



## **New Mexico Public Education Commission Charter Schools Division**

### **2019 New Charter School Application Kit Part B. Executive Summary**



## Part B: Executive Summary

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

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

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

#### New Charter Application Executive Summary

##### **Polaris Executive Summary**

**Proposed School Name:** Polaris Charter School, a 6-8 grade middle school

**Mission:** Polaris Charter School's mission is to engage students in the community, environment, history and culture of Northern New Mexico through personalized hands-on learning experiences that strengthen and support student well-being and intellectual growth. We have three objectives: academic growth, social-emotional learning, and active citizenship.

**Projected Student Population:** Our targeted geographical area includes Los Alamos county and the surrounding communities of Jemez, Espanola, and Pojoaque. The school anticipates drawing a number of students from Los Alamos county, where the school plans to be located. Los Alamos has a population of about 18,000. In addition, about 3,600 employees commute from surrounding communities to work at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Currently, 17-18 % of LAPS students are from outside of the district.

We anticipate that most of the student population will be from Los Alamos Public Schools (LAPS). Data for LAPS for the school year 2015-16 recorded ethnicity as 32.8% Hispanic, 2.3% American Indian, 5.4% Asian and 58% Caucasian. Special populations for LAPS also include 12.6% economically disadvantaged, 2.8% English Language Learners, and 18.4% Students with Disabilities.

**Where Projected Students Are Currently Being Educated:** Polaris expects to have middle school students from Los Alamos and surrounding areas. According to the NM PED School Grading map, the middle schools in our area have recently received Ds and Fs: Los Alamos Middle School received a D in 2017, but a B in 2018; Carlos F. Vigil Middle School in Espanola received an F in 2015, 2016, 2017, and a D in 2018; Sixth Grade Academy in Pojoaque received an F in 2014, 2015, 2016, and a D in 2017 and 2018; Pojoaque Middle School has received Ds in 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2018, and an F in 2017; Jemez Valley Middle School received a D in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Parents wanting to exercise the option to transfer to a better school for their students need another option, we can help meet this need.

**Community Need:** Many students in Los Alamos come from families highly educated in STEM fields that hold high academic performance expectations, particularly in sciences and math. This sets up an experience of inadequacy for students who are intelligent but hold different interests and talents. A mental health survey in November of 2015 completed by 1,300 local students indicated 753 reported concerns of stress/anxiety; 610 depression; 335 self-harm behavior; 310 feeling suicidal.

For the past three years, members of the community and Los Alamos Public Schools have been in open dialogue about new educational options for its students. In 2015 a diverse team embarked on a nine-month journey to reimagine our high school and win a \$10 million grant from the XQ Foundation. While we did not win the award, we were a top applicant. A key to the team's success was its ability to engage the community, students, and staff in conversations about reimagining high school. It is estimated that a thousand people attended at least one event over the nine-month period.

An outgrowth of the XQ project was the formation of this team to establish a charter school based on similar beliefs about education. The Polaris Charter School team formed in 2017 and has continued meeting with local groups. A public launch event on December 1st 2017 attracted approximately 120 participants. Of those who completed a survey, 69% said that it is important for Los Alamos to have another middle school option, 24 % were undecided, and 7% said no. The number one reason given for a family to choose a different option for their child was "more engaging methods of instructions" at 64%. The message from our community is clear. They need another option for their children.

**Effectiveness:** Polaris Charter School will improve our local school district by providing a new learning model for students based on current research into understanding the developmental needs and function of the adolescent brain. All components of our program (student choice, self-awareness, peer connections, affective learning, metacognition, and real-world experiences) were carefully chosen to support the brain-friendly practices recommended by Thomas Armstrong (2016) and brain-based learning (Jensen, 2008). Our Place-Based framework will improve the academic proficiency of students by creating learning opportunities that are socio-culturally relevant real-world experiences. This framework has been shown to foster a sense of belonging and improve student achievement in core subjects. According to *“Closing the Achievement Gap”* by Lieberman and Hoody, students, teachers and administrators report integrating the local environment has significant positive effects on problem solving skills, critical thinking and decision making. They also report an “increased enthusiasm and engagement in learning and gains in summative measures of educational achievement such as standardized test scores and grade point average.” (Lieberman and Hoody, 1998)

**Innovative and Unique Programmatic Features:**

- *Use competency-based instruction and formative assessment* as tools to develop a growth mindset and focus on student learning.
- *Incorporate advisory time* into the school schedule daily to prioritize social emotional learning, a sense of community and organizational skills.
- *Integrate restorative practices*, an approach to justice that involves the victim, offender, and community members, provides a real-time opportunity to solve problems by proactively building a sense of empathy and social connection, into the school.
- *Ground curriculum in authentic place-based experiences* to actively engage each student in learning that is culturally relevant and connected to the local community.
- *Offer studio electives around student passions.*

**Founding Team and Proposed Governing Board**

Name	Qualifications: Education, Employment, Experience
<p><b>Bill Hargraves</b>                      Founder,                      Proposed Governing Board Member</p>	<p><b>Education:</b> undergraduate, graduate degrees in Aerospace Engineering from GIT  <b>Employment:</b> academia, NM State Government, Federal Government, private sector, and is retired from LANL.  <b>Experience:</b> LAPS School Board Member</p>
<p><b>Elizabeth Martineau</b>                      Founder, Proposed Governing Board/School Leader</p>	<p><b>Education:</b> B.A. Elementary Education, M.Ed. Instructional Leadership  <b>Employment:</b> 13 yrs. teaching in public/ private schools in NM, 12 yrs. Education Specialist for Los Alamos National Laboratory  <b>Experience:</b> Leadership Los Alamos graduate, past president LAPS Foundation.</p>
<p><b>Branden Willman-Kozimor</b>                      Founder, Proposed Advisory Council Member</p>	<p><b>Education:</b> B.A. in Sociology and Human Services, Masters of Public Administration  <b>Employment:</b> teacher, place-based/environmental educ. in CA and NM, Nonprofit Management, San Juan College, Program Director at PEEC.  <b>Experience:</b> instrumental in starting two community-based nonprofits and served on the board of directors for several others.</p>
<p><b>Amy Bartlett Gaunt</b>                      Founder, Proposed Governing Board Member</p>	<p><b>Education:</b> B.S. in Physics from New Mexico Tech  <b>Employment:</b> Teacher 8th grade science, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math, currently the mathematics department chair of Los Alamos Middle School.  <b>Experience:</b> participated in LANL's Math Teacher Leader Network</p>
<p><b>Scott Johnson</b>                      Founder, Proposed Governing Board Member</p>	<p><b>Education:</b> B.A. in English from Ohio Wesleyan University, NMHU  <b>Employment:</b> 22 years teaching 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade  <b>Experience:</b> 2008 Los Alamos Public Schools' Teacher of the Year. Facilitates young adult programs such as Restorative Justice and Boys Council.</p>
<p><b>Robert Gibson</b>                      Proposed Governing Board Member</p>	<p><b>Education:</b> PhD Physics  <b>Employment:</b> LANL  <b>Experience:</b> County Government</p>

<b>Jane Clements</b> Proposed Governing Board Member	<b>Education:</b> PhD Chemistry <b>Employment:</b> LANL Community Programs, UNM-LA <b>Experience:</b> ELL Student Services,
<b>Ken Holmes</b> Proposed Governing Board Member	<b>Education:</b> NM Administrator License <b>Employment:</b> retired Los Alamos High School <b>Experience:</b> Non-profit, XQ Grant
<b>Chris Bernstein</b> Proposed Governing Board Member	<b>Education:</b> Education degree <b>Employment:</b> 22 yrs. teaching, currently in Pojoaque <b>Experience:</b> Community Leader