the school's annual audit
- ~ Presentation and discussion of financial information with the Governance Council
- ~ Preparation of grant and contract financial reports
- ~ Preparation of bank and general ledger account reconciliations
- ~ Preparation of federal and state payroll tax reports
- ~ Processing accounts payable and payroll
- ~ Posting cash receipts and disbursements
- ~ Assistance in preparation of the annual budget for PED approval
- ~ Determination of cash requirements while managing cash flows
- ~ Determination of adjusting entries necessary to assure that accounting records are maintained accurately

FISCAL OVERSIGHT

B.(4) Provide a description of how the governing body will provide the proper legal fiscal oversight to ensure compliance and financial stability. Demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the financial viability of the school.

Financial documentation will be maintained by three individuals. Internally, the academic director and principal will independently track and manage expenditures from academic accounts while the principal and administrative executive will oversee the spending from administrative and operational accounts. The school's contracted business manager will evaluate all financial accounts and thus provides an independent and external form of oversight.

At each of its monthly meetings, the Explore Academy Governance Council will receive summaries from all accounts, compiled from the Finance Committee. This will provide the Governance Council with consistent updates of the school's financial standing. Any questions, concerns, or need for further explanation will be directed toward the school's principal. As requested, the business manager will attend Governance Council meetings to present or discuss financial information.

B.(5) Describe the school’s strategic vision (long-range planning) for the sustainability of the school. Discuss the plans for addressing enrollment that does not meet the projections stated in your application.

The projected budget offers a considerable safeguard against budget shortfalls and thus provides for long-term financial sustainability. While the Explore Academy budget provides considerable allocation for teaching materials to promote the diversity of the school’s curriculum, these funds could be reallocated, especially in future years once the majority of each program’s preliminary purchases have been made.

The Explore Academy budget reaches its operational annual budget in School Year 4 once the school’s enrollment growth has reached its maximum. At this point, moving forward, the Explore Academy has a considerable financial buffer in place (see General Supplies and Materials within the budget, section 1000) to help compensate for annual shortfalls. As stated, while this material is slated for instructional use, it can be reallocated as needed for emergency funding.

In the event that enrollment projections are unmet, and because student enrollment is the central determining factor for a school’s budget, certain compromises will need to be made. As described above, reduction in the hiring of teaching staff can be performed to accommodate a lower-than-expected enrollment *without sacrificing* the school’s choice-based philosophy.

The school’s facility projections, and budgetary allocations, will allow it to inhabit and manage a facility without significant dependence on SEG funding, and thus avoid significant and long-term financial problems that would negatively impact its educational pursuit.

The strategic vision for Explore Academy is to create a gradual growth plan that allows the school to increase revenues and expenditures at a proportional rate that can be understood and planned for by the institution. Growth will take place over three years, in which the school’s curriculum will increase in its offerings to students.

The school’s growth is meant to balance curricular diversity, in accordance with the mission of the school, with optimum population size to maintain efficiency, which it achieves at its predicted enrollment value at the beginning of School Year 3 (500 students). Based on preliminary community

feedback, established community interest in charter schools, and the uniqueness of the school's innovative curriculum, the school is expected to meet its enrollment projections.

The school's long-term viability is driven by the dynamic nature of its curriculum, which has the inherent ability to evolve with its changing student population. The school's curriculum is not bound to one academic model, but rather is driven by diversity based on student interest, and can thus adapt to change as needed without the need for restructuring.

EVIDENCE OF SUPPORT

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

A. Describe the type of outreach to be conducted to make students and families aware of the proposed charter school and give evidence of the support you received in response.

Explore Academy has reached out to its community through a variety of outlets. Beginning in 2012, flyers were mailed to families across the Albuquerque school district describing the school's philosophy and curricular offerings. While not all potential students/families received flyers, the targeting mailing of the flyers was distributed equally throughout the city to all zip codes within the Albuquerque district (87048 to 87123). The number of mailed flyers totaled 1,500.

It should be noted that no preliminary advertising took place in either Rio Rancho or Bernalillo, however, these populations will be considered as potential areas from which to draw students during the school's Planning Year.

Information on the flyers was comprehensive and provided parents and students with the basic information on what Explore Academy has to offer. For further information, parents and students were directed (per the flyer) to the school's website. The website was further used to receive feedback through either email or an online submission form for those students and parents who are interested in the school's programs. This is the primary method through which support was gathered.

Since the mailing, the following data has been gathered through the school's website:

- Over 11,900 hits to the school's website since November 2012
- Approximately 137 unique site visitors per month since November 2012 (unique visitors are tallied based on IP address), 822 total
- 148 emails/form submissions showing interest in the school's program

Explore Academy also employed measures using web-based dissemination of information including both social media and online community forums. Facebook has been the primary method of providing information through social media. The school has used its Facebook page to provide basic

information on the school vision and potential academic offerings, as well as a link back to the school's main website where more detailed information can be found. This method has proven effective as it has gathered over one hundred individuals within the Albuquerque area as followers, many of which are local parents who have expressed interest in enrolling their children.

An alternate method of the dissemination has included the utilization of free community message boards focused on the Albuquerque-area populations, including such community forums as Duke City Fix, Urban Spoon, City-Data, and Topix. Within each community forum, messages were posted detailing Explore Academy and its potential arrival within the Albuquerque community.

B. Provide the total number of students interested in the charter by grade level. DO NOT provide names or specific letters of interest from families or students. If appropriate to demonstrate that the interested students meet the demographics of the students you are hoping to serve by the proposed school, disaggregate the number of prospective students by zip code, school of attendance (current), gender or type of current school (home, private, public), or other pertinent data.

Based on the feedback as stated above, the breakdown of interested potential students is described in the table below. Note: only current 7th and 8th grade students received the school's flyer (as they will be the students entering 9th and 10th grade in the fall of 2014).

Student feedback did not include any demographic information besides gender.

ZIP CODES	CURRENT PUBLIC SCHOOL	Male (7 th Gr)	Female (7 th Gr)	Male (8 th Gr)	Female (8 th Gr)
87109-87110	Cleveland Middle School	2	1	0	0
87111-87122	Desert Ridge Middle School	6	2	2	4
87109-87111	Eisenhower Middle School	3	0	1	3
87105	Ernie Pyle Middle School	2	4	0	4
87107	Garfield Middle School	1	1	0	3
87108-87123	Grant Middle School	2	1	0	0
87105	Harrison Middle School	0	2	1	3
87110	Hayes Middle School	0	0	1	0
87108-87123	Hoover Middle School	1	0	2	0
87112	Jackson Middle School	3	1	0	4
87114	James Monroe Middle School	3	0	3	4
87106	Jefferson Middle School	0	2	1	4
87120-87121	Jimmy Carter Middle School	2	3	0	0
87105-87121	John Adams Middle School	2	3	1	0
87123	Kennedy Middle School	1	0	1	0
87120	L.B. Johnson Middle School	2	5	2	1
87109-87112	Madison Middle School	0	2	0	0
87110	McKinley Middle School	1	3	0	0
87105	Polk Middle School	1	1	4	0
87107	Taft Middle School	1	1	2	0
87048-87114	Taylor Middle School	1	2	5	1
87114	Tony Hillerman Middle School	2	3	0	1
87121	Truman Middle School	0	2	0	3
87108	Van Buren Middle School	0	1	0	0
87102	Washington Middle School	2	1	0	0
87108	Wilson Middle School	4	1	3	0
TOTALS		42	42	29	35

C. Explain the founder(s)' ties to and knowledge of the community your school is intended to serve.

Explore Academy's founder has been a teacher in both the Albuquerque and Rio Rancho public school districts, with experienced instruction in general education, special education, and ELL. Throughout his experience both in and outside of education, he has developed community ties within the Albuquerque and Rio Rancho public school districts, including a diverse network of fellow teachers, as well as Sandia Laboratories, Albuquerque BioPark, Intel, Honeywell, Tricore, the University of New Mexico, and various private business, non-profits, and other community entities. These relationships will assist in the establishment and continued success of Explore Academy.

D. Explain any partnerships, networking relationships, or any resources or agreements that are planned with these persons or entities.

As a member of its community, Explore Academy will promote community aid for its students as part of its curriculum (academic service requirement). This type of service is meant to provide students with the ability to build and foster relationships and connections within their community, but also to further their perspective into the world they are about to enter as high school graduates. It is expected that most students will choose to serve in the areas specific to their academic focus, and thus this component provides vital experience in that regard.

For example, a student who is planning for a future in law, and is thus enrolled in the corresponding academic pathway at Explore Academy, will contribute their service hours assisting at a local law office or the University of New Mexico School of Law where they can both provide assistance (to an extent deemed appropriate by the cooperating agency) and gain crucial insight into the nature of the career path in which they have interest.

As such, Explore Academy will not operate in isolation, but will rather be an active member in reaching out to provide assistance to members of its community while also providing its students with valuable insight into their future pathway.

At the time of this writing, Explore Academy, through its founder, development team, and Governance Council, has established relationships with community entities from a variety of sectors, including medicine, engineering, business, law, and education. As the school begins to formulate itself,

specifically during the Planning Year, these individuals will continue to reach out and build those vital relationships with the community to provide its students with as many opportunities as possible.

UNIQUENESS OF PROPOSED SCHOOL

E. Comparing your educational program with those of other public schools in the geographic area where you are seeking to locate, demonstrate the uniqueness, innovation, and significant contribution of your proposed school and why it is a needed option for the students served by the existing school(s).

Public high schools in the Albuquerque area possess an average enrollment of 2000 students, with several smaller public charter high schools averaging around 150 students. Studies suggest that the optimal high school size reaches its maximum at or around six hundred (600) students, and that most high schools, given their larger size, are not sized to maximize student learning, and as such, become detrimental to the tested achievement of all students regardless of socioeconomic status or poverty (Lee & Smith, 1997). Furthermore, as schools grow, so does the inherent bureaucracy, and as a result is thus increasingly likely to waste more resources than can be gained by increasing size (Lee & Smith, 1997).

Very small high schools too are problematic, and even though learning is more equitable in small schools (Lee & Smith, 1997) the opportunities that exist in small programs can be restrictive to student choice.

Although Explore Academy will exist as a small school, its structured program, the differentiated curriculum, compensates for its smaller enrollment, and can thus offer a disproportionately higher number of opportunities for its students, more than can be found at even the largest high schools. This uniqueness, based on smaller size and the school's individualized curriculum, are unmatched and cannot be found anywhere in the state.

While many Albuquerque-area schools now offer career readiness courses and higher-level electives, none do so with the ability for students to explore a variety of fields prior to graduation. Schools may offer individual courses (one or two semesters in length) in areas such as business or forensics, but none provide students with a *three-year* track for students to truly experience the field of study.

While the Albuquerque area does possess college preparatory schools, many of those that exist are either private and require tuition, or smaller charter schools that have limited enrollment and preparatory offerings.

Finally, what Explore Academy offers is education for the individual, which is seen in no other academic institution locally or nationally. Nowhere else will one find the degree of course diversity and educational customization than what is found at Explore Academy. While many schools offer elective offerings for credit in non-core academic areas, most students track through the same scope and sequence of courses in core academic areas (where they receive most of their credits). As such, there is very little choice in what courses students can take for most of the credits required of them. Explore Academy, on the other hand, offers *every course as an elective*, core and non-core alike, and thus provides students the ability to chart their own paths in their educational pursuits.

The table below shows the comparison between Explore Academy and the traditional academic model:

	EXPLORE ACADEMY	TRADITIONAL ACADEMIC MODEL
COURSE STRUCTURE	4-week courses, specific accountability in student comprehension	Semester-based classes, low accountability in student learning
CLASS STRUCTURE	Greater depth in covering fewer content areas	Depth is sacrificed in the interest of moving on to subsequent topics
CONTENT COVERAGE	Fewer content areas for students to focus; students can be more focused in their studies	Less focus as more content areas are covered within the scope a course; students must be more general in their studies
CLASS SIZE	Class sizes are small (15-17:1) and can remain small due to a fixed enrollment	Class sizes vary with enrollment. Most average between 25 and 32 students per class. Charter schools can be smaller
DEPTH OF UNDERSTANDING	Because content can be covered at a greater depth, assessments can use multiple demonstrations of competency to assess student comprehension	Because content is covered at minimal depth, assessments do not measure depth of understanding in any area
CURRICULAR STRUCTURE	Students have a choice in how they fulfill their requirements, allowing them to explore a variety of different topic areas. No single, specific course is required of all students	A structured curriculum, with students collectively following a sequence of specific courses year after year
UNIT EXAMS	Students must show proficiency for each standard covered within each unit (seminar) as covered on the unit's exam (exit exam)	Students can fail unit exams, in which they are assessed for proficiency, yet still may obtain credit for the course and the same included academic standards

CONTENT ASSESSMENT	Students are specifically assessed over recent content from no more than one month prior to the assessment date	Students are assessed over content from months prior to the date of the assessment and must often re-learn information from that time
CONTENT ACCOUNTABILITY	Students are held accountable for <i>every</i> academic standard	Students do not receive certification of proficiency in each academic standard
COMPREHENSIVE PROFICIENCY	Students earning credit are deemed proficient in each one of the included academic standards within the course	Students can fail units of study within the course and still earn credit for the course, certifying them as proficient in all the included standards
FAILURE IN PROFICIENCY	Students are not allowed to be less than proficient in even one academic standard before earning course credit	Students are permitted to show gaps in understanding over the collection of standards as long as their <i>average proficiency</i> is measured above 60%
EARNING OF COURSE CREDIT	Students must demonstrate proficiency in each specific academic standard within the scope of a given course	Students do not demonstrate comprehensive proficiency but rather are deemed proficient in all academic standards if their <i>average proficiency</i> is greater than 60%
CREDIT RECOVERY	When students fail a 4-week seminar, they can easily make up the required credit without significant setback	When students fail an 18-week semester, credit recovery is much more difficult and requires significantly more time
PROFICIENCY MONITORING	Scores on exit exams specifically certify a student's knowledge in the content, pinpointing in what area(s) the student shows proficiency	Scores on final exams generally certify a student's knowledge, although a student may fail a final exam and still earn credit for a given course
ACADEMIC PROMOTION	Students do not move on when they are deemed non-proficient	Students may move on to higher levels of study with gaps in comprehension
STUDENT CHOICE	Students choose how they will receive instruction for each specific content area	Students choose courses, usually in non-core academic areas, but have no choice in the methods of instruction presented therein
TEACHER CHOICE	Students choose how they want to learn by selecting what instructional methodology works for their learning style(s). Students are paired with teachers who share the same interests and passion	Students are assigned to a teacher based on the courses for which they register. Students must adapt to the teacher's instructional methodology
CLASS COMPOSITION	Students take courses with students who share their interests, often times mixing multiple age groups	In most cases, students share classes with other students of their same age. They tend to see the same students

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION	Students are free to create their own educational pathways by specifically choosing <i>each course</i> from a set of options	For most of their core credit requirements, students take the same classes as their peers
ACADEMIC SPECIALIZATION	Students can specialize in one of over thirty different areas of study, paralleling those academic areas found in most colleges	Students choose from a sparse set of elective offerings which provide them basic experience in non-core academic areas
COLLEGE PREPARATION	Students begin the college preparation process in 10 th grade, gradually building the skills they need to be successful in their transition to college	May offer college preparatory classes that are advanced, but only sparingly, and usually only for 12 th grade students
COLLEGE FINANCIAL SECURITY	Students who graduate will be guaranteed eligible for the NM Lottery Scholarship based on the minimum required grade-point average	Students are permitted to graduate with a grade point average below proficiency (1.0 GPA, D-average), and would thus not be eligible for the NM Lottery Scholarship
CAREER PATHWAYS	An unparalleled offering of over thirty degree programs, representing <i>all of</i> the most popular majors chosen by college students. These programs are not single courses, but three-year tracks for students to begin exploring their future	May offer some classes which provide students insight into careers pathways. Usually no more than one or two in a given area with many areas unrepresented. May have a focus such as STEM or liberal arts
REMEDIATION	Students receive tutoring during the school day, where such time is built into the schedule	Students are typically offered tutoring opportunities where they conflict with other obligations (lunch, after school, etc)