

## **Executive Summary for the Indigo Hill Charter School**

The Indigo Hill School is a proposed new charter school dedicated to helping neuro diverse and at-risk children excel academically, using developmentally appropriate, individualized and relationship-based strategies. Our education philosophy emphasizes that Indigo Hill will best serve its students by addressing the unique characteristics and behaviors of ALL students, whether typical or non-typical, rather than stereotyped labels.

As a full-service community charter school, IHS has been designed to serve diverse students through the general education curriculum in a fully inclusive setting. The school's internal controls and business systems are structured to provide the most cost-effective case management, including provision of special education services and multi-tier system supports.

A number of recent articles have analyzed the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the availability of services. In March 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (CDCP) disseminated by the results of an ongoing study of autism, noting "The CDCP estimates that 1 in 88 children in the United States has been identified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), according to a new study . . . that looked at data from 14 communities. Autism Spectrum Disorders are almost five times more common amongst boys than girls – with 1 in 54 boys identified."

This latest estimate represents an overall increase of about 25 percent since the last analysis reported in 2006 and a near-doubling of the rate reported in 2002. Although the study was limited to 14 states, the number of children identified with ASDs ranged from 1: 210 children in Alabama, to 1:47 children in Utah. The largest increases were amongst Hispanic and black children. While the reasons for the increase are not clear, it appears that better identification and reporting methods have drawn attention to the growing number of children and families that need assistance. They also need help in navigating the confusing system of community and educational services that are available, but disconnected.

Indigo Hill believes our school can provide a very competitive option for K-6 students. By design, it will offer a dynamic education model that includes ready access to a continuum of comprehensive services aligned to this growing student population. The continuum integrates research-based teaching procedures; adapted technology, equipment and materials; accessible settings, and other interventions designed to help all of our students become more self-reliant and successful at school and in the community.

The IHS academic program incorporates effective practices, cognitive science, brain-based methods, challenging curricula, social skills training and enrichment activities, delivered in an inclusive, multisensory learning environment. Indigo Hill's school year is based on a 'stretch' calendar that extends the curriculum through bridge programs to increase student success during summer and extended school day for interventions and enrichment activities. IHS offers:

an evidence-based, model program that emphasizes inclusion and students' strengths and gifts the acclaimed Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, where the school setting—inside and outside—is referred to as "the third teacher" and multiple intelligences are addressed rigorous, relevant and reflective curricula addressing common core standards including internationally benchmarked Cambridge International primary framework and the Core Knowledge™ sequence vibrant, full-service, innovative learning environment incorporating assistive technology and blended learning methods, to challenge and support high-functioning, ASD/Asperger's/Gifted students' special needs emphasis on student safety and elimination of harassment collaboration and teacher supports through mentoring, the Professional Learning Community Model and access to comprehensive professional development parents are essential partners and 'co-therapists' in their child's education provide a continuum of services, comprehensive wraparound services and cost-effective use of resources.

Often, the learning needs of children may go unrecognized, leading to critical delays in receiving appropriate treatment and services. Students with milder forms of ASD may not be accurately identified until middle school when more complex social skills are needed. This leads to increasingly frustrated children and families, as well as school staff, however well-intentioned. Through deployment of our Child Find team twice a year, Indigo Hill School's clinical and special education team hope to identify minority and at-risk children from historically under-served groups with related academic or behavioral conditions. In addition, some of our prospective students are being homeschooled currently, or likely attending public schools in Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, and Bernalillo.

What distinguishes Indigo Hill's approach from other traditional public school programs for special needs students is its focus on full inclusion that honors our students' cognitive strengths and gifts, rather than the perspective of student deficits. Although the school's programs focus broadly on the unique learning needs of children with ASD and/or identified as Gifted, the founders believe that learning interventions and evidence-based practices for special needs students can and should be mainstreamed throughout the general education curriculum to benefit all students.

Eventually, the proactive use of early interventions to improve students' capabilities can reduce the need for more intensive special education services down the road. Thus, ALL children, regardless of their status, will benefit through Indigo Hill's challenging programs with appropriate, individualized therapeutic supports. And, ALL children will receive their education within an inclusive, dignified and least restricted environment that encourages respect and trust. In this way, we are creating a student environment where any student with or without an IEP can thrive, academically and socially.