



New Mexico Public Education Commission

2019 New Charter School Application Kit Part C. Application & Rubric



School Information:

Name of Proposed Charter School: Explore Academy-Las Cruces

School Address (if known): [To be determined]

School Location (City/Town): Las Cruces, New Mexico

School District within which the proposed school will be located: Las Cruces Public School District

Grades to be served: 6-12

Requested Enrollment Cap: 700

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Directions: Please answer each and every prompt, if applicable (e.g., if you are an elementary school, you will not answer questions about graduation), where indicated. **Use the rubrics following each of the prompts to guide your responses.**

Please note: The Public Education Commission (PEC) has determined which questions are of greater importance than others. Therefore, certain scores are increased as indicated in the scoring rubrics as set forth below.

Scoring: Along with each prompt, the application identifies the elements that must be present for a response to be evaluated as “Meets the Criteria.” The rubrics on this page govern **general scoring practices**. *Please be sure that each response completely addresses the bulleted points in the rubrics for each individual prompt as well.*

<p>Meets the Criteria</p> <p>100% of total points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All required elements present • Sufficient detail present, enabling the proposal to be implemented without requiring further proposal development • The proposal is reasonable and realistic • Fully consistent with other sections, including budget and mission • Fully consistent with all requirements of law • Coherent and easily understood
<p>Approaches the Criteria</p> <p>50% of total points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not clearly meet all criteria identified above to be rated “Meets the Criteria” • The majority of required elements are present, but not all • Insufficient detail; further proposal development will be required before the applicant can begin to implement the concept • Minor inconsistencies with other sections • May raise questions about legal compliance, but does not demonstrate non-compliance • May raise questions about reasonableness or viability of the proposal
<p>Falls Far Below the Criteria</p> <p>0 points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None or less than a majority of the required elements are present • Contradicts other sections, or substantially inconsistent with other sections • Insufficient detail to understand the proposal, which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Copying responses from a prior applicant’s application ○ Copying statutory, regulatory, or policy/guidance language ○ Plagiarizing information from other publicly available material • Includes statements that violate or conflict with the requirements of law • Incoherent or cannot be understood • The proposal is patently unreasonable or unrealistic • Does not clearly meet criteria identified above to be rated “Approaches the Criteria”

Minimum Scoring Expectations:

- No response is evaluated as “Falls Far Below the Criteria”;
- No more than three responses may be evaluated as “Approaches the Criteria” in any one section of the application; and
- The applicant must earn at least 80 percent (80%) of the available points in order for a positive recommendation by independent reviewers.

I. Academic Framework

A. Mission.

Note: The proposed school shall report each year on implementation of its mission as set forth in the Performance Framework.

A. (1) State the mission, or the driving force, that guides this school proposal. The mission should answer questions such as: 1) what student outcomes does the proposed school seek to accomplish; 2) how will it accomplish that; and 3) what is innovative and unique about the proposed school? The best mission statements are clear, cohesive, comprehensive, reasonable, and innovative, and have a focus on outcomes rather than inputs.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:	
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The mission of Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) is to provide all students, regardless of background, with a personalized educational experience through the power of student choice, allowing each student to create a personalized and engaging educational pathway in preparation for college.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces is a college preparatory school that will serve grades 6 to 12. Its core academic philosophy and overall vision are based the idea of a differentiated curriculum in utilizing an expansive set of electives to provide students equal opportunity for choice in their learning, all the while empowering them with the freedom to create unique and individualized educational pathways. The mission is achieved through the innovative and unique curriculum and instruction of the Explore Learning Model (see Sections II.D and II.F for more detailed information about curriculum and instruction).

Explore Academy - Las Cruces students are held to specific requirements which align with state standards; however, rather than learn objectives through longer, semester-based courses, EA-LCS uses month-long seminars to focus on fewer objectives. What was previously a semester or year-long class is now divided into several smaller seminars which collectively cover the same academic standards. The outcome is a more focused education that holds students, and teachers, accountable for all required skills and standards.

Within each seminar, the accountability level is much higher than what is seen in traditional high school courses, with students being required to demonstrate mastery in each standard within the seminar in order to earn credit. By addressing the standards in smaller clusters and requiring students to demonstrate mastery in each academic standard, each student's education is more foundationally sound with no gaps in learning across the entire collection of state standards (outcome). This comprehensive educational foundation serves to prepare students for success on state assessments and the demands of the college educational system (outcome).

The first core value of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission lies in the manner in which the Explore seminars are structured. The fundamental feature of the seminar model is in the collaborative format with which teachers deliver instruction to smaller groups of students. The seminar-style, small group instruction allows for the exchange of ideas, cooperative learning, and discussion between all members of the classroom environment as the group, together, works toward the goal of comprehensive proficiency in all standards. The collaborative nature of Explore Academy's seminars gives all students the opportunity to be an active part of the learning process, resulting in higher engagement and student success. The outcome of this structure is that students learn responsible educational choice-making skills that will lead to greater success as they transition into the more complex choice-making demands of college and career pathways.

The second core value, at the heart of the EA-LCS mission, is the manner in which instruction is delivered. Rather than providing one option for each course for all students and scheduling them by grade level cohort, Explore Academy - Las Cruces differentiates each seminar into a group of diverse “flavors” (or themes), created through the interests and passions of its teaching staff, and offered to students to provide them choice in how they learn. It is from this creativity that the course catalog is generated, which, at full enrollment, will consist of well over one thousand flavors which are designed to engage students from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds. It is from this diversity of thematic offerings for each seminar that students begin to piece together their own individualized educational pathways while completing their state-mandated academic requirements.

Throughout the duration of the seminar, all work performed by students is formative, allowing teachers the ability to provide students the feedback and time to work through standards that may be more challenging than others, as well as to allow teachers time to remediate students who are struggling. This level of individualized attention provides students with the opportunities for specific and individualized support as they work toward mastery of each standard. The outcome of the continual formative assessment and feedback for all students is the ability to develop a growth mindset in which they value the process of learning and continual academic and personal improvement.

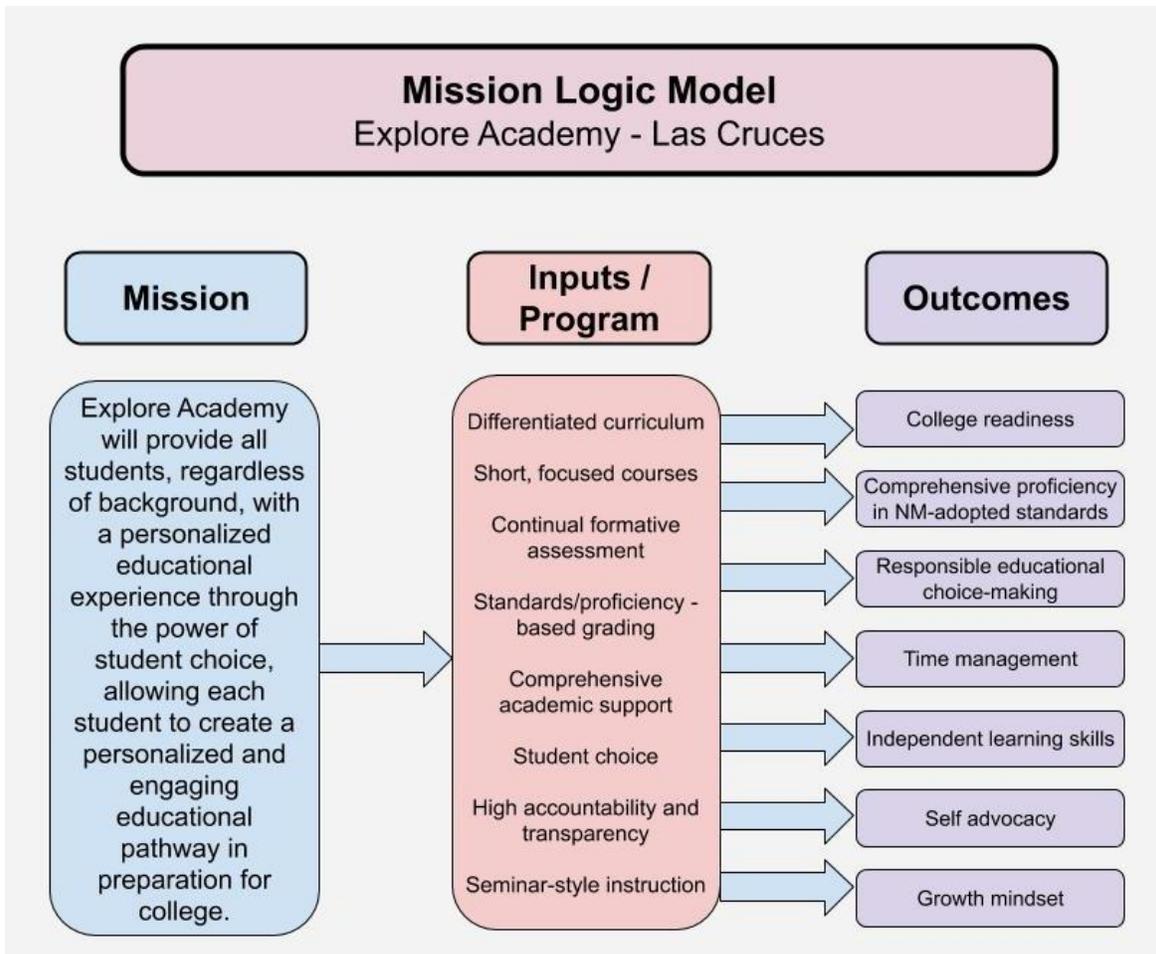
Each seminar concludes with a summative exit exam, requiring students to demonstrate mastery in each standard covered within the scope of the seminar. Flavors of the same seminar, which cover the same standards, incorporate common exam elements, certifying that, no matter what theme the student chose to engage the material, the demonstration of understanding is consistent across all equivalent seminars. This standards-based assessment process leads to students with comprehensive proficiency in all New Mexico-adopted academic standards as well as a solid foundation for success in college (outcome).

Explore Academy is committed to high accountability and transparency, comprehensive student supports, and continual school improvement through a process of data-driven analysis of the effectiveness of its instructional model and the performance of its students. To this end, the school’s primary goal is to raise the level of student achievement through increased engagement and academic commitment through its choice-based academic model. Because the school employs eight, month-long terms, there is a significant level of data collected and analyzed each month, including:

- Seminar pass rates to evaluate overall instructional effectiveness and to identify students who require additional remediation and support moving into the next term,
- Pass rates between different flavors of the same seminar to compare effectiveness between the different themes through which the standards were covered,
- Student feedback on teacher performance to analyze and evaluate teacher effectiveness,
- Seminar flavor evaluation based on student feedback each month to evaluate the theme through which the content was presented,
- Effectiveness of student choice in academic achievement to measure the correlation between student choice in flavor and the resulting level of academic success,
- Increasing mastery rates as students advance through the curriculum to evaluate the degree to which the standards-driven accountability system improves the academic foundation as students advance through the curriculum.

The nature of Explore Academy’s curriculum, given its use of shorter learning modules, possesses the capacity to evolve each month and each year as data merits. As school metrics, including those listed above, are collected and analyzed, the school and its teachers can be better informed of the effectiveness of their practice, and in turn take specific steps to improve each measurable outcome to increase academic performance, improve student engagement, and promote equal learning opportunities for all students as the school continues operation.

Each year, achievement data will expand to include state standardized assessment scores in addition to the exit exam scores, allowing the school to evaluate the areas that require greater focus for the year ahead, and which students require additional remediation and support both in and outside of class. The outcome of the support and high accountability for students and teachers is that students develop independent learning skills and develop self-advocacy mechanisms to facilitate their academic growth. As described in Section I.B, the goal for Explore Academy - Las Cruces is that most students are passing 80-100% of their seminars not with averaged grades or 60% scores, but with full proficiency (80-89%) or mastery (90-100%) in all seminar standards.



Uniqueness and Innovation

The mission of Explore Academy - Las Cruces is deeply rooted in the power of student choice and a system that is equally rigorous and nurturing. The combination of student choice and engagement, high academic and behavior expectations, and a comprehensive support system result in positive student outcomes for both academic and social success.

The Explore Learning Model is alone amidst the educational landscape in its focus, innovation, and uniqueness in producing effective learning outcomes for its students. By breaking concepts into smaller modules, students are able to focus on fewer objectives at a time, allowing for greater depth (over breadth) in covering academic content. Further, by providing students a diverse set of options through New Mexico Public Education Commission adopted April 12, 2019.

which they can complete their objectives, the power of student choice creates an almost mathematically infinite combination of student pathways, thus creating a unique educational experience for each student. EA-LCS could be open for thousands of years and mathematically no two students would ever share the same educational experience.

As compared to the traditional educational model, or any model seen within the Las Cruces area, where students are subjected to randomly assigned classes, teachers, teaching styles, and instructional modalities, the vastness of the Explore Learning program shows no comparison in providing students choice. The model builds individuals not only ready for the academic future ahead, but ready for the responsibility that comes with charting and steering their own educational mission through their post-secondary enrollment.

In the area of academics, no school in New Mexico, let alone the Las Cruces area, shows an equivalent degree of accountability placed on student learning. At the time of graduation, an EA-LCS graduate can confidently say that he or she has mastered every standard set forth before them from the State of New Mexico. While some schools boast a standards-based program, none do so at a level seen within the Explore Learning Model.

With the focus on student growth rather than grading per task, as is traditionally seen, the Model further sets itself apart in uniquely building students who are focused on developing themselves as lifelong learners, committed to overcoming challenges that they face through hard work and perseverance, rather than simply focusing on academic achievement as the end in and of itself.

The path to achieving this outcome is not without its challenges, which is why, to complement its rigorous academic program, the school provides a heightened level of academic support at school to help remediate or supplement student learning in a way that is tailored to the needs of the individual student, all the while developing students in managing their own time. Students will fail along the way, as that is part of the learning process. The Explore Learning Model is unique in that it not only acknowledges this but holds it as an essential component of its educational system through the philosophy of “failing forward” and working through mistakes and deficiencies to overcome the challenges students face along the way. This approach is unique to the learning models seen in the traditional education system, and as such, the Explore Learning Model remains at the forefront of innovation in the system it implements to grow success within its students.

Total Points Available	Expectations
16	A complete response must <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify the student <u>outcomes</u> the proposed school seeks to accomplish;• Described how it will achieve the identified student outcomes (inputs/program); and• Identify the proposed outcomes and how they will be achieved is innovative and unique.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION:	

B. Goal(s) Related to the Proposed School's Mission.

The Amended Charter School Act **requires schools to identify at least two mission-specific goals in the application** that set targets for the implementation of the proposed school mission. Mission-specific goals **MUST BE** provided within the application. If the application is approved, these goals will be used as the initial draft during the negotiations with the Authorizer.

For the purposes of this application, the goals will show the capacity of the applicant to identify appropriate goals aligned with the mission of the proposed school. During the later contracting process after approval, the goals may be negotiated and put into the Performance Framework to allow an approved school to demonstrate its achievements related to an approved mission. The Performance Framework is assessed on an annual basis.

Mission-specific goals put into the application should

- (1) demonstrate the proposed school's ability to implement the proposed school's mission;
- (2) be in the format set forth below, which is a SMART goal format (specific, measurable, attainable, rigorous, and time-bound); and finally,
- (3) include metrics and measures using the following criteria: "Exceeds standards," "Meets standards," "Does not meet standards," and "Falls far below standards."

For instance, if a school's mission focuses on language acquisition, then a school may choose a mission-specific goal that measures student progress and performance in this special area.

Again, please note that **these goals are subject to change through the negotiation process as an approved schoolworks with their Authorizer in the contract negotiation process during the planning/implementation year.**

Please note: The criteria for the SMART format is as follows:

- **Specific.** A well-defined goal must be specific, clearly and concisely stated, and easily understood. Educational goals should be tied to learning standards or outcomes that specify what students should know and be able to do, for each subject or content area and for each grade, age, or other grouping level.
- **Measurable.** A goal should be tied to measurable results to be achieved. Measurement is then simply an assessment of success or failure in achieving the goal.
- **Attainable.** A goal should be attainable and realistic. The applicant should identify why the goal is attainable.
- **Rigorous.** A goal should present the challenge of rigor. The applicant should identify why the goal is rigorous.
- **Time-Bound with Target Dates.** A well-conceived goal should specify a timeframe or target date for achievement.

B. (1) Mission-Specific goals

Identify and provide at least one mission-specific goal in the following section. Include the following key elements:

- First, ensure that the annual goal provided shows the implementation of the proposed school’s mission.
- Second, for each goal provided, use the SMART format (specific, measurable, attainable, rigorous, and time-bound—see glossary). Your goal should include all of these key SMART elements, be clear, comprehensive, and cohesive.
- Third, include measures and metrics in your mission-specific goal. Specifically, determine what percentage constitutes “exceeds standards,” what constitutes “meets standards,” what falls under “does not meet standards,” and what it means to “fall far below standards.”

NOTE: Please see examples in the glossary or in Part A of this application.

APPLICANT	<i>Goal related to School’s Mission:</i>	
RESPONSE:	<i>Other Mission-Specific Goals, if appropriate</i>	

Implementation of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Mission

The mission-specific goal described below is designed to measure the success of the entire curricular model of Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) through its most basic desired outcome: students will achieve and demonstrate proficiency in all standards through the innovative curriculum and instruction of the Explore Learning Model. To measure the success of this outcome accurately, it is necessary to monitor student progress at a variety of levels; however, special attention must be paid to the student performance trends on the standards-based exit exams given at the end of each term.

Through these exams, which require an 80% score on all standards to earn credit for the seminar (see Section C.I.H Assessment and Accountability)), students demonstrate their level of proficiency in all standards, and in turn, EA-LCS administration, teachers, and data analysts collect this student data in order to monitor trends and develop root cause analyses related to any areas of weakness. Once the staff team arrives at one or more root causes, they are able to course correct with interventions, remediation, curricular adjustments, and any other action steps deemed necessary. This mission-specific goal will guide the school throughout its contract and serve as a reflection of the success of the academic model and its mission.

As a note, this goal is modeled after the approved goal between Explore Academy (Albuquerque) and the Public Education Commission. Given that the two schools share the same model, it is appropriate for both to be held to the same mission-specific goal.

Goal - Student Success

At the end of each term, at least 70% of students will pass* 80% of their standards-based exit exams.

*passing a seminar requires earning an 80% or higher in *each* standard assigned to that seminar

Indicators***Academic performance and proficiency***

The mission of Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) is to offer students a choice in their courses paired with standards-based instruction, assessment, and evaluation practices. It is important to measure the

success of the model-specific seminar-style instruction, eight-year term, flavored courses, student choice, and standards-based grading.

Measures and Metrics

Proficiency (80-89%) or Mastery (90-100%) on all seminar-specific standards and skills after “flavored” instruction in each 22-day term as measured through standards-based exit exams administered at the end of each seminar.

The specified metric was selected to ensure that instruction adheres to the mission and charter of Explore Academy - Las Cruces by requiring proficiency in all standards assigned to each seminar (no averaging or cumulative grading). It was also selected to measure this rigorous academic progress when offered ample academic support, student choice, and engaging instructional practices.

The exit exams are designed by content teachers in collaborative content teams. They are designed using Bloom’s Taxonomy* to provide various levels of questions depending on student level and standards being addressed. There is a mix of multiple choice and short answer questions across all contents. There may also be extended response, essays, projects, performances, discussions, presentations, etc. that are used to measure proficiency in certain standards. All exams are peer-reviewed and used in a secure manner similar to state testing. Each seminar, regardless of “flavor”, administers a common portion of the exit exam to ensure that all students, no matter which seminar they choose to take, is assessed using the same metric.

*Bloom’s Taxonomy is a set of three hierarchical models used to classify educational learning objectives into levels of complexity and specificity. This hierarchical ordering of cognitive skills can, among countless other uses, help teachers teach and students learn.

Targets

For Explore Academy - Las Cruces to score at “meets standard”, at least 70% of students must pass 80% of the seminars they take. This will be monitored monthly (five seminars per student) as well as annually (40 seminars per student).

The specified metric was selected in order to ensure that instruction is adhering to the mission and charter of Explore Academy - Las Cruces by requiring proficiency in all standards assigned to each seminar (no averaging or cumulative grading) through the analysis of exit exam outcomes each term. It was also selected to measure this rigorous academic progress when offered the ample academic support, student choice, and engaging instructional practices used in the EA-LCS mission.

Students must achieve 80% across the board on all standards in order to pass a seminar, and in turn the goal for the school is to have at least 70% of students pass 80% of their seminars through standards-based exit exams every term of the year. This data will be tracked longitudinally across the eight terms of the year and broken down as needed by content, grade level, subgroup, etc. This data will also be compared across school years to assess trends and changes in performance over time. The above goal is considered attainable based on both the engagement in class and the comprehensive support system provided by the school’s academic model.

Description of the Target

Measure Rating Category	Description of Target for this Performance Level	Points Assigned
Exceeds Standard	81-100% of students pass 80% of their exit exams	100
Meets Standard	70-80% of students pass 80% of their exit exams	75
Does Not Meet Standard	50-69% of students pass 80% of their exit exams	25
Falls Far Below Standard	Less than 50% of students pass 80% of their exit exams	0

Implementation Plan

Exit exams will be administered at the end of each term (last 1-2 days) in every seminar. An average Explore Academy - Las Cruces student taking five classes each term across eight terms will take 40 exit exams per year. At full enrollment, for high school, 460 students will take five exit exams each term, resulting in 2,300 each term.

This will result in 18,400 exit exam scores for the mission-specific goal progress analysis. The data are collected by the school's administration after the exit exams are scored and grades are finalized. This usually occurs in the term break day after each term. The final data set is analyzed within a week of the end of each term. This results in reports that include at a minimum, the pass rate in terms of percent of exit exams that earned a passing score (all standards are at or above 80%), and will include pass rates at each grade level and pass rates in each content, among other subgroup breakdowns, as needed or requested. The data are compiled by taking the exit exam final scores of every student from every seminar for a given term. The percentage is then derived by dividing the number of exams/seminars earning 80% or higher by the total number administered. For example, if there were 450 students tested in term 1 and 356 students passed four or five of their exams (80% and 100% respectively), then 79% of the students passed 80% or more of their exit exams that term ($356/450 = 79\%$). Thus, the result for that term's performance toward the mission-specific goal would be recorded as 79% - Meets Standard.

Data sets will be maintained for each school year that include exit exams/seminar final scores, pass rates, and cohort/subgroup breakdown analyses. The data sets will be housed on the school's secure server and accessible only to authorized staff and administration.

The data and resulting reports will be shared with the staff, the Governing Council, and the CSD with the annual report each year. The pass rates across terms, in each content (in all seminar types and levels), will be shared with the department heads to inform trends and content-specific needs. The overall exit exam pass rate and subgroup breakdown will be shared monthly with the Governing Council to contribute to school performance updates and analysis. The overall school exit exam pass rate will be shared with the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) annually as a measurement of mission-specific goal performance for the charter contract. The exit exam scores in raw form will be available at any time in the student information system. If further verification is desired, spreadsheets with exam results for each standard of each seminar for each term can be provided (for exams administered online) and in paper forms/score sheets/rubrics (for oral, performance, and other non-digital exams). All of these scores are also reflected individually for each exit exam given across all terms.

The tools and resources for this goal include internet access, administrative and staff devices that can access Google Sheets and Microsoft Excel, and data processing time at the end of each term. It also

requires that teacher teams for each content update and revise exit exams at least annually or as required to maintain test security, content applicability, and test quality for all seminars each term. Time for this will be built into teacher planning time or offered as compensated summer collaboration sessions.

Terms and Conditions

Term – instructional period lasting an average of 22 days. There are eight terms in each school year – four in the fall and four in the spring.

Seminar – class or course at Explore Academy - Las Cruces

Flavor – a unique theme or version of each seminar offered. For example, English 400 is Argument and Logic level 4. English 401 and English 402 are both the same seminar, but offered in two different flavors, or versions. Students choose which one to take from the flavors of each seminar.

Exit exam – standards-based exam given at the end of each term to explicitly assess the required standards assigned to each seminar. The exams include varying test levels based on Bloom’s Taxonomy and are built to assess students at appropriate levels for each standard.

Common exam – for each flavor, the exit exam has common test items or a completely common exam to allow for cross-flavor seminar comparison, test validity, and instructional alignment.

Standards-based – the assessments and grades are all tied to demonstration of proficiency on specific standards in each seminar, not on specific tasks or assignments.

Term break – the day(s) set aside between two given terms dedicated to student and staff support, exam retakes, professional development, teacher grading and planning time.

Total Points Available	Expectations
12	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include one mission-specific goal; • Align to the student outcomes identified in the mission response (A.1.); • Include all elements of the SMART format: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specific ○ Measurable ○ Attainable ○ Rigorous ○ Time bound; • Include the following rating categories—Exceeds Standards, Meets Standards, Does Not Meet Standards, and Falls Far Below Standards; • Include measures and metrics, including percentages for each rating category; • Explain why the established goals are rigorous; and • Explain why the established goals are attainable.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION:	

C. Bilingual Multicultural Indian Education and Hispanic Education

C. (1) Provide a description of the proposed school's curriculum will ensure equal education opportunities for students in New Mexico through cognitive and affective development of the students by:

- (a) using the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in a bilingual multicultural education program;
- (b) providing students with opportunities to expand their conceptual and linguistic abilities and potentials in a successful and positive manner; and
- (c) teaching students to appreciate the value and beauty of different languages and cultures.

Provide and describe a detailed, clear, comprehensive, and reasonable timeline and plan for the development of the entire proposed curriculum, including identification of responsible staff, action steps, and deadlines that will ensure alignment with CCSS, NM Content Standards, and the proposed school's mission.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will provide equal education opportunities to all students regardless of race, ethnicity, background, language, culture, or any other factor. Although Explore Academy - Las Cruces does not currently plan to operate a full Bilingual or Dual Language model or program, the school values the incorporation of and appreciation of all cultures and linguistic backgrounds. The staff and teachers will promote the preservation and practice of all home languages, both of students and staff. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will offer clubs and other organizations to students and staff in order to promote cultural appreciation and language use and enrichment. It is important that students and staff are able to express their culture, use their language skills, and expand their knowledge of other cultures and languages within the structure of the Explore Learning Model.

The Explore Learning Model is designed to bring choice and engagement to all students. Each student will forge their own unique learning pathway in grades 6 through 12, creating an educational experience that is unique to their needs, interests, and passions. To accomplish this, and in direct support of the school's mission and vision, the curriculum is customized to integrate the needs, interests, and passions of the students, as well as the teachers, of EA-LCS. This includes many aspects of the student and staff cultural and linguistic background. By designing versions of each class, or flavors of each seminar to use Explore Learning Model terms, EA-LCS teachers will ensure that the customized Las Cruces curriculum is inclusive of, applicable to, and appreciative of the cultures, backgrounds, and interests of the students and their community. This allows for increased student engagement and a deep level of student buy in while still adhering to all required New Mexico standards.

As the curriculum is drawn from a proven educational model, the Explore Learning Model, the basis of the curriculum described here and further below is justified from the successful academic track record of the founding Explore Academy campus, Explore Academy - Albuquerque. As one of the most successful schools in the state of New Mexico, exhibiting the highest levels of student growth of any charter school, the effective track record provides this model the credibility on which its implementation at Explore Academy - Las Cruces is based.

Teachers are encouraged to design seminars that are reflective of the community and students that Explore Academy - Las Cruces will serve. The goal is to design curriculum that is not only aligned to the required standards, but also integrates the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students. This allows students to expand on their conceptual and linguistic abilities continually within the scope of the broader curriculum. To accomplish this, teachers gather and plan using materials, content, concepts, and

tasks for each seminar in a way that incorporates the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students and the community. Through high quality standards-based instruction, teachers also have ample opportunity to integrate the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of other areas, regions, states, and countries, expanding and enriching the schema of EA-LCS students. This exposure to other people and their unique characteristics allows students to see the beauty, value, and interconnectedness of other languages and cultures.

Additionally, all EA-LCS students take, at a minimum, two years of foreign language instruction not as an elective, but as a school graduation requirement. This allows all students to experience not only language instruction, but also content that brings culture and tradition to the forefront of the educational experience. Because several the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) standards are related to culture and linguistic appreciation, all students have over two years of content that enriches their worldview and provides unique perspective into cultures outside their own. Foreign language instruction also strengthens students' grammatical and linguistic abilities as they familiarize themselves with structure, conjugation, and usage in another language. This benefit is seen in all other contents, especially grammar and writing classes.

With a curriculum that is custom-designed to meet their cognitive and affective needs, including choice-based seminar offerings and universal foreign language instruction, students are able to develop a much stronger connection to EA-LCS, to the learning process, and to the world around them both near and far, leading to greater academic outcomes.

The attention given to ensuring equal education for all students as they develop their cognitive and affective abilities goes beyond the individualized curriculum that is developed and implemented in the classroom setting. The school is also designed to promote cultural and linguistic inclusivity in programs outside the classroom such as clubs (for all students every Friday during the school day), during flex period activity offerings, through student-driven initiatives, and through the celebration of various cultural holidays and events on campus. With students changing classes every 22 days (44 days for grades 6-7), students are grouped with new students and new teachers often, allowing for greater exposure to many cultural and linguistic viewpoints and perspectives.

To support these initiatives both in and out of the classroom, Explore Academy - Las Cruces data collection and analysis methods are designed to monitor trends across all subgroups including English Learners (ELs), various student ethnicities, and socio-economic groups. This includes tracking high student mobility rates, failure and pass rates, exit exam scores, absenteeism, and high rates of individualized education plans (IEPs) and other special programs within certain subgroups. The school will also use survey, community and parent input, and school meeting comments and data, qualitative and quantitative, to better shape the school to meet the needs of all students while also promoting positive and inclusive language and cultural learning opportunities.

In response to this data, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will implement interventions to address all concerns based on the data collected in order to continually ensure that all students have their cognitive and affective needs considered and met. To that end, professional development for staff will reflect inclusive practices, cultural awareness, diverse curriculum practices, and other strategies that assist teachers in the development of curriculum and school practices that promote and support Explore Academy - Las Cruces' Hispanic, bilingual, multicultural, Native American, and linguistically diverse students in addition to helping all students flourish in language and cultural education and appreciation.

Timeline

For development of Explore Learning curriculum that aligns to cultural and linguistic needs and goals.

Action Item	Date	Deliverable	Responsible Group
Charter application approval	September, 2019	N/A	Founding team
Begin hiring of prospective instructional staff	December, 2019	N/A	principal, founding team
First teacher training module - "The Seminar" (student-driven instruction)	March, 2020	Assignment of teaching assignments/seminars for the upcoming school year, example sets of frontloading, example student-driven unit plan layout	founding team (trainers), EA-LCS teachers
Second teacher training module - "The Flavor" (cultural and linguistic integration into flavors)	April, 2020	Backward planning layout for three (3) planned seminars for the upcoming school year, completion of ten (10) course descriptions for upcoming seminar flavors	
Predicted completion of hiring of instructional staff	May, 2020	N/A	principal, founding team
Third teacher training module - "Assessment" (sensitivity and bias in assessment, equal and fair access to content instruction and assessment, affective vs cognitive goals)	May, 2020	Formative assessments for three (3) seminars for the upcoming school year; completion of unit plans for the first four (4) seminar terms (per teacher), to be submitted to CSD	founding team and EA-LCS teachers
Fourth teacher training module - "Student-Driven Instruction" (building on student strengths, integrating cultural and linguistic topics)	May, 2020	Fully developed student-driven seminar plan for five (5) seminars for the upcoming school year	founding team and EA-LCS teachers
Submission of all course descriptions for the school's course catalog	July, 2020	Fully developed course descriptions from each teacher, deadline: June 30	founding team and EA-LCS teachers
Ongoing support in developing lesson plans	March to August, 2020	N/A	founding team

Actions Steps

Action Step 1:

New Mexico Public Education Commission adopted April 12, 2019.

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Customized Curriculum - Las Cruces “Flavor” Design

Staff responsible:

Content teachers (English, math, science, social studies, PE, art/music)

Timeline / deadlines:

Initial seminar flavor development to begin as teachers on-board throughout spring and summer 2020. All seminar titles and course descriptions are due first week of July 2020 to allow for course catalog finalization for 2020-2021 seminar registration.

Seminar plans for terms 1 and 2 are due during professional development days planned the first week of August 2020. This includes the instructional plan for the term (22 days), instructional materials, and planned formative assessments.

Plans for each subsequent term will be done at least one week before the start of the term.

Alignment to standards:

All seminars at Explore Academy - Las Cruces are created based on a complete vertical and horizontal alignment of all standards. Each seminar is responsible for a specific set of content skills and standards. Credit is earned through demonstration of proficiency in each of the standards for a given seminar.

English and mathematics seminars from grades 6-12 are created using the Common Core Standards for ELA and mathematics. Science seminars are vertically and horizontally aligned to the STEMReady! +6 NM science standards. Social studies seminars are aligned to the NM Social Studies standards. Art, music, and physical education are all aligned to required NM content standards as well as national standards when applicable.

Alignment to Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces, at its core, is designed to bring the culture and traditions of its students, teachers, and community directly into the curriculum that is taught. To that end, each seminar is thematically designed, or “flavored”, in a way that appeals to the students based on their interests, backgrounds, culture, experiences, and preferences. The curriculum is engaging by design, which in turn allows the teachers to facilitate the learning process as students dig much deeper into the content than is traditionally possible, allowing for greater cognitive and affective student development.

Students in a given seminar are compatible with each other not only because they chose that specific version of the class, but also because they are at the same skill level in that content and have met the same prerequisites as their peers. These students are also matched with a teacher who is passionate about the same course material and designed curriculum specifically for this thematic unit of instruction. In this way, the curriculum is not only designed to bring choice and engagement to all students while introducing new concepts and perspectives, it is also inclusive of all backgrounds, cultures, experiences, and preferences.

Action Step 2:

Customized Curriculum - Student-Driven “Flavors” and Instruction

Staff responsible:

Content teachers (English, math, science, social studies, PE, art/music)

Timeline / deadlines:

Beginning in Term 1 annually and occurring continually all year as daily instruction is adapted in real time for student needs and input in each seminar
 Reflection periods each term break, eight times a year
 Adjustment period each summer to review flavors, adapt for student-driven input and needs, and reinvent flavors when needed

Alignment to standards:

Each seminar, as described above, is based on and adheres to a set of standards. Within the required standards and the planned flavor, teachers constantly adapt the daily instruction methods for a focus on student engagement, inclusivity, and individualization. Since the standards remain constant and function as a final goal for any given seminar, independent of the flavor being used, this level of customization is possible in all classes, allowing teachers to be sensitive to and inclusive of all student cultural and linguistic backgrounds while still maintaining a rigorous focus on the required seminar standards.

Alignment to Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission:

In meeting the Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission, it is crucial that all students feel they are welcomed, accepted, and integrated as contributing members of the school family. The highly engaging flavors, comprehensive support systems, and small class sizes are mission-specific characteristics that, together, ensure that all students at Explore Academy - Las Cruces achieve academic, social, and personal success throughout their middle and high school careers. By not only prioritizing the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all students and staff, but by actually incorporating these rich and diverse experiences throughout the curriculum at all levels, students are involved and enriched personally and academically.

Action Step 3:

Foreign Language Curriculum Design and “Flavors”

Staff responsible:

Foreign language teachers

Timeline / deadlines:

Initial foreign language seminar structure and flavor development to begin as teachers are on-boarded throughout spring and summer 2020.

All seminar titles and course descriptions are due first week of July 2020 to allow for course catalog finalization for 2020-2021 seminar registration

Seminar plans for terms 1 and 2 are due during professional development days planned the first week of August 2020. This includes the instructional plan for the term (22 days), instructional materials, and planned formative assessments

Plans for each subsequent term will be done at least one week before the start of the term

Alignment to standards:

All world language seminars are aligned to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) world readiness standards for learning of languages. This includes standards related to and based in education and appreciation of various world cultures and linguistic backgrounds. Since all students at Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be required to take two years of a new language, all students will have exposure to new cultures, linguistic styles, and beliefs from various populations

around the world. The world language requirement, when paired with continual adaptation and student-driven instruction, provide a deep and rich program of multicultural and multilingual education. This is then paired with the standards-based education provided in the other content areas and the result is a student body with a diverse world view and appreciation of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds and characteristics in addition to content standard proficiency.

Ideally, there would be two or more languages offered to students, providing a wide variety of diversity for students to expand their academic and affective knowledge and skills.

Alignment to Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will provide choice to students in a variety of ways to facilitate an educational process that is engaging and inclusive. In world language seminars, students are given choice as they are able to pick their preferred flavors among a variety of foreign language course offerings. As seen in core content areas, language courses also adapt constantly to meet student needs through student input, drawing connections to the cultures and languages being studied, and including students in all aspects of the educational experience.

Action Step 4:

Data collection, analysis, and action planning

Staff responsible:

Administration
Governing Council
Staff
Founding team

Timeline / deadlines:

Initial data collected and analyzed in the planning year 19-20 to shape school curriculum
Monthly data collected and analyzed via surveys each August - May
Monthly data collected and analyzed at PTO and parent meetings monthly July - June
Annual data compiled for final analysis April - May
Action planning - short term/small scale: monthly, long term/large scale: annually May - June

Alignment to standards:

Using parent, student, and community input will allow the EA-LCS team to best tailor the school model to the students, ensuring the inclusivity and richness of the flavors for all seminars while still aligning strongly to the required standards. Alignment to standards goes hand in hand with alignment to statute and education acts, so prioritizing curricular and programmatic content that highlights and appreciates linguistic and cultural characteristics and attributes allows the students to receive a well-rounded education that is also standards-based and rigorous.

Alignment to Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission:

All students at Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be seen as individuals who are on a unique pathway to academic proficiency and success that will propel them into college and career pathways after graduation. Part of the mission, as seen in the majors and range of flavor topics in the core curricula, is to provide students with exposure to many ideas, cultures, disciplines, time periods, schools of thought, etc., allowing them to shape their own mindset and academic belief system based on a plethora of

research and knowledge. Fostering each students linguistic and cultural knowledge and abilities will lead to more well-developed, worldly students who appreciate and learn from the world around them.

Action Step 5:

Professional Development and Training

Staff responsible:

Administration
Founding team

Timeline / deadlines:

Teacher modules and training prepared before January 2020
Teacher training from March through July 2020
Teacher / staff training and professional development days in first week of August 2020
Revisit culturally and linguistically conscious instruction and outcomes at least monthly during scheduled term breaks

Alignment to standards:

The training for teachers focuses on implementation of the Explore Learning Model which itself is planned around the instruction and assessment of all state-adopted standards. This includes training modules for standards-based instruction and assessment, flavoring of seminars to meet student needs, adaptation of instruction in response to student-driven input and feedback, and sheltered instruction/differentiation methods for diverse student populations and needs.

Alignment to Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission:

As mentioned above, alignment to the standards is at the core of the Explore Learning Model and the Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission, this alignment and integration of student and community culture and linguistic backgrounds promotes the mission of the school while also meeting the needs of all students, including bilingual, multicultural, Native American, and diverse student learners while also creating and implementing a rigorous, responsive curriculum to develop cognitive and affective skills in Explore Academy - Las Cruces students at all levels 6-12. The data collected throughout the year, as in other aspects of the model, also allows for linguistic and cultural topics to be adjusted and improved upon based on performance management and stakeholder input and feedback.

Total Points Available	Expectations
12	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the proposed school’s curriculum; • Identify information that demonstrates the curriculum is research-based; • Describe a curriculum that is reasonable, based on the professional judgment of experienced educators; • Identify information that demonstrates how the curriculum will align with the New Mexico Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and New Mexico Content Standards; • Identify information that demonstrates how the curriculum will align with the proposed school’s mission; and • Include a reasonable (as based on the professional judgment of experienced educators) timeline and plan for the development of the entire proposed curriculum—including scope and sequence, unit plans, daily lesson plans, project plans and rubrics, and unit and course assessments. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The timeline must identify the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ responsible staff ▪ action steps ▪ deadlines ○ The timeline must include specific action steps that will ensure alignment with the CCSS, NM Content Standards, and the proposed school’s mission. ○ The timeline must demonstrate that the scope and sequence and unit plans for one semester’s curriculum will be fully completed before June 1st of the planning year—the deadline for having the commencement of operations approved. ○ If the applicant is proposing to adopt a fully developed or standardized curriculum, the timeline must include specific action steps to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the local community and the State of New Mexico.
<p>INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.</p>	

D. Curriculum, Educational Program, Student Performance Standards.

D. (1) Provide a description of the proposed school's curriculum. The proposed curriculum must be research-based, reasonable, and clearly align with the New Mexico Common Core State Standards and the proposed school's mission.

Provide and describe a detailed, clear, comprehensive, and reasonable timeline and plan for the development of the entire proposed curriculum, including identification of responsible staff, action steps, and deadlines that will ensure alignment with CCSS, NM Content Standards, and the proposed school's mission. If approved, the PEC requires one semester's curriculum to be fully completed by the charter school during the planning year before commencement of operations is approved.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

The choice theory model of education, that underlies the philosophy of Explore Academy - Las Cruces [explained more fully in C.I.F. (1)], * is focused on turning each student into an active learner who will increasingly become responsible for his or her own education. By allowing each student to choose and personalize his or her own educational pathway from an exceptionally diverse set of course offerings, each student will be a more empowered and demonstrate heightened levels of academic success. As a school whose mission and vision are focused on student choice, the Explore Learning curriculum directly supports the mission and vision of Explore Academy - Las Cruces.

As the curriculum is drawn from a proven educational model, the Explore Learning Model, the basis of the curriculum described below is justified from the successful academic track record of the founding Explore Academy campus, Explore Academy - Albuquerque. As one of the most successful schools in the state of New Mexico, exhibiting the highest levels of student growth of any charter school, the effective track record provides this model the credibility on which its implementation at Explore Academy - Las Cruces is based.

The Explore Learning Model has three core objectives:

- 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

Objective One - Greater student accountability using a standards-driven system in course design and academic reporting

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. As students, teachers, and schools are held to higher standards of accountability for proficiency, the Explore Learning curriculum will promote strong, foundational core knowledge and increased student accountability for every core standard, and will thus ensure that every EA-LCS graduate will leave as a well-rounded, educated citizen, and that the school itself will be successful in the current educational climate.

The Explore Learning curriculum divides content areas into smaller increments of instruction,

*Glasser, William. *Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom*. Harper`Collins, 1998.

called *seminars*, each of which spans 22 days in length for high school grades or 44 days for middle school.

These seminars are the school's courses and are formed around grouped sets of common academic standards (literary analysis, Newton's Laws, polynomials, etc.). As an example, instead of a student taking a traditional English course which would include a unit of study on grammar, EA-LCS students will take a specific seminar devoted to grammar, its own individual course, taught over the span of a 22-day period.

Using the state's academic standards (Common Core standards, Stem Ready, etc.), the entire curriculum for all four core subjects is divided into these smaller, more focused areas of study. These are the seminars. Within the core content seminars (shown below in the graduated requirements in section C.I.E), the entirety of the required core standards is covered across the 24 units in each content. By this translation, 6 core seminars hold the equivalent standard coverage as a traditional academic year.

The Explore Learning curriculum 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. The 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. As schools and teachers are often being evaluated based on student performance on standardized tests, there is a higher level of accountability on schools in preparing students for more rigorous academic performance measures. Yet those schools, and their staff members, exist within a system, under the traditional academic model, 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 Learning 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, described in more detail below and in C.I.H Assessment and Accountability) 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* standards each student has shown proficiency and in which areas each student has shown *comprehensive* proficiency.

Objective Two - Selectivity and student choice for all classes to promote both a customized and individualized form of education

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(s) 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 the Explore Learning Model 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*.

Within this framework, for each seminar, there will exist multiple versions from which students can choose, with each version possessing its own emphasis and providing its own forms of instruction. These are the *seminar flavors*, and it is through this differentiation that students develop the freedom for academic choice. Each flavor within a given seminar 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 fulfill the academic standards set forth before them. While flavors for a given seminar differ, expectations remain aligned across flavors so that no matter which flavor/theme a student chooses, he or she will still be receiving instruction over the same standards; the difference is *how the student will be learning*.

This idea of a differentiated curriculum is at the core of the Explore Learning philosophy: that *all classes can be elective in nature*. Because all flavors of a given seminar will share common exit exam components, the school will be able to verify that all students who are receiving credit show proficiency in all of the required standards, regardless of the curricular paths they chose.

As an example, consider the example of a statistics course. There are many ways in which a teacher may approach the teaching of statistics, and as such, the diversity of themes teachers can create allow for instruction of the same standards through different instructional lenses. Within the statistics example, three themes may be:

- Box Score Bonanza: statistics from professional sports, including analysis of team and individual player performance numbers
- In Sickness and in Health: health statistics, including analysis on American nutrition and diet, disease rates, and epidemiology
- We the People: consumer statistics including real estate, marketing; and social statistics including political science, sociology, and crime rates

As described above, all three share the same academic standards and a common component to the summative exit exam, ensuring that, no matter how a given student learns, he or she is held to the same expectations as those who take any flavor of the seminar in question.

The school's entire curricular framework is designed in this way, with the teachers' creativity driving the actual design of the seminar flavors. At full enrollment, the school will have over one thousand flavors (from grades 6 to 12) from which students will be able to choose.

As students change seminars and choose new flavors every 22 (for high school) or 44 days (for middle school), the combination of choices an individual student will make becomes nearly mathematically infinite. As such, the personalized "curriculum" each student creates for themselves is truly unique, driven by their own interests and passions.

Further, as students have the freedom to choose the theme through which to master a given set of standards, they are placed in seminars in a manner that is not random, but purposeful, creating an environment where students and teachers come together in a way based on a shared set of interests.

Through this curricular model, students will more effectively learn the core content for which they are responsible. More effective learning takes place when students can apply their knowledge 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.

A focus of Explore Learning curriculum is the development of students as responsible and independent learners. The traditional education system does little to promote student independence and individual student responsibility; in fact, one could argue that it 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 primary grades and continues through high school. Thus, 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, the Explore Learning Model will develop students as responsible, active learners who will create their own pathway personalized toward their own educational success.

Objective Three - College preparation through the implementation of a curriculum which increasingly resembles and simulates college academics in structure, rigor, and content

The third facet of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces academic philosophy involves preparing graduates for success in college. There are three components to the Explore Learning curriculum's college readiness approach: student interest and engagement, spiraled curriculum, and college/career exposure.

As students fulfill their academic obligation within the core standards, they will enroll in upper level seminars from various major programs 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.

This type of extension will provide three main positive functions. First, it will allow students to pursue their academic interests, leading to greater student commitment, all the while nurturing their academic motivation. Second, this approach allows the school's upper division seminars 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 students' 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 majors' programs will be designed specifically for this purpose: to prepare students for college. All the seminars within a given major 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, 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.

Scope and Sequence

As described above, the framework of the Explore Learning Model utilizes shorter learning modules, called seminars. For the middle grades, a seminar will last 44 school days (one quarter); for high school grades, a seminar will last 22 days (approximately one month). These are the academic terms across which the school's calendar is subdivided. Thus, middle school students follow four terms within the year while high school students follow an eight-term year. Within the school's calendar, two high school terms is equivalent to one middle school term.

The chart below shows a general breakdown of an empty schedule for both middle and high school students. Students at both levels will take five classes per day for the length of the term.

Middle School

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Class Period 1				
Class Period 2				
Class Period 3				
Class Period 4				
Class Period 5				

High School

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8
Class Period 1								
Class Period 2								
Class Period 3								
Class Period 4								
Class Period 5								

Within each content area, as described above, the entirety of the academic standards for the State of New Mexico is broken down across the 24 required seminars per core content area, thus ensuring that students receive instruction and demonstrate proficiency in all required areas.

Within this design, middle school-specific seminars are numbered at the 100 and 200-level while levels 300 and above are reserved for high school students (and accelerated middle school students). As Explore Academy - Las Cruces will adopt the Explore Learning Model, the curriculum for all four core content areas has already been subdivided with the associated standard breakdown for each seminar within each content area. The chart below shows the basic scope and sequence for the English curriculum. Note that the curriculum is divided across four skill levels. It is within these four skill tracks that the curriculum is vertically aligned to promote the development of the core skills for the content area while also dividing the content into smaller modules. The credit requirement is shown at each level to equal the 24 credits required for graduation (2 credits per seminar x 4 seminars per level x 3 levels of high school (300-500 level)).

Note that the middle school seminars begin at the 100-level and continue through the 200-level. The majors for English, which function as electives outside of the core curriculum, begin at the 600-level.

Within the matrix above (and for all content areas), the vertical alignment of the skill functions as a prerequisite for students to move through the curriculum in a manner of their choosing. Within this system, a student has to complete ENG 400 before advancing to ENG 500. As such, a student may be in a

different place within the curriculum based on their current progress in mastering the standards. As an example, a student may be at 500-level Argument (ENG 500) based on their successful demonstration of mastery in the standards at the 300 and 400-level but may be at the 300-level in Language (ENG 330). As long as they hold to the prerequisite within each skill track, they can move through the curriculum in a

600-LEVEL	ENGLISH MAJORS				Varies
500-LEVEL	ENG 500	ENG 510	ENG 520	ENG 530	2 credits per
400-LEVEL	ENG 400	ENG 410	ENG 420	ENG 430	2 credits per
300-LEVEL	ENG 300	ENG 310	ENG 320	ENG 330	2 credits per
200-LEVEL	ENG 200	ENG 210	ENG 220	ENG 230	Mid School
100-LEVEL	ENG 100	ENG 110	ENG 120	ENG 130	Mid School
	ARGUMENT	LITERATURE	RESEARCH/ COMM	LANGUAGE	

manner of their choosing and skill level, thus making each student's path unique in the manner in which they master the standards set forth. The content areas of math, social studies, and science are designed in a similar manner.

Exit Exams

Exit exams serve as the summative, credit-determining measure of proficiency for each seminar. Since exit exams are administered at the conclusion of every term (two months for middle school, one month for high school), there are several opportunities for the staff and school leadership to collect progress data (see C.I.H Assessment and Accountability) and focus efforts on interventions when there is not adequate progress being made.

Exit exams measure proficiency (and mastery) for each academic standard, and thus align specifically with the academic standards required by the state. Students must demonstrate proficiency (80% or above) for each academic standard for the seminar in question in order to earn credit for that seminar. Proficiency on standards is only measured on the exit exams with all other evaluations administered within the term functioning as formative for the purposes of continuous feedback for students in supporting the growth mindset of the curriculum. As such, students who graduate from Explore Academy will have been deemed proficient in every academic standard.

Exit exams incorporate questions from Bloom's Taxonomy levels, with lower-level seminars utilizing Bloom's levels 1 to 3 and higher-level seminars incorporating Bloom's levels 4, 5, etc., depending on the seminar level. Every exit will be broken into two sections, with the half assessing the lower-level Bloom's skills common across all flavors of a particular seminar (as described above). The other half, assessing higher order Bloom's skills will be specific to the flavor in question.

Exit exam scores will be reviewed each month by the Governance Council, administration, data analysts, and teachers. Teachers are required to reflect each month on a variety of metrics, one of which will include pass rates for each different seminar they taught during that time, the results of which are direct from the exit exam.

The chart below provides a general breakdown of Bloom's Taxonomy levels per seminar level, denoting majors and which exit exam portions are common (C) vs. flavor-specific (F).

	100-LEVEL	200-LEVEL	300-LEVEL	400-LEVEL	500-LEVEL	600-LEVEL
Bloom's L1 Remember	C	C	C	C	C	
Bloom's L2 Understand	C	C	C	C	C	F
Bloom's L3 Apply	F	F	C	C and F	C and F	F
Bloom's L4 Analyze		F	F	F	C and F	F
Bloom's L5 Evaluate				F	F	F
Bloom's L6 Create						F

Timeline

Leading up to the launch of the school in the fall of 2020, the school will have a fully developed curriculum ready for implementation. Because Explore Academy - Las Cruces will adopt the Explore Learning Model curricular framework, the founding team will function to lead and guide new teachers through the process of successfully implementing the model in the classroom. While the framework exists and has been established, there is tremendous latitude for teachers to utilize their creativity to create themes and flavors to engage students within the classroom. In this sense, the Explore Learning Model functions to promote diversity in instruction while maintaining a rigid framework within which teacher creativity can have tremendous flexibility.

The founding team has created a significant set of curricular resources, including a comprehensive staff handbook, course/standard breakdown, scope and sequence sets for each content area and each individual seminar, and common summative assessments to be utilized campus-wide within a given seminar in order to provide new teachers guidance and resources for the successful implementation of the model.

The framework of the Explore Learning Model/curriculum is already established and already in use at the school's sister campus: Explore Academy - Albuquerque. As such, this framework is already very specifically aligned with CCSS and NM Content Standards. Due to the standards-based nature of all Explore Academy seminars, the specific linkage between standards and courses has been established in great detail.

As the Explore Academy - Albuquerque mission and vision parallel that of Explore Academy - Las Cruces, the alignment of the above-mentioned academic standards also align with school's mission and vision.

In the development of the school's curriculum prior to the beginning of operations, an overview of the projected development timeline is shown below:

Action Item	Date	Deliverable	Responsible Group
Charter application approval	September, 2019	N/A	Founding team
Begin hiring of prospective instructional staff	December, 2019	N/A	Principal, founding team
First teacher training module - "The Seminar" (includes standards-based course structuring, instruction for small class sizes, seminar-based teaching, intro to student-driven instruction, introduction to frontloading)	March, 2020	Assignment of teaching assignments/seminars for the upcoming school year, example sets of frontloading, example student-driven unit plan layout	Founding team (trainers), EA-LCS teachers
Second teacher training module - "The Flavor" (flavor-based instruction, student-driven instruction, backward planning, generating of course descriptions)	April, 2020	Backward planning layout for three (3) planned seminars for the upcoming school year, completion of ten (10) course descriptions for upcoming seminar flavors	Founding team (trainers), EA-LCS teachers
Predicted completion of hiring of instructional staff	May, 2020	N/A	Principal, founding team
Third teacher training module - "Assessment" (formative assessment, Bloom's Taxonomy, creating authentic, standards-based assessments, higher-level questioning and project-based grading, creation of standard and skill-based rubrics)	May, 2020	Formative assessments for three (3) seminars for the upcoming school year; <u>completion of unit plans for the first four (4) seminar terms</u> (per teacher), to be submitted to CSD	Founding team (trainers), EA-LCS teachers
Fourth teacher training module - "Student-Driven Instruction" (inquiry/student-driven instruction)	May, 2020	Fully developed student-driven seminar plan for five (5) seminars for the upcoming school year	Founding team (trainers), EA-LCS teachers
Submission of all course descriptions for the school's course catalog	July, 2020	Fully developed course descriptions from each teacher, deadline: June 30	Founding team, EA-LCS teachers
Ongoing support in developing lesson plans	March to August, 2020	N/A	Founding team

Total Points Available	Expectations
12	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the proposed school’s curriculum; • Identify information that demonstrates the curriculum is research-based; • Describe a curriculum that is reasonable, based on the professional judgment of experienced educators; • Identify information that demonstrates how the curriculum will align with the New Mexico Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and New Mexico Content Standards; • Identify information that demonstrates how the curriculum will align with the proposed school’s mission; and • Include a reasonable (as based on the professional judgment of experienced educators) timeline and plan for the development of the entire proposed curriculum—including scope and sequence, unit plans, daily lesson plans, project plans and rubrics, and unit and course assessments. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The timeline must identify the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ responsible staff ▪ action steps ▪ deadlines ○ The timeline must include specific action steps that will ensure alignment with the CCSS, NM Content Standards, and the proposed school’s mission. ○ The timeline must demonstrate that the scope and sequence and unit plans for one semester’s curriculum will be fully completed before June 1st of the planning year—the deadline for having the commencement of operations approved. ○ If the applicant is proposing to adopt a fully developed or standardized curriculum, the timeline must include specific action steps to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the local community and the State of New Mexico.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

E. Graduation Requirements.

E. (1) Identify the proposed school's proposed requirements for graduation, if applicable, and explain any changes or additional requirements that vary from state minimum requirements. Provide high school graduation requirements that clearly articulate and meet state requirements. If you provide additional requirements that vary from state minimum requirements, ensure they are clearly explained.

If you are seeking any change from mandated minimum graduation requirements, identify the change and explain why you are seeking it. Clearly explain how the change supports the mission and ensures student readiness for college or other post-secondary opportunities.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

While Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will utilize shorter teaching modules, the breakdown of the skill and content standards ensures that students are not only exposed to but master the academic standards and graduation requirements set forth by the State of New Mexico. To this end, the set of seminars within each content area more than equals the semester credit requirement as set forth in the State's graduation requirement. With a conversion of roughly three (3) seminars equivalent to a traditional semester, the chart shown below is the requirement with the corresponding Explore Academy - Las Cruces seminar count for each content area.

As Explore Academy - Las Cruces will function as a 6-12 school, beginning in 8th grade, students will be eligible to earn high school credits toward graduation, thus providing for a greater number of overall credits available to earn (172) compared to the maximum available to students beginning in 9th grade (160). For students who transfer in at the high school level (grade 9 and beyond), the chart below includes an abbreviated graduation requirement set that more than meets the state minimum graduation requirement.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS (HIGH SCHOOL CREDITS ONLY)

SUBJECT AREA	STUDENTS BEGINNING BEFORE 9TH GRADE	SEMESTER EQUIVALENT	STUDENTS BEGINNING IN 9TH GRADE OR ABOVE	SEMESTER EQUIVALENT
English	24 seminars	4.0 credits	24 seminars	4.0 credits
Math	24	4.0	24	4.0
Social Studies	24	4.0	24	4.0
Science	24	4.0	24	4.0
Foreign Language	12	2.0	12	2.0
Physical Ed/Health	8	1.0	8	1.0
Fine Arts	8	1.0	8	1.0

Electives	54*	9.0	24	6.0
TOTAL	172	29	148	26
*Will include required seminars such as ACT/SAT prep, Senior Capstone				

Graduation Assessment Requirements

When a student is unable to meet the minimum state required cut score for a graduation assessment even after all required attempts (ELA and math - TBA standards-based assessment, science - NMASR, social studies - End of Course exam in social studies), the student will progress to an approved Alternate Demonstration of Competency (ADC). The Explore Academy - Las Cruces ADC policy, outlined below, will be propose to the Governing Council. The school will first use state-approved ADC options as outlined in the most current ADC Manual released by the NM Public Education Department. This includes scores from tests such as the ACT, SAT, EoC, and Accuplacer. If a student has not met any of the PED-outlined ADC options, they will progress to the Explore Academy - Las Cruces ADC project. This project will be designed with content experts for each content area and peer-reviewed by a cross-content team to ensure rigor and adherence to a standard of excellence for graduation qualification.

ADC Policy (To Be Proposed to the Governing Council)

All students will participate in New Mexico required state testing for English Language Arts, math, science, and social studies. Students who are unable to earn the minimum score for graduation qualification after the required minimum attempts in one or more of these state-mandated exams, will be allowed to use an Alternate Demonstration of Competency to show their proficiency in the content area(s).

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify all of the proposed school’s graduation requirements; • Provide proposed Alternative Demonstration of Competency policies, if any • Align to state graduation requirements OR explicitly identify all requirements that vary from state minimum requirements; and • If there are variances from state minimum requirements explain the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ why the proposed school believes the change is important ○ how the change supports the mission ○ how the change ensures student readiness for college, career, or other post-secondary opportunities.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

F. Instruction.

F. (1) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** overview of the educational philosophy and instructional methods to be implemented that **clearly** supports and aligns with the proposed school's mission, and curriculum.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

The traditional educational system's use of grades has distorted the learning process, shifting the goal of education away from learning toward the collection of points and the achievement of specific letter grades. To combat this trend, and to bring learning back to the forefront, Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) minimizes the use of summative grades to focus more on learning.

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, and submission of late work, has created students who know how to manipulate the system and can perform the work without learning the material.

For this reason, the educational philosophy of the Explore Learning Model is that all work, both in and out of the classroom, is done for the purposes of assessing what students know and is thus formative in nature. This philosophy extends into a growth mindset where feedback on student work is continually provided for the intrinsic benefit of providing students and parents with a measure of where the student stands in the *learning process* and is thus not calculated 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 for high school or 44 days for middle school), students take an exit exam which assesses the scope the information (standards) presented within the seminar. The score on this single exam comprises the student's score within the course and is the basis for the awarding of credit. Thus, the focus of daily work and homework is shifted 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. In this sense, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will promote a growth mindset in its learners.

The Explore Learning Model and its instructional practices have been developed from and is supported by a significant body of research as well as a multitude of data-driven success from the founding campus in Albuquerque, it is truly an instructional model that is built for success both now and in the future educational climate. The instructional methods and educational philosophy reflect the mission and curriculum to support student choice, engagement, achievement, responsibility, and proficiency.

The essence of the instructional methods of Explore Academy - Las Cruces are described in the six actions below, as well as in the specific practices that follow, with all action steps having been vetted through the current success of the Explore Learning Model.

Action One: Make Skills Relevant

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 - Las Cruces students will select their own educational pathways, working toward the goal of preparing them for college and career. The school's entire environment is 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 major 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, all become relevant to their future.

* Borowsky, R. (1993). Visual word recognition: A multistage activation model. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 19, 813-840.

Action Two: 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. Within this thread, for maximum effectiveness in teaching, only 50% of material should be new, and the focus of learning should be to connect new material with one's previous knowledge. It is critical to recognize the importance of educational simplicity, with fewer objectives emphasizing depth over breadth, in the quality of learning and the establishment of retention (Shadmehr*, 1997).

Explore Academy - Las Cruces seminars will be driven by a specific focus in a given content area and the vertical alignment of a particular skill set. In this sense, each seminar is not a standalone unit but a continuation of a larger process which works to *establish connections* between its own unique material 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, EA-LCS seminars will constantly review, reiterate, and reinforce material from other seminars to establish a system of comprehensive education that spirals learning targets continually.

The focus on low density instruction operates outside the classroom as well. The Explore Academy - Las Cruces 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, usually seven or eight classes enrolled at a given time. This effort leads to a greater focus on depth over breadth.

* Shadmehr, Reza. "Neural Correlates of Motor Memory Consolidation." *Science* 8 Aug. 1997

Action Three: Use Short Classes and Shorter Learning Modules

According to research (Belding*, 2004), segments of learning should be as concise and specific as possible. Within this vein of thought, the dissemination of 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. The stream of information, to which students are constantly bombarded, does little to establish the long-term retention of information.

Because Explore Academy - Las Cruces 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 additionally serve the school and its teachers by providing a more accurate measurement of each student's proficiency level, allowing better insight as schools and teachers work to meet increased levels of accountability as required by the State.

* Belding, Shaun. "Stickiness - Skills Retention and Stickiness." (n.d.): n. pag. July 2004. Web.

Action Four: 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 Roedigerii*, 2007). Repetition is often a key driving force in moving information from short-term to long-term memory and countering what is known as the *fading effect*, which describes the natural loss of information over time. Material that is retained over more extensive periods of time, termed *residual memory*, is created directly from repeated exposure and is the basis for long-term retention.

The strategy of information repetition is seen between and within Explore Academy - Las Cruces seminars which, based on their flavor, work to continuously incorporate information from other content areas and build on existing content knowledge and skill sets covered in lower-level tiers within the same content area, thus creating greater cohesiveness between individual seminars. This reinforcement of ideas works to tie the individual seminars into one solid framework that addresses learning targets repeatedly through various content areas and seminar flavors.

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 the brain changes and the longevity of the stored information increases significantly.

By providing a spiraling curriculum between seminars, with seminars 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.

This philosophy operates within the seminar timeframe as well. While each seminar focuses on a few specific academic standards, the way in which these standards are presented to students builds connections within the twenty-two- or forty-four-day term. By using spiraled instruction, where the teacher circles back on instructional objectives and learning targets in an effort to continuously tie content together, information is repeated often, albeit with new connections, thus strengthening the understanding and interrelatedness of each individual objective.

* Karpicke, J., and H. Roedigeriii. "Repeated Retrieval during Learning Is the Key to Long-term Retention☆." *Journal of Memory and Language* 57.2 (2007): 151-62. Print

Action Five: Provide the Learner with Motivation

Learning becomes most effective when the learner has inherent motivation to learn. 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. As it relates to the classroom, Glasser's theory describes a choice-based education as one in which students are (a) provided a warm, supportive classroom environment where they are respected, (b) asked to perform only useful work (no compulsory homework), (c) pushed to do the best they can, and (d) continuously asked to evaluate their own work and improve it (feedback).

In addition, a teacher in a seminar-based environment steps into a mentoring role rather than one that is supervisory in nature, helping to facilitate, 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).

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 of providing each student with his or her own customized educational pathway is the foundational principle of the Explore Learning Model that will drive Explore Academy - Las Cruces.

*Glasser, William. *Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom*. Harper`Collins, 1998.

Action Six: Provide the Learner with Feedback

Appropriate feedback within the educational process is a crucial element in the learning process, especially when it possesses the following characteristics: goal-oriented, ongoing, timely, and specific (Bransford*, 2000).

Explore Academy -Las Cruces will focus on learning as a *process* and not an end in and of itself, and thus feedback and guidance become integral components in this process. With the exception of the single summative assessment at the conclusion of a given seminar (the exit exam), all work is 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, are formative in nature and thus meant to serve as a mechanism to provide feedback to students and parents. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will utilize these assessments as measures *within* the learning process and not as measures in the attainment of learning. Thus, it becomes in the best interest of the student to not only complete the work, but to understand the work as they complete it.

Because EA-LCS is based on active student learning, the teacher takes on a mentoring role where he or she can more effectively assess student learning and attainment of the learning targets for each seminar and provide timely and specific feedback throughout the duration of the learning experience.

* Bransford, J. D. (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press

The Explore Learning Model incorporates the six actions described above in highly effective instructional practices that guide students to academic success. Some of the most fundamental instructional practices that will be implemented at Explore Academy - Las Cruces are:

Seminar-Style Instruction

Explore Academy - Las Cruces utilizes a seminar-based approach to teaching, one which is focused on a student-driven form of education. The seminar structure differs from a traditional style of teaching in that the learning is directed by students, not the teacher.

Within a seminar-based design, the teacher's role shifts from instructor and the source of information to a guide and facilitator of learning and understanding. Explore Academy - Las Cruces seminars do not utilize lecture as the primary manner of instruction. Information that students are expected to learn should be largely collected by the students themselves (using resources provided by the teacher), with the teacher's facilitation functioning to provide examples, provide pointed questioning, clarify, fill gaps in understanding, apply, and extend on the information being covered.

The seminar represents a two-way discourse, where students are communicating in class as much, if not more, than the teacher. This can come in the form of student-to-student communication or student-to-teacher communication and may be nested in a variety of instructional formats (discussion based, inquiry, Socratic method, etc.). There is no one instructional format that must be utilized to allow for a student-driven seminar. The manner in which the seminar is conducted is up to the teacher's discretion.

Seminar Flavor Creation

Explore Academy - Las Cruces' core academic philosophy is driven through student choice with a strong focus on student engagement. The entire curriculum is formed around seminars that are constructed around a theme, or flavor, through which all material and instruction is presented and experienced by the students. Each teacher is given the creative freedom to form their seminars with flavors that are engaging and interesting for them and the students alike, creating a learning environment that is dynamic and fun while also achieving rigorous academic progress.

Grades 8 to 12

In the upper grades, every seminar will be based on its flavor with teachers using a “flavor first” approach to teaching in which the seminar’s flavor is a vehicle through which the material is taught. The standards should be interwoven into the flavor, so that as students learn about the flavor they come to understand the required standards.

Once a seminar is given its flavor, the teacher then develops the course materials in a way that carries the flavor throughout the seminar. The content standards and skills that are assigned to the seminar are learned and mastered through the flavor and corresponding materials, always keeping the thematic integrity of the seminar’s flavor at the forefront of classroom instruction, activities, and assessments. The use of the flavor throughout the seminar is crucial and all seminars will be designed to dive deeply into the flavored material, allowing the students to reach proficiency in the content skills and standards in a way that promotes high levels of engagement and involvement in all aspects of their learning.

Example Flavor: “A Bunch of Hot Air”

Standards Covered: physical science standards and earth science standards

Approach: Students will learn the specifics of hot air ballooning (the design of the balloons, construction, flight, weather conditions, etc.) while also learning about the nature of gases, temperature, and the atmosphere.

Grades 6 to 7

In the lower Explore Academy - Las Cruces grades, the students will build the capacity to make purposeful and intentional educational choices for themselves as they learn more about themselves and develop their own personal and educational preferences and interests. Keeping this in mind, all seminars for grades 6-7 will be taught with specific content skills and standards as the foundation of the 44-day term. Rather than the flavor-first approach described above, the flavor represents a supplemental enrichment pathway to extend and expand upon the material learned within the class (similar to a differentiated instructional approach). Students will stay in the same class, but will embark on one particular enrichment pathway to extend their learning through a particular theme.

In 6th grade, students will be given two flavor pathways from which to choose; in 7th grade, students will be provided three flavor pathways. These pathways will be designed with creative freedom by the teacher.

For the initial two weeks of the nine-week (44-day) term, students will explore the content without flavor. At the beginning of the third week, students will be provided with a choice as to which path to pursue. For the remaining six weeks, students will embark on a series of tasks (activities, projects, etc.) which center around the theme of the flavor, allowing them to push deeper into a given area. They will be held to this choice throughout the remainder of the term.

Standards Covered (Grade 6): Research standards and speaking and listening standards

Example Flavor 1: “Wild Kingdom”

Approach: Students research and present information to their peers in a project-based flavor that focuses on the animal kingdom, allowing them to research independently and prepare an informative slide presentation about a species that interests them.

Example Flavor 2: “Go for the Gold”

Approach: Students research and present information in a cooperative-based flavor that promotes teamwork as they research Olympic sports history and prepare an informative demonstration of several sports from an Olympic era that interests them.

Seminar Structure

Grades 6-7	Grades 8-12
Students have choice <i>within</i> the class	Students have choice <i>within</i> the class
The flavor extends on and enriches the basic content covered in the class	It is through the flavor that content is covered within the class
The flavor begins in the third week. Students must commit to the flavor for the remainder of the term	The flavor begins right away. Students must commit to the flavor once the class begins
Students stay in the same classroom, but split up into subgroups when working on a different flavor	Students are in separate classes from one another when exploring different flavors
The flavor extends on the content	The content extends from the flavor
The work specific to the flavor is an extension of what's learned in class	The content and flavor are interwoven throughout the class

Learning Categories

Each flavor in the course catalog will include indicators to show students the instructional strategies used within the flavor. After the course description, teachers should include between two and three categories to indicate the predominant teaching method, assignment types, working environment, etc.

When designing flavors, it is critical that teachers are cognizant of the nature of the flavor and which methods of instruction, classwork, assessment, etc. lend themselves best to a particular flavor. Since teacher creativity in the creation of flavors drives the diversity of the curriculum, examining the instructional methods that will make the flavor the most successful is a crucial step in the seminar-development process. Comprehensive professional development and training will be provided to new and returning staff annually to assist with course development and planning. This starts as early as the spring when new teachers apply for the upcoming school year and will culminate in early August with staff development days prior to the start of the student academic year.

Each year in July, all course offerings will be compiled into a course catalog for students to view and plan the upcoming school year. The categories used for specific seminars within the course catalog are:

- Cooperative group-based
- Inquiry-based
- Lab-based
- Analytical focus
- Writing-intensive
- Reading-intensive
- Technology-intensive
- Problem-based learning
- Project-based learning
- Mature content
- Self-paced
- Math-intensive
- Hands-on learning

Frontloading

One of the most fundamental instructional methods used at Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be frontloading. Frontloading is the practice of assigning students a pre-learning task to complete prior to arriving in class that will allow them to be fully engaged during class. It functions as an anticipatory set to be done outside of class prior to the day's lesson, allowing for more quality learning time while in class. As an example, instead of students watching a video in class, they watch the clip ahead of time (on their own) and are ready to discuss it during class.

Frontloading replaces homework, utilizing an approach where students perform individual work prior to the class lesson instead of after. Teachers still have the flexibility to assign additional work outside of class (reading, projects), but these are secondary to frontloading.

The use of frontloading represents a paradigm shift from the traditional model in that students are not taught a lesson then asked to practice it at home, alone, for homework instead, they are given introductory material of some sort (notes, pre-reads, slide presentations, multimedia clips) to complete/read/review before the next class period to prepare them for their class session. Thus, when arriving in class, they are able to use the material they reviewed to clarify concepts, solidify content knowledge, ask questions, and practice skills, all while being guided by the teacher in person as well as working alongside their peers.

Frontloading can take many forms, allowing teachers creativity in how they structure their work for students outside of class. Some examples of common frontloading assignments are:

- Pre-reads (articles, sections of books, lyrics, formulas)
- Problem completion (calculations, exercises, translations)
- Notes (reading slides or outlines, reading sections of instruction, listening to video tutorials)
- Completion of project phases (students demonstrate that they have finished a portion of a larger project by submitting said portion at the required checkpoint)
- Media (watching clips, movies, interviews, podcasts)
- Material review (from classwork, source documents, returned quizzes, lab safety procedures, create summary of info prior to a quiz)
- Learning of simple facts (memorize a small set of vocab words)
- Brainstorming/Pre-Thinking (thinking of questions/ideas/examples, find a quote)

Frontloading is not the same as traditional homework. There are some key differences that make this instructional practice one of the most successful aspects of teaching and learning in the Explore Learning Model:

Frontloading	Homework
Completed before arriving in class so that students can use and refer to the material when class begins	Assigned at the end of a class period to be turned in at a future time (next day, next week)
Preview of material to prepare for class	Review of what was taught in class
Standardized format for all content areas that is short and purposeful	No set requirement or standardization across classes or content areas

10-30 minutes to complete frontloading depending on the nature of the material and level of the seminar	Various time needed to complete homework depending on a wide variety of factors
Frontloading is used immediately in class and any learning gaps and areas of confusion is addressed by the teacher and peers immediately	Homework is turned in and sometimes never seen or reviewed again, while other times it is graded and handed back without being used or integrated into class
Formative in nature and meant <i>for students</i> to enhance learning and deepen understanding	Usually summative in nature and meant <i>for teacher</i> to see student progress after a lesson or unit

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment methods are a cornerstone of the Explore Learning Model's instructional practices. Allowing students to learn authentically, which means making mistakes and working through areas of weakness, provides them with the freedom to engage with the curriculum without the same anxiety or guardedness that often stifles academic progress. When students are afraid of being wrong, they are less likely to attempt difficult tasks, a feat that leaves even strong learners in a vulnerable position. When students learn that it is acceptable, and even expected, to fail at times, they begin to learn from the individualized formative feedback in order to make progress in their seminars.

Throughout the duration of a seminar, teachers continually assess student progress in each of the content or skills standards that are covered in the seminar. To do this, every assignment, project, and quiz is broken down by standard so that every grade that is earned is a reflection of the students' current level of proficiency in each standard individually. There is no average or combined grade; each standard has a stand-alone grade that represents the students' current level of proficiency.

As feedback and student reflection on their own learning is a vital part of the learning process, teachers use all classwork (such as frontloading, class projects, assignments, quizzes, calculations, labs, posters, presentations) as checkpoints, allowing them to provide students with specific and targeted feedback in order to guide the learning process as students improve their work and make progress toward their academic goals.

Teachers may choose to have formative projects that are completed throughout the course of a seminar. These extended projects can help students work on several standards/skills over an extended length of time, but are graded formatively on a continual basis, with the grade for each specific standard fluctuating to reflect current student progress. Formative projects and their grades will not impact the final grade of the seminar, so students can use feedback to improve continually while correcting errors and improving their work.

Tutoring

Academic support and individual attention will be a vital component of the instructional practices of Explore Academy - Las Cruces. Academic tutoring is a practice that will be utilized across the campus at all grade levels to support students as they work toward proficiency in their five seminars each term. The school's schedule (including its two free "flex" periods daily) will allow for built-in tutoring time for all students.

Tutoring can be assigned at any point within the scope of an academic term by a student's current teacher as well as through assignment to structured flex periods that serve as study hall periods. Assignments and objectives during these flex periods will be specific, with the teacher and

administration utilizing constant communication with the flex tutoring staff to inform all parties as to the precise area(s) in which the student shall receive additional assistance.

If a student does not self-advocate for tutoring, they can be assigned to a structured flex period during which they will receive tutoring as well as more in-depth progress monitoring. The goal of structured flex is not only to provide academic tutoring, but also to mentor students as they develop their own independent learning skills. Students can be assigned to structured flex on a weekly or monthly basis, depending on the level of need, in order to receive tutoring, progress monitoring, mentoring, and focused study time.

For those students overseen by a case manager, either those under a 504/IEP or those identified as ESL/ELL, tutoring or structured flex periods may be assigned on an individual basis based on the recommendation of the case manager. The increased support and constant access to tutors throughout the school day provides support for all students and all teachers as they work toward their seminar goals.

At-Risk List and Report

It is imperative that students are given individual attention and intervention in order to best support their academic progress. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will implement a student progress monitoring system that will accompany the classroom instructional practices in order to ensure that students who are not on track, for whatever reason, are given timely and effective support and interventions.

Each week, teachers will provide feedback regarding students who are struggling or demonstrating learning gaps in any given seminar to identify students who need to be on the At-Risk list. This is done electronically and must be completed by Sunday evening each week (or Monday evening if there is no school Monday). This will allow administration to generate the At-Risk list report and assign the identified students to a structured flex / study group to provide focused interventions for their academic needs. This is done weekly for the entire school year.

Cuspies

At the completion of term four, all staff will collaborate to separate students based on their achievement level and success in their first four terms. The resulting ranking system and student data will provide a list of "cuspies" who are students who are on the cusp of success but require more support to get them there. From this list, each staff member will be paired with a cuspie and provide that student with monitoring, guidance, and support for the last four terms. This mentoring is meant to push cuspies into success at Explore Academy - Las Cruces, and the progress and data related to cuspies will be analyzed and discussed during staff meetings as well as term break days to ensure that all cuspies are receiving the support they need. It will be required that teachers stay in contact with and monitor their cuspie students.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the educational philosophy of the proposed school;• Identify primary instructional methods to be implemented that align to the educational philosophy;• Identify information that demonstrates the instructional methods are research-based; and• Describe how the educational philosophy and instructional methods support and align to the mission and curriculum.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

F. (2) Provide a yearly calendar and daily schedule (length of school day, instructional blocks, and breaks) that **completely comply** with all state requirements and ensure **effective, successful** implementation of the academic program/curriculum. Describe in detail how this schedule supports the proposed school’s educational program and how the calendar is optimal for achieving high outcomes for your anticipated student population.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

The Calendar

The school’s proposed calendar for the 2020-21 school year is shown below. The calendar shows the breakdown of the different academic terms (shown by differences in colored areas) to illustrate the 22-day Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) terms, corresponding to EA-LCS’ shorter learning modules. The calendar itself will follow the Las Cruces Public Schools calendar to allow families with children in multiple school the ease of planning family events and arranging childcare. The major school breaks can also be adjusted to better align with the majority of the schools in Las Cruces. The key (below) shows the breakdown of each term, term break, and tentative school holiday breaks for 2020-2021.

August							September							October						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1			1	2	3	4	5					1	2	3
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	27	28	29	30				25	26	27	28	29	30	31
30	31																			

November							December							January						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			1	2	3	4	5						1	2
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
29	30						27	28	29	30	31			24	25	26	27	28	29	30
														31						

February							March							April						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5	6					1	2	3
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
28							28	29	30	31				25	26	27	28	29	30	

May							June							July						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1			1	2	3	4	5					1	2	3
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	27	28	29	30				25	26	27	28	29	30	31
30	31																			

Key: **Dark red:** Professional Development; **Dark gray:** School Holidays; **Light gray:** Non-school days; **Pastel colors:** Academic terms

Important Dates

The calendar shows the projected start date of August 6th for students (August 4th for staff) and a projected end date of May 26th for students (May 27th for staff). Term break days are shown in dark red, which allow for parent conferencing, student remediation, and professional development for staff.

Because it is currently unknown as to when the statewide assessment calendar will be approved, there is no predicted state testing window from which to plan, however, the school's projected calendar allots extra days in the seventh (yellow) and eighth (pink) terms in order to allow for state testing.

Daily Schedules

The daily schedules are shown below. The schedule is structured around a seven-period day, with each period equal in length and meeting every day. There is an alternate schedule for Friday with the insertion of club times and early release for staff meeting time and professional development.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces Class Schedule Monday - Thursday		
PERIOD	TIME	DURATION
Period 1	7:45-8:47	62 minutes
Period 2	8:49-9:51	62 minutes
Period 3*	9:53-10:55	62 minutes
Period 4*	10:57-11:59	62 minutes
Period 5*	12:01-1:03	62 minutes
Period 6	1:05-2:07	62 minutes
Period 7	2:09-3:15	62 minutes

Explore Academy - Las Cruces Class Schedule Friday		
PERIOD	TIME	DURATION
Period 1	7:45-8:28	43 minutes

Period 2	8:30-9:13	43 minutes
Clubs	9:15-9:55	40 minutes
Period 3*	9:57-10:40	43 minutes
Period 4*	10:42-11:25	43 minutes
Period 5*	11:27-12:10	43 minutes
Period 6	12:12-12:55	43 minutes
Period 7	12:57-1:40	43 minutes

Alternate Schedules

There is a set 2-hour delay schedule for inclement weather for Explore Academy - Las Cruces to be used on days where students and staff are safer arriving at school later in the morning. Other alternate schedules can be designed to meet student, community, or situational needs as they arise.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces Class Schedule 2-Hour Delay		
PERIOD	TIME	DURATION
Period 1	9:45-10:30	45 minutes
Period 2	10:32-11:17	45 minutes
Period 3*	11:19-12:04	45 minutes
Period 4*	12:06-12:51	45 minutes
Period 5*	12:53-1:38	45 minutes
Period 6	1:40-2:25	45 minutes
Period 7	2:25-3:11	45 minutes

Example Daily Schedules

Each day, students will attend five classes, one study flex (tutoring) period and one lunch flex period. Lunch periods will take place during periods 3, 4, and 5 with students having lunch flex during one of these three periods. On Fridays, students will be released early to allow for weekly professional development and collaboration time for the staff. Every Friday has time built in for clubs during the school day, allowing all students to participate without hardships such as transportation, club costs, or availability after school hours.

Example student schedule

Period	Activity	Description
1	MTH 301	9th grade math - algebra I
2	FLEX	study/free flex
3	ENG 332	9th grade English - language
4	SCI 311	9th grade science - argument
5	FLEX	Lunch flex
6	PE 302	9th grade PE
7	SPN 201	Spanish I

Each day, all staff will teach five periods and have two periods for planning, grading, student feedback, and personal care. This time also allows for collaboration and content planning time. On Fridays, all staff have professional development, collaboration and planning, and whole school support meetings from 1:40 pm - 3:15 pm, allowing them to be supported and productive without mandating that they stay for any hours outside the normal school day.

Example teacher schedule

Period	Activity	Description
1	SCI 101	6th grade science class
2	SCI 101	6th grade science class
3	PREP	Prep period
4	SCI 201	7th grade science class
5	SCI 201	7th grade science class
6	PREP	Prep period
7	SCI 613	Science "major" grades 10+

Instructional Time

Based on the above calendar, the 8 academic terms, there exists a total of 179 school days projected. Within the above daily schedule showing six academic periods per day at sixty-two (62) minutes each, each day totals 372 instructional minutes. Multiplied across the 179 school days per academic year, the annual calculation of instructional time equals 1,109 instructional hours (66,588 instructional minutes). This calendar and daily schedule combine to meet all minimum hour (total instructional time) requirements laid out in [NMSA 22-2-8.1](#).

Budget Alignment

Understanding that small class sizes, shorter terms, increased teacher prep time, and increased student study time all align with the Explore Learning Model and help student achieve high levels of academic success, the proposed budget supports these aspects of the calendar and school schedule. The budget outlines teacher salaries as well as money allocated to technology and flex period management, all important components of the school calendar and schedule. Additionally, the budget also allows for the proposed number of school days and supports staffing and facility expenses.

Target Population and Student Support

The academic calendar and daily schedules are designed to facilitate the learning process and are structured with ample time for student and staff support, remediation, collaboration, and intervention. For students who are at-risk, English language learners, students with disabilities, and other subgroups who may need extra attention, the daily schedule allows for intervention and support time every day without the students having to miss any class periods. During their flex period (one of the seven daily periods), students can meet with service providers, mentors, case managers, counselors, administrators, tutors, teachers, and any other parties who may assist them in their academic business. This can be voluntary on the part of any student or assigned to students who are showing signs of being at-risk in any area or in any seminar.

The yearly academic calendar is also built to support students through shorter, more manageable learning modules rather than overwhelming, yearlong classes. With this structure and calendar, students are able to focus their attention solely on five classes at a time, mastering the standards from those classes. At the end of each term, there are days dedicated to the exit exam administration campus-wide, allowing all students to share in the atmosphere of determination as they work to demonstrate their knowledge. Then, students are given term break days between each term to allow their minds time to transition to the next term's seminars. This system allows for more focused time for each seminar, allowing students who are at-risk or struggling to manage their time and class load more easily and with more success.

In addressing the academic needs of the anticipated student population from the Las Cruces area, the supports described above allow for specific intervention strategies in closing learning gaps, particularly in English and math, where proficiency levels are current below state averages. Additionally, as mentioned above, the calendar allows for alignment with the Las Cruces Public Schools district, thereby allowing families to enroll children at EA-LCS and Las Cruces Public Schools without undue scheduling hardship.

School Mission Alignment

The academic calendar is a driving force behind the school's educational philosophy as the breakdown of shorter academic terms allows the school to manage fewer standards at a time within a shorter (22 days on average for high school, 44 days on average for middle school) period. By taking a "divide-and-conquer" approach, the school community as a whole, including parents, teachers, and administration

can effectively measure with greater precision what topics and standards students are or are not mastering, a component central to Explore Academy - Las Cruces' philosophy.

With a standards-based and mastery-based approach to learning, the shorter modules provide an academic platform through which a student cannot proceed within a given skill or content area unless he or she has mastered the skill and/or content requirements, thus promoting greater accountability and preventing students from proceeding to more advanced areas of study with gaps in their understanding which would otherwise undermine a student's potential of success.

As a model whose central focus is to collect data on student comprehension, at more frequent points within the school year, the calendar becomes a driving force for that philosophy.

Extending Learning

Although EA-LCS does not currently plan to commit to an extended learning time program as the school's schedule already allows for students to have ample time outside of class to extend on their learning, either through enrichment or remediation. This includes flex time, structured study groups, tutoring, and academic-driven clubs.

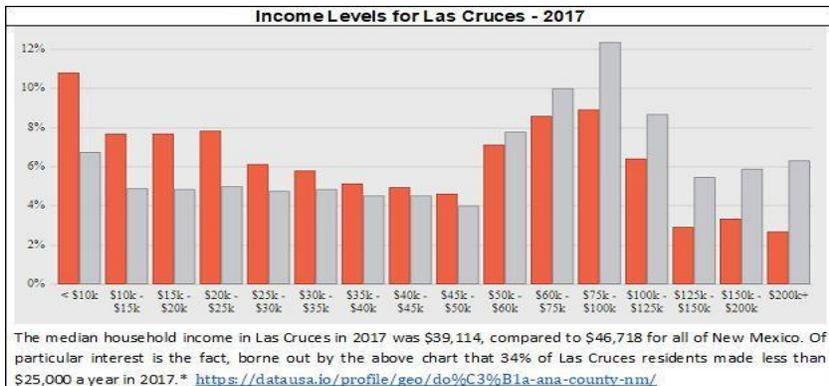
Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a yearly calendar that identifies the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual start date and end date ○ Teacher professional development days and times ○ School-wide assessment periods ○ School days, holidays, and partial days ○ Teacher parent conferences; • Include a daily schedule that identifies the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Instructional times ○ Break times ○ Start and end times ○ Differences in the daily schedule for full and partial days; • Meet all minimum hour (total instructional time) requirements laid out in NMSA 22-2-8.1; • Describe how the calendar and schedule support the proposed school's educational program; • Describe how the calendar and schedule are optimal for achieving high outcomes for the anticipated student population; • Describe specifically identified services to improve the academic success of at-risk students; • Describe the extended learning time programs to improve academic success of students and professional learning of teachers; • If this is an elementary school, describe the K-5 plus program; and • Be supported by the proposed budget found in the Financial Framework section of the application.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

F. (3) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** explanation of how the educational philosophy, instructional methods, and yearly calendar and daily schedule will be effective with the anticipated student population.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

The Explore Academy founding team commissioned an assessment of its ability to open a new campus with its unique and innovative curriculum and educational philosophy elsewhere in New Mexico, including Las Cruces. The Bellwether report (Attachment 1) suggested that Las Cruces was the most important location for Explore Academy to consider in New Mexico. The report found that existing charters underperform and district schools have student populations of more than 1000. Explore Academy’s small size and unique academic model may bring new, desirable offerings to Las Cruces and Doña Ana County. The community need is significant with free and reduced lunch programs reaching 67% more community members than other areas of the state. Bellwether also reported that charter schools have not performed well in the Las Cruces area, but that Explore Academy’s unique curriculum was well-positioned to erase that challenge.

As the Explore Academy founding team began consideration of Las Cruces as an expansion site for the Explore Learning Model, we conducted research on the demographics of the area, the student

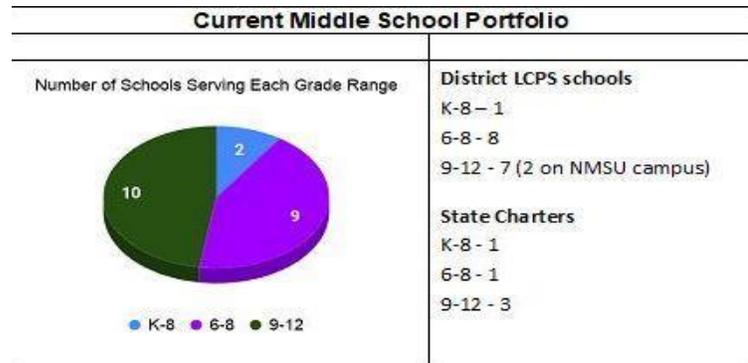


population that the school would be serving along with current attendance and truancy rates, and proficiency rates from the Las Cruces Public Schools. From this data, Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will adapt and customize the curriculum, instruction, and operation to meet the needs of the students and families of Las Cruces.

The Las Cruces Public School system is, in effect, no different from the Albuquerque Public Schools or any other school district across the country. No district or system is immune to the pressures or stressors placed on families, students, stakeholders, or schools. Socio-economic impactors affect all levels of the educational system and are exacerbated by the local environment. How local school systems, including charter schools, respond to these stressors and pressures is the seed for addressing the challenges to education and turning around the barriers to exceptional education and improved outcomes. Understanding the local challenges is the first step in formulating the response. To that end, EA-LCS, its founding team and Governing Council, has researched the local data for the Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS) and, where appropriate, offered a comparative view of equivalent data for the Explore Academy-Albuquerque campus as an Explore Learning Model standard.

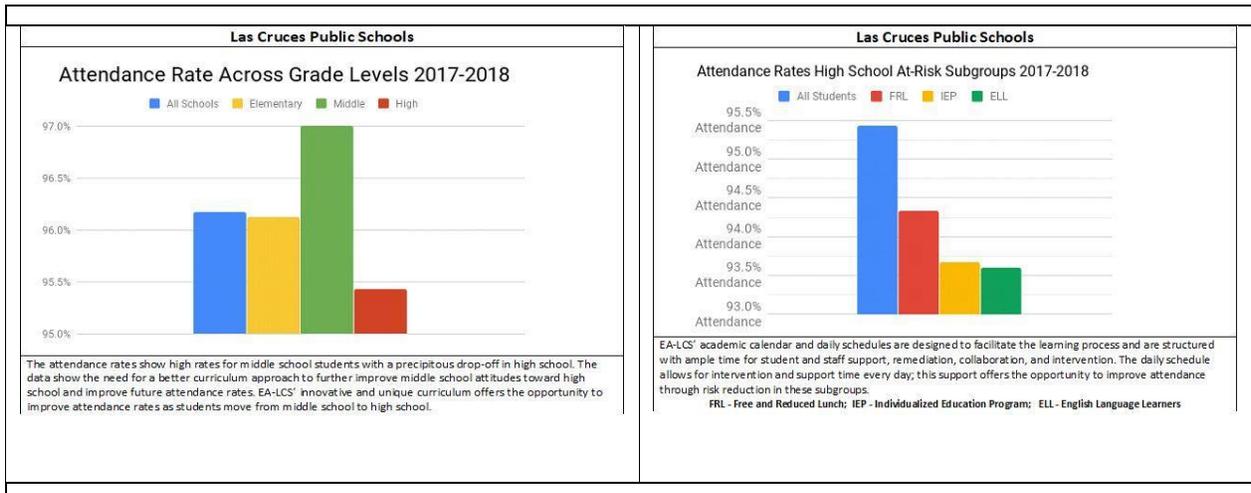
The state of New Mexico resides at or near the bottom of most socio-economic categories when compared to the other 49 states. This ranking put pressure on the state and municipal governments to support the local population across the entire landscape. Financial stress places a burden on families and students and the school systems' response must acknowledge those pressures. Adequate facility and support are a requirement to address the pressures and provide a stable, engaging and encouraging educational environment.

**School data sourced from NM Public Education Department website and Las Cruces Public Schools website.*



Las Cruces Middle Schools

The current middle school portfolio for Las Cruces, both public and public charter, indicates there is not a saturation of middle schools in the area. When comparing the number of middle schools to high schools, it is unusual to see a district with the same number of each. This fact demonstrates that middle schools are similar in size, if not larger, than high schools, creating an atmosphere for grades 6-8 with high student population density and low levels of individualization or choice. Further data (Attendance Rate charts



below) show the need to engage middle school students to keep them engaged and in school as they move from middle school to high school.

Attendance Rates

Recognition of the fallout from local pressures and stressors on families, students, stakeholders, and school systems, including charter schools, requires an assessment of engagement through attendance as a proxy for the attracting and engaging students. The LCPS attendance data demonstrate a significant picture of the district's challenge. The data show a fall in attendance from middle school to high school for the academic year 2017-2018. Unemployment and underemployment in Las Cruces are reflected in the annual median income levels for the area. That fact puts pressure on families and students and education

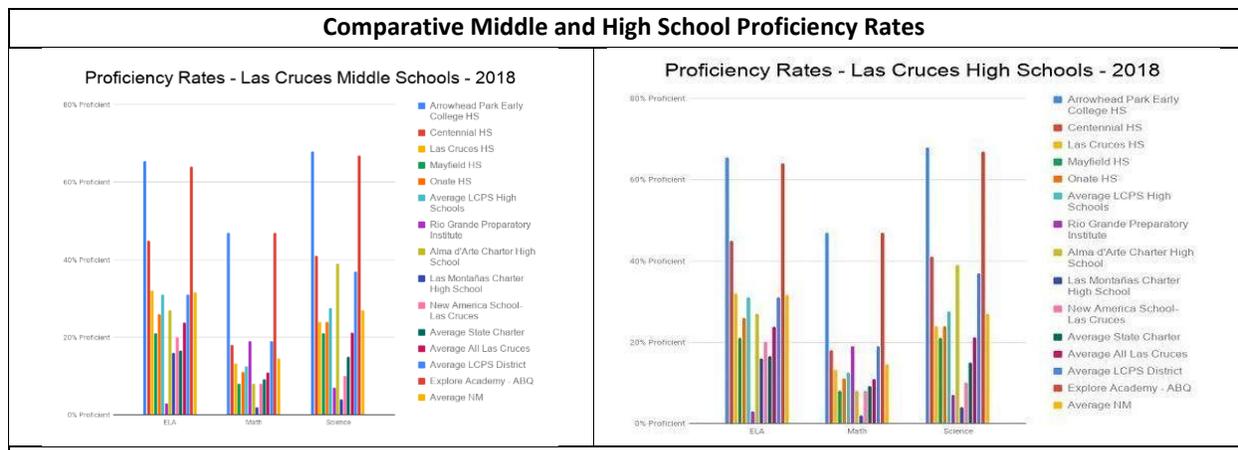
has the potential to devolve to secondary importance. Of interest in these data is the not insignificant rise in attendance rates from elementary to middle school where the highest rates exist across all students. Recognizing these patterns and trends in the Las Cruces environment is an essential component of EA-LCS’ recruitment, retention, engagement, and education of LCPS students.

This assessment is supported by the companion data graphed above that demonstrate the socio-economic condition of the area. At-risk students are less likely to reach the standard by all students across all grades for attendance.

Middle school is the grade range and student population Explore Academy - Las Cruces will open its doors to in 2020. EA-LCS’ innovative and unique curriculum offers the opportunity to improve attendance rates as students move from middle school to high school. Importantly, the curriculum offers support to at-risk subgroups of students. The highly engaging curriculum and student support systems will help improve student buy in and in turn improve the attendance issues seen in middle and high school grades, particularly within the at-risk subgroups: English Learners, students with IEPs, and students who qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Proficiency Rate Data

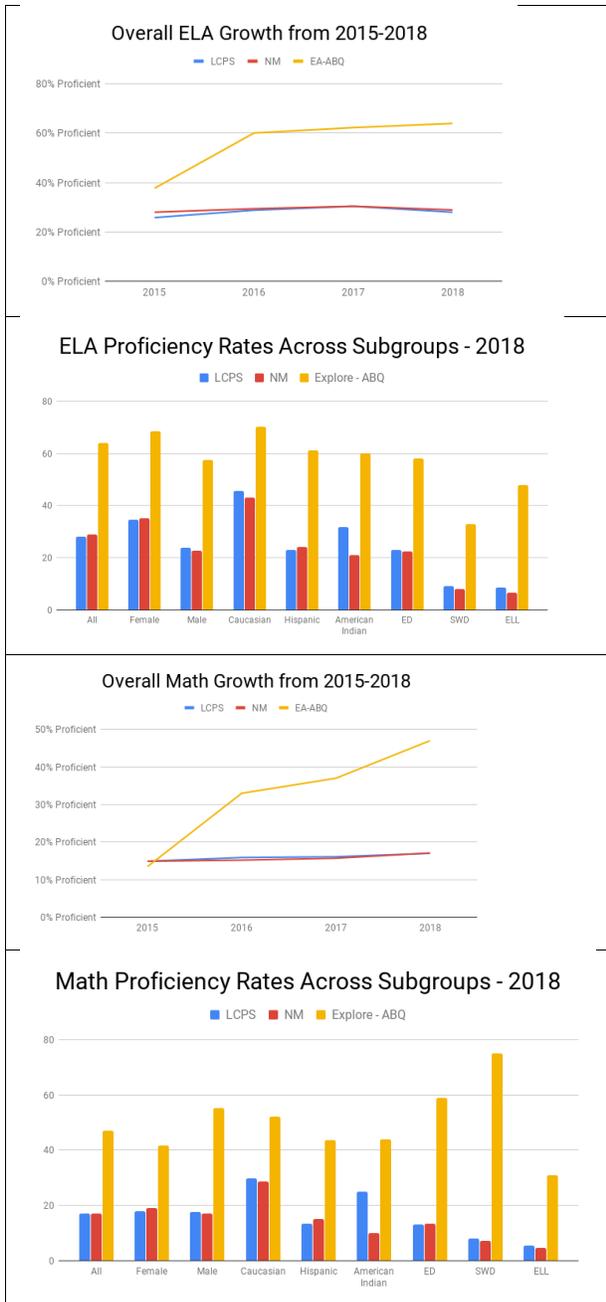
Socio-economic pressures can lead to reduced perceptions of education as a value to life outcomes. Where these outcomes are exhibited is the proficiency data for curriculum components.



Overall, the middle and high schools in the target area achieve lower proficiency rates in ELA and math than the New Mexico average. Although a few schools have rates that reach slightly higher, the majority of middle and high schools, district and charter, in Las Cruces are performing at very low levels academically, particularly in mathematics. When compared across academic school years, there is little to no growth in ELA or math in Las Cruces schools. More troubling, when compared across grades 9 to 11, there is only a small amount of growth in ELA, and students actually decline in math, achieving proficiency rates below 15% in many schools. The target area schools do achieve slightly better results within some of the subgroups represented, slightly passing the state average in a few categories.

The data provided in these charts indicate Explore Learning Model outcomes offer a higher proficiency level for students than other schools, both public and charter, achieve. Importantly,

ELA and Math Growth and Proficiency Comparisons

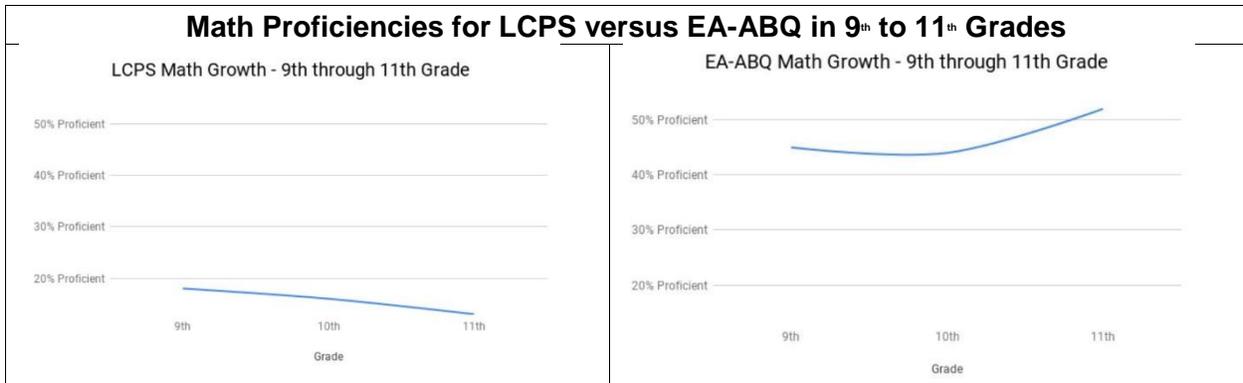


subgroups of economically disadvantaged (ED), students with disabilities (SWD), and English language learners (ELL) achieve higher proficiency levels with the Explore Learning Model. The growth over time (9th through 11th grade) and across academic years demonstrate that the longer a student is immersed in the unique Explore Academy Model, the more growth and achievement they will attain. For students in Las Cruces, a city with the highest graduation rate in the state paired with one of the lower math proficiency rates, the need for both high school diploma completion *and* content proficiency will lead to students who are fully prepared for their college and career pathways. The Explore Learning Model is innovative and unique in producing effective learning outcomes for its students.

Similarly, Explore Learning Model has demonstrated a wide range of educational outcomes with data collected from 2015 through 2018. Data collected for overall ELA for the academic years 2015-2018 demonstrate a significant improvement for student outcomes when compared to New Mexico and the LCPS. Likewise, the differential between Explore Learning Model for ELA proficiency rates for 2018 further support the value and effectiveness of the Explore Learning Model and its potential impact in the Las Cruces area. When assessing the Explore Learning Model’s impact on overall math growth for 2015-2018, the data show a dramatic differential in outcomes for students attending Explore Academy and learning through its curriculum. Importantly, it must be pointed out that the Explore Learning Model works within the same population of students as evidenced by the starting point in 2015

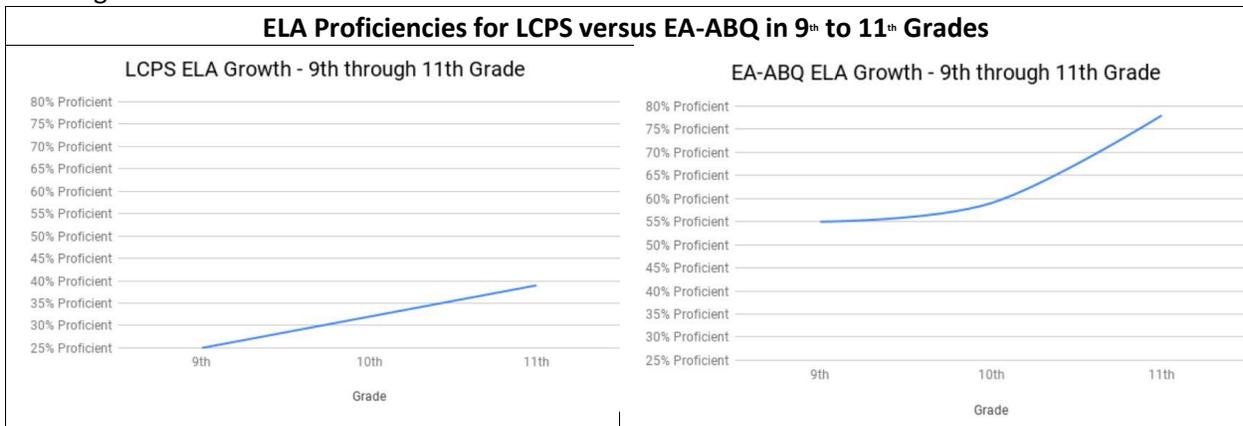
for overall math growth. The Explore Learning Model has resulted in a more than 30-point improvement in overall math growth as compared to New Mexico as a whole, and Las Cruces Public Schools.

When evaluated on a more granular level, ELA and math proficiencies for 9th to 11th grade students in the Explore Learning Model versus students in the LCPS exhibit markedly different results. The trajectory for LCPS students for these grades shows a disturbing eroding trend far below 15%. In contrast, Explore Academy-ABQ data reveal an increase in math proficiency to more than 50% by the 11th grade. Implementing the Explore Learning Model would seemingly provide an ideal curriculum to assist in reversing this trend in math growth.



LCPS math data demonstrate a decline in proficiency rate as compared to EA-ABQ for grades 9 to 11. The data suggest that the Explore Learning Model will have a significant impact on math proficiency in Las Cruces.

Interestingly, ELA data for LCPS reveal an encouraging trend in growth over the 9th to 11th grades. A nearly 15-point improvement in ELA proficiency has gas been reported. Over those same grade levels, the Explore Learning Model improves ELA growth from 55% to nearly 80%. Leveraging the Explore Learning Model into the current trend for ELA growth in the LCPS would seemingly provide an ideal opportunity to build on the foundation that is being established and push the growth rate to Explore Learning Model standards.

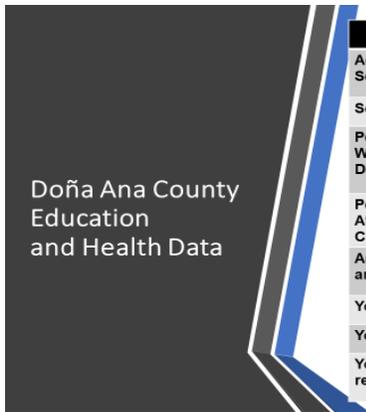


LCPS ELA data demonstrate an encouraging trend in proficiency rate for 9th to 11th grade. ELA proficiency data for EA-ABQ are significantly higher and suggest the Explore Learning Model will have a greater impact on ELA rate given current LCPS trending.

These data and the quantitative assessment of the Las Cruces environment, the pressures and stressors that impact families, students, stakeholders, the educational landscape point to the potential for Explore Learning Model and the Explore Academy-Las Cruces school to have a positive impact on the students and improve the educational outcomes and drive careers and life outcomes.

Data sourced from NM Public Education Department’s website.

Explore Academy leadership has long recognized that it cannot drop itself into the Las Cruces and Doña Ana County environment without a preparatory process of introductions, patronship development and collegial collaborations with local leaders. The objective is to avoid the pejorative description of a helicopter school dropping in and taking advantage of the local community. The initial efforts to generate introductions with local community members and drivers have resulted in promising relationships that



Data Set	Result	Source
Adults ≥25 years and older o High School diploma	21%	NM Dept of Health - 2016
School-aged children living in poverty	35.5%	NM Dept of Health - 2016
Percentage of Live Births to Women Who Had Completed a High School Degree or Higher	76.4%	NM Dept of Health - 2017
Percentage of Students Who Attended Daily Physical Education Classes Daily	22.9%	NM Dept of Health - 2017
Adolescent Nutrition – Daily fruits and vegetables	20.2%	NM Dept of Health – 2017
Youth feeling sad/hopeless	36.1%	NM Dept of Health – 2017
Youth smoking prevalence	11.5%	NM Dept of Health – 2017
Youth with caring, supportive family relationships	86.6%	NM Dept of Health - 2017

will benefit the charter school and the community. We view these forays into Las Cruces as efforts to introduce ourselves, the school, its unique curriculum, and its many successes to our future partners and stakeholders. It is our

intention, and obligation, to become an integral component of the city and county communities.

Currently in the target area, the student population is relatively consistent over the last decade, with the average school enrolling 75% Hispanic students, 20% Caucasian students, and 5% mix of other races and ethnicities. The schools generally have around 12% English learners who will need English language development as well as monitoring and support systems in order to allow them to learn academic English while also making grade-level content progress. This percentage of students who are ELs is smaller than in most other areas of the state; however it is important to remember that almost most families in Las Cruces speak Spanish as their primary language or in addition to English. Knowing that over 50% of the city speaks and uses Spanish daily, school materials, processes, and resources will be available in both languages so that families, teachers, and students can access information in whichever language they prefer to use.

As mentioned above, the economically disadvantaged (ED) or Free and Reduced Lunch (FRD) population is much higher than in other areas of the state, so the Explore Academy - Las Cruces team will adapt systems and policies to increase success for these students through apparel provision, technology assistance, and on-site family resources such as internet and school supply stocks. The students with disabilities (SWD) population is similar to what is seen statewide and the systems for providing their service needs are budgeted and planned for in detail, along with in depth support systems to monitor and provide intervention and support when needed.

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces founding team has established a quantitative data collection plan to assess five-year trends in health, education, business, economic, and census data for the city and county. We cannot assess our own impact on Las Cruces and Doña Ana County without understanding the history and trends in these qualitative and quantitative data sets. With a five-year trending data set, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be better positioned to assess its impact through changes in the various data for educational outcomes among others. Our research has pointed to several differences between Albuquerque and Las Cruces, namely American Indian and Hispanic student numbers.

The current network of prospective partners and leaders for Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be expanded as the application is submitted, reviewed, and scored. Data collection will continue during the process and throughout Explore Academy - Las Cruces’ tenure in Las Cruces. It will be important to solicit input from current and prospective families and students. Qualitative data will be collected through satisfaction surveys with current students and families as well as stakeholders. These data will provide insight on the EA-LCS efforts on the ground. They will permit adjustments to operations, outreach and learning environment.

As Explore Academy - Las Cruces becomes more ingrained in the community, we will expand our data collection outreach to determine potential growth in the community for the charter school. We will partner with an epidemiology specialist to draft a non-intrusive survey instrument to assess community satisfaction with education opportunities in Las Cruces and how EA-LCS might fill real and perceived gaps in services. Keeping our “finger on the pulse” of the community will provide guidance on where Explore Academy - Las Cruces may need improvement and where we are succeeding. These school-collected qualitative and quantitative data will be compared to NMPED-collected data from throughout the state

Graduation - 4-Year Cohort of 2017, Status of Non-Graduates

These figures represent students who were expected to graduate on time by August 1, 2017, but did not graduate. Graduation cohorts include all students who were ever enrolled during the four years, including part-time students. Percentages do not use the Shared Accountability method of calculation. For details see the Cohort Graduation Rate Technical Manual on the PED website: <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/accountability/graduation/>.

	Certificate Completed coursework but did not pass exit exam %	Status Unknown Dropped out or whereabouts unknown %	Exit Out Exited with intent to get GED or vocational credential %	Still Enrolled Continued high school enrollment past 4th year %
State Current	<2	15	4	10
LEA Current	<2	14	2	7
Centennial High School	<2	12	<2	5
Early College High School	<2	4	<2	2
Las Cruces High School	<2	12	<2	6
Mayfield High School	<2	11	2	7
Ocate High School	<2	11	3	5

Blanks indicate too few students to report (N<10). Source: PED Accountability Bureau

Status on non-graduates in Las Cruces through August 2017

Explore Academy-Las Cruces will continue to collect archived and historic data to identify trends and assess outcomes following the graduation of our first class and beyond

and Las Cruces, specially. An outcomes program evaluation will be employed to assess the direct and indirect impact of the EA-LCS curriculum. It must be made clear that EA-LCS is not seeking sole attribution for any outcome on local data. Rather, the charter school is seeking to describe how the entire educational enterprise in Las Cruces evolves over time with value-added curricula braided into the community from multiple sources and schools. The question then is, can we as a collaborative member of the community change non-graduate status over time, as a team?

Based on demographic data supplied in this section, EA-LCS anticipates a higher level of ELL students than seen at EA-ABQ (although lower than the state average) and the potential need for staffing in this area in addition to Spanish materials and communications. Further, based on occupations in agriculture, fishing, and forestry, modules in these topic areas will be developed for the curriculum.

The academic calendar is built to support students through shorter, more manageable learning modules rather than overwhelming, yearlong classes. The academic calendar and daily schedules are designed to facilitate the learning process and are structured with ample time for student and staff support, remediation, collaboration, and intervention. For students who are at-risk, English language learners, students with disabilities, and other subgroups who may need extra attention, the daily schedule allows for intervention and support time every day without the students having to miss any class periods. During their flex period (two of the seven daily periods), students can meet with service providers, mentors, case managers, counselors, administrators, tutors, teachers, and any other parties who may assist them in their academic business. The flex periods also allow for tutoring, studying, and collaborating, activities that are essential for all students as they build their academic habits and processes. Further, the inclusion of both academic and extracurricular activities during the school day

allows for all students, particularly those who have less financial means to participate in activities, to be fully involved in any aspect of the educational process from tutoring to clubs and sports.

The philosophy of Explore Academy - Las Cruces is rooted in the power of student choice and a system that is equally rigorous and nurturing. The combination of student choice and engagement, high academic and behavior expectations, and a comprehensive support system result in positive student outcomes for both academic and social success. Compared to the traditional educational model, or any model seen within the Las Cruces area or anywhere else in the United States, where students are subjected to randomly assigned classes, teachers, teaching styles, and instructional modalities, the vastness of the Explore Learning Model shows no comparison in providing students choice. The model builds individuals not only ready for the academic future ahead, but ready for the responsibility that comes with charting and steering their own educational mission through their post-secondary enrollment.

The Explore Academy model is innovative and unique in producing effective learning outcomes for its students. By breaking concepts into smaller modules, students are able to focus on fewer objectives at a time, allowing for greater depth (over breadth) in covering academic content. Further, by providing students a diverse set of options through which they can complete their objectives, the power of student choice creates an almost mathematically infinite combination of student pathways, thus creating a unique educational experience for each student. This uniqueness and mission for a middle and high school align perfectly with the demographic, academic, and statistical data of the Las Cruces and Dona Aña county population.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the anticipated student population, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Demographic information based on the local community population ○ Educational proficiency based upon enrollment at the school ○ Attendance and truancy trends ○ English language proficiency ○ Other special educational needs; • Explain any special factors influencing the makeup of the anticipated student population; • Explain how the educational philosophy has been designed to meet students' needs; • Explain how the instructional methods have been designed to meet students' needs and specifically how they will meet the needs of at-risk students; and • Explain how the yearly calendar and daily schedule have been designed to meet students' needs.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

G. Special Populations.

This includes those with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) English Language Learners (ELLs), Native American Students, Hispanic Students, and Bilingual and Multicultural educational needs to improve student outcomes.

G. (1) Special Education.

G. (1) (a) Provide a **clear, cohesive, and comprehensive** description of how the proposed school will provide required instructional services/supports to students with IEPs. Ensure you address both students with disabilities and students classified as gifted.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

The entire nature of Explore Academy - Las Cruces' academic model is based on individualized student educational pathways, thus providing students with special needs, both students with disabilities and gifted students, with in-depth academic support that surpasses what is traditionally seen in public education. For students with documented special needs, such as IEPs and 504 plans, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will follow all legal protocols to provide these students with services specific to their special needs to create an environment based around educational equity.

Identification of Students With Special Needs

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will prioritize the identification of students with special needs prior to enrollment or at the time of demonstrated academic at any time while enrolled. There are a variety of avenues through which students with special needs can and will be identified. For those students with previous documentation of program eligibility and/or participation, EA-LCS will request all pertinent educational records at the time of enrollment to ensure that any services provided prior to enrollment will remain consistent and continue without disruption.

For those students for which an academic concern is noticed and/or suspected, whether due to academic struggle or exceptionally high levels of performance, staff, teachers, and parents may recommend the student for interventions and possible special education testing (see SAT process below).

Special Education Program

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will utilize a full-inclusion structure, with all students provided access to a free and appropriate public education, all the while sharing the same opportunities for curricular choice. Within this framework, the school will provide support staff for special education students, both gifted and with disabilities, to provide direct and supplemental instructional support and services both in and out of class. This support will be extended by the network of ancillary service providers with which the school will contract in order to provide the necessary support services. Supports are offered to accommodate and modify the learning environment of each student based on their IEP or 504. These services will include individual exit exam test environments, text-to-speech programs installed on student Chromebooks, large print texts, audiobooks, copies of notes or class materials, peer mentor assignments, flexible seating, headphones, color overlays both physically and digitally, specifically assigned flex periods based on food or medication requirements, extended time on class assignments, extended time on testing, and/or use of manipulatives or other learning aids.

The primary work that supports students with special needs, however, begins with the classroom teachers. In implementing the Explore Learning Model, EA-LCS will commit itself to maintaining smaller class sizes (average of less than 18 in any class) so teachers may work closely with each student in class. The seminar style of instruction will ensure students are doing at least 50% of the communicating

in class, so the environment becomes one where discourse is two-way. By knowing their students and their students' specific learning needs, teachers will effectively intervene and provide individualized support in areas specific to address student deficiencies. Teachers can also customize instruction to challenge gifted students and deepen their level of interaction with the seminar curriculum. The small class size characteristic of EA-LCS also creates a small-group environment which is conducive to special education accommodations and modifications as well as enrichment activities for gifted students thanks to the individual attention that the teachers will be able to provide each student.

All support mechanisms will operate across a multitude of dimensions depending the level of intervention required based on the needs of the individual student. One such mechanism is in scheduling around required supports to keep students in class as much as possible. For students that require services in the areas of social work, speech language pathology, etc., Explore Academy - Las Cruces will provide these service hours to students during their free (flex) periods so they are not missing class for these crucial sessions. There is also the possibility for a student with an IEP or 504 to enroll in only four classes during a specific term, allowing for a modified schedule with greater individual support provided during the extra flex period in addition to the class load decrease.

These flex periods will provide an additional layer of support throughout the day while the student is at school. The expectation is to allow flex periods to remain open for students to use as needed (unless interventions are necessary), students with IEPs and 504s may be assigned to a "structured" flex period, which includes work with the school's tutoring staff, to better meet their academic needs. This will allow them time with their special education case manager to work individually on areas of deficiency, learning gaps, or social skills, as well as to be a point of contact between content area teachers and parents in order to maintain open lines of communication. Gifted students will be able to use this period to meet with a gifted teacher and receive services to challenge them in their area of giftedness and other areas where they are curious and ready to explore. This class period, meeting on a daily basis, will allow for dedicated tutoring time, extended test-taking, and technology skill building. As a component built into the day, this time will help ensure that students will be able to receive all the support services they may require, including ancillary services such as physical therapy, speech therapy, gifted seminars, social work, occupational therapy, as well as receive academic interventions to allow them to be successful in their seminars for each term.

The structure of the school's staffing, schedule, and curriculum allow support for any student across the spectrum of need. In this sense, there is no one-size-fits-all mechanism that benefits all students, but rather the combination of specific mechanisms (as described above) can be tailored to fit the needs of each student individually.

There will be a Student Assistance Team (SAT) in place in order to serve students who are suspected of qualifying for an IEP. This team will initiate and monitor the SAT process as well as all Response to Intervention (RTI) and tiered intervention protocols. This will include teacher surveys and feedback forms, student observations, parent input meetings, SAT meetings, student results after interventions, data collection and analysis, and student support services results and feedback. At that time, if the SAT team determines that a student may qualify for special education services and recommends further action, EA-LCS will arrange for a diagnostician to administer the proper tests and make a ruling on the best placement for the student. If the SAT team recommends no further action, the student will remain in an RTI program that includes structured flex and tutoring in order to support their academic progress even if they do not qualify for special education services at that time.

Staffing and Training

Explore Academy - Las Cruces anticipates its students with disabilities population to be similar to the surrounding school district which is currently around 10-15% of the total student population. The school will begin with one special education director and will expand as student need dictates, adding positions

each year to meet the needs of the students enrolled each year. The current budget accounts for three special education staff members at full enrollment, but this can be increased if necessary. This can also be expanded to include a gifted education coordinator to meet student need. All ancillary services will be provided through outside contracts so that EA-LCS can provide all types of services, even if for very small time increments.

The special education directors will work as a team to serve the students in coordination with administration, teachers, and academic tutors. The special education director role will include important activities such as: (a) lead the identification process, including organizing the special education assessments and evaluations, both at the initial and reevaluation stage; (b) ensuring that services are provided and aligned with the individual's IEP; (c) monitoring timelines for annual reviews and reevaluations of IEPs; (d) complying with state and federal reporting guidelines; (e) providing professional development and support to general education staff; (f) collecting and compiling all data pertaining to students with IEPs including progress monitoring and modification and accommodation efficacy and (g) ensuring that special education data is stored in a confidential manner. Special education directors will also be responsible for reporting all teacher concerns to the Student Assistance Team, both for possible disabilities and possible giftedness. This will allow the SAT process to properly collect data and evaluate identified students so they may receive appropriate services if they qualify.

Additionally, the special education directors will work closely with the ELL coordinator/teacher to evaluate all students with IEPs and cross reference ELL program participation to ensure that English Learners (ELs) are not overly represented in the special education program.

The special education directors will distribute accommodation and modification reports to teachers of students with disabilities and gifted students each term so that the seminars are adjusted to meet student needs. Teachers will provide all accommodations and modifications, with the guidance of the special education staff and administration, such as extended time, outline of notes, pre-reads, study partners, notes in advance, flexible seating or material use, text-to-speech, manipulatives, etc. The charge of each teacher is to adjust the curriculum and instruction, with assistance and training from the special education staff and administration, to make the learning environment fair, equitable, and accessible to students who have learning disabilities or giftedness that impacts their ability to access course content or participate in the class in the same way or to the same degree as their peers.

All EA-LCS staff will be actively participating in the education of students with disabilities, and thus will receive ongoing training focusing on many special education topics, such as:

- Mindset and high expectations for students with special needs
- Referral process to the Student Assistance Team
- IEP Team process
- Goal setting specific to individual needs and Progress Toward Goals process
- Implementation of a student's IEP
- Differences between accommodations and modifications
- Evaluation of data aligned to individual IEP goals
- Specific reporting and communication requirements between school and home
- Discipline of students with disabilities

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how the proposed school will identify and provide instructional supports and services to students with disabilities, who have IEPs or are eligible for an IEP; • Describe how the proposed school will ensure that students who are ELs are not over-identified as students with disabilities; • Describe how the proposed school will identify and provide instructional supports and services to gifted students who have IEPs or are eligible for an IEP; • Describe how the school will address the spectrum of needs that students with IEPs may present; • Describe the steps to ensure that students with disabilities have access to a free and appropriate public education; • Identify specific responsibilities for school staff, classroom teachers, and special education staff; and • Identify specific training and support that will be provided to teachers and school staff to ensure they are able to fulfill their responsibilities.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

G. (1) (b) Provide a **clear, cohesive, and comprehensive** description of how the proposed school will regularly evaluate and monitor the progress and success of special education students to ensure attainment of IEP goals.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

As Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) integrates technology into its instructional and administrative processes, staff will communicate efficiently regarding student progress and academic needs, both of which specifically benefit the support of the school's students with special needs and gifted students. A 504 Plan and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) are both intended to protect a student with a disability to ensure that they are learning in the least restrictive environment. The integration of progress monitoring and data analysis systems as part of the instructional model also supports students with IEPs and 504s at Explore Academy - Las Cruces. This workflow will operate across several dimensions, the more prominent ones being:

Frequent Assessments

As mentioned in the Assessment and Accountability section C.I.H, Explore Academy - Las Cruces' instructional model relies heavily on the collection and use of student and school data. To that end, students with IEPs and 504s have many data points that are used to tailor the educational experience to each of them individually including their exit exam scores, formative assessment scores, teacher feedback on assignments, and standardized test scores. Students are tested on Explore Academy - Las Cruces' standards-based exit exams every term, resulting in 5 scores per student, per term. This means that over the course of the year, EA-LCS staff will be able to analyze 40 exit exam scores per school year in order to best address each student's individual academic needs. Additionally, the frequent formative assessments, used in all seminars, creates a multitude of data points from which the staff can form the best plan for each individual student. For students with 504s and IEPs, this level of academic progress monitoring is crucial to their success because it allows for frequent, adaptive actions that address needs specifically and quickly.

Open Communication

With students moving through the classrooms of more teachers within a shorter span of time, EA-LCS creates a system where staff communicate constantly about student progress and academic needs. At the beginning of each new term, modifications and accommodations are shared with all teachers for students with modified curriculum, assessment, and educational setting. This open line of communication allows teachers to share best practices and experiences with each other continually, providing open dialogue about what works best for each student. The data collected each term from all seminars also allows administration and special education case managers to monitor each student and respond quickly to any issues that may arise. This monitoring and intervention help to assign students to some of the many supports mentioned above and below. This constant monitoring and communication related to student progress also ensures that students have their needs met in all classes consistently, creating a safe and stable educational environment.

Formative Curriculum

Explore Academy - Las Cruces' choice-based curriculum is built on the idea that students must continually work to improve in their learning. As such, the assessment of proficiency in each seminar's standards/skills is formative throughout the term, thus allowing students the ability to demonstrate learning as they make educational gains at their own pace while being provided the freedom to work

through their mistakes. A student's final grade is not penalized for a score earned in week one if they are able to demonstrate mastery in that same concept by the end of the term. This allows students with disabilities, medical conditions and gifted students to learn in a way that is less intimidating and more accepting of each student's individual cognition, circumstances, talents, and possible learning gaps. With formative assessments continually providing students feedback, students who would normally be lost or disengaged in a large class, are given individualized attention and guidance, providing them with support and confidence to take control of their learning. Students are not asked to merely hand in an assignment and wait two weeks for a grade rather, they are working through class concepts with their peers and teachers in class, allowing the teacher to facilitate each student's learning in real time with authentic feedback.

The At-Risk List and Report

At the conclusion of each week, teachers evaluate student progress and generate an at-risk list which identifies students who are struggling along with metrics denoting the potential causal factors. Reports from each teacher are compiled and a comprehensive report is sent to parents at the conclusion of each week detailing areas in which the student may be struggling and why teachers perceive these struggles might exist. This report is further modified to provide feedback for the special education staff members who work closely with their students. Using the metrics from each teacher, staff can provide more precise support as they work with students and liaise between teachers, students, and parents throughout the term.

The At-Risk report sent out on a weekly basis allows teachers to identify students who are struggling in their seminars. These students can be assigned tutoring, designated to attend a class for a second time, or they may be placed in a structured flex period where they have added support.

The goal of the At-Risk report is to intervene before a student fails a seminar, allowing students with special needs to get support before they reach a point where they are falling behind or failing a seminar. Because it is done on a weekly basis, it can be utilized for continual monitoring and immediate intervention for students who would otherwise fall behind in their seminars.

Progress Towards Goals (PTG)

As a component of each student's IEP, PTG becomes a specific benchmark on measuring student growth. While the common practice is to measure PTG once per year, EA-LCS teachers will review and provide feedback on special education goals each month, thus creating a more precise and workable data set from which the special education teachers can operate in supporting students for the term ahead. These data are compiled and added into an existing report which is shared with parents for review on an ongoing basis.

Structured Flex

As described above, the structured flex period is built into the daily schedule and provides support for special needs students. All students in 6th and 7th grades will have a structured flex where they work closely with a mentor teacher. Beginning in 8th grade, in addition to students who are struggling in their seminars or who have failed seminars (as mentioned in C.I.H - Assessment and Accountability), students with IEPs and 504s can be scheduled into a structured flex period during which they receive individual support from the special education staff. This intervention is put in place to prevent students from struggling in or failing seminars term after term without receiving the support they need for academic success. The structured flex also provides students access to a teacher, one on one, every day of the week. This individual attention means they are not lost in the system or overlooked as an individual. Each student's needs are identified, and they are able to work toward making progress on their own learning gaps and academic issues during their flex period. This leads to greater success in all seminars each term.

New Mexico Public Education Commission adopted April 12, 2019.

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Monitoring Timeline

The chart below shows the specific responsibilities for school staff, classroom teachers, and special education staff as it applies to progress monitoring and reporting:

Action Item	Date	Deliverable	Responsible Group
At-Risk list	weekly	IEP students on the At-Risk list	teachers, admin, sped director
Progress Toward Goals	monthly (each term)	student report for all students with IEPs	teachers, admin, sped director
Structured Flex assignment	weekly, monthly	students assigned to structured flex	admin, sped director, flex coordinator
Formative grades	weekly	grades in gradebook	teachers
Parent communication	as needed, at least weekly	email, phone call, reports provided, conferences	teachers, parents, sped director, admin, flex coordinator
IEP compliance	annually	completed IEP	SPED director, admin, parent, student, teachers
SAT process and students in RTI monitoring	monthly	SAT process reports and RTI analysis reports suggested next steps	SAT team and chair, admin, teachers, flex coordinator
Proficiency analysis, student achievement data	monthly (each term) annually (May-August as reports are released)	student analysis based on exit exams, ELA, math, and science (grades 8 and 11) performance, individual students, overall students with special needs subgroups	data analyst, admin, SPED director
ELL and SWD program comparison	twice annually, fall and spring	report of students in both programs, plan for ensuring proper identification	ELL coordinator/ teacher, sped director, data analyst, teachers, admin
Program evaluation	annually	action steps for improvement	admin, SPED director, Governing Council, stakeholders, students, teachers, data analyst, counselor

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how the proposed school will monitor the progress toward special education students' attainment of IEP goals; • Identify specific responsibilities for school staff, classroom teachers, and special education staff; • Identify the regular intervals at which progress will be monitored and success will be evaluated; • Identify specific actions/reporting that will engage students and or families; and • Describe how the school will evaluate the effectiveness of its special education program and services.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

G. (2) English Language Learner (ELLs).

G.(2)(a) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** description of how the proposed school will provide required curriculum, and instructional services/supports to students identified as ELs.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

As mentioned in section G.I Special Education, the entire nature of Explore Academy - Las Cruces' (EA-LCS) model is based on individualizing the educational experience for each student. For students with limited English language skills who are identified as English Learners (ELs), the Explore Learning Model creates an environment in which they can simultaneously improve their language abilities while also making academic progress in content standards. This is done through properly identifying ELs who are enrolled and providing comprehensive support through scheduling and support services.

Identifying

To identify ELL students, Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will use several methods that, together, promote early identification. First, records are requested from the student's previous schools that include not only academic and assessment records, but also program records to include special services such as English language services. When WIDA – ACCESS* scores are provided for a student, the school will identify them as an ELL and will proceed with services (see below). If a Language Usage Survey (LUS) is present and any question 1-7 is answered with "yes" then the student is identified as a possible EL. If there is any indication from student records that a student may be an EL, then they will be placed in the process for placement testing and screening if that has not already been done at the previous school.

The second method used for identification is contained with the school's registration form that specifically asks about home language and language usage as it relates to the student and their family. When a student's answers reveal a language other than English that is used by the student or their immediate family, the school identifies the student as a potential EL and proceeds to placement testing and screening for ELL status if that was not done at the previous school.

Lastly, in NM, EA-LCS will use the state education department's student database to perform queries on any student for whom it cannot acquire previous education records or for whom it is unsure of language usage based on enrollment paperwork. This allows the school to see student's previous program qualification as well as previous test scores, including ACCESS scores, if any. Explore Academy - Las Cruces maintains that the most important goal to have in mind when welcoming new students each year is to gather as much information about those students as is possible. This means doing everything possible to identify students who may have English language issues in order to support them from the very beginning of term 1. The engaging content and seminar-style instruction that comprises the EA-LCS experience will not be fully accessible to a student who does not have the same level of academic English as the peers around them. It is the mission of the school to identify and support Explore Academy - Las Cruces' ELs so they may achieve the same academic growth as their peers.

For students who are entering public school in New Mexico for the first time, the LUS will be administered. If any question 1-7 is answered with "yes" then they are will be placed in the screening process.

For any student who has been placed in the screening process and no prior screening or testing data can be located, the WIDA Screener online is administered by a certified teacher or administrator. This screener separates students who are Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP) from students who are English Learners (EL). Students who are IFEP are then exited and not put in program. Students who are EL based on the screener are placed in the ELL program and will be administered the ACCESS 2.0 for ELLs annually (January-March) in order to monitor their academic English performance. Scores 4.9 and lower

remain as ELs. Scores of 5.0 and higher are eligible to exit the program where they will be monitored for three (3) school years in order to ensure they do not need more support.

*ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 is a secure large-scale English language proficiency assessment administered to Kindergarten through 12th grade students who have been identified as English Language Learners (ELLs). ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 is aligned with the WIDA English Language Development Standards and assesses each of four language domains of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The assessment is available in both paper-based and online formats for Grades 1-12, while Kindergarten and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs are paper based tests.

WIDA has established language development standards for English and Spanish. These standards represent the language students need to be successful in early childhood programs and Grades K-12. The first standard, Social and Instructional Language, reflects the ways in which students interact socially to build community and establish working relationships with peers and teachers in ways that support learning. The remaining four standards present ways multilingual learners can communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies. (Note that these are different for the early English and early Spanish standards.)

Scheduling and Support

Per Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, all ELs have the right to equal access to high quality education in schools of their choice. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will ensure that all ELs who are enrolled have the supports in place to allow them equal and fair access to the Explore Academy grade-level appropriate curriculum and instruction.

Once a potential or confirmed ELL is identified, the school will have several systems in place to meet their language and academic needs within the curriculum. First, the student is placed in a structured flex period with an ESL teacher who has been trained in sheltered instruction, language acquisition, and English language development (ELD). The focus of the structured flex period, aside from ELL case management, centers around English language development through the use of WIDA and English Language Development Standards for ELs, academic support, and sheltered content material instruction. The teacher also adapts materials from the student's seminars to ensure they are receiving fair and equal access to content while also improving their academic English language skills. This approach is meant to further both grade-level content knowledge acquisition as well as fostering progress in the English proficiency of the student. These services will be provided during a structured flex period to allow ELs students to maintain a five-period schedule each term just like the general student population. This will allow them to stay on track academically and lessens the need for credit recovery down the road. It will also provide them with greater exposure to academic English in context as well as exposure to grade-level content knowledge.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will provide classroom and assessment supports for ELLs such as word-to-word dictionary use, extended time for work and testing, adapted reading materials, scribes and text-to-speech services, and sheltered content instruction that includes vocabulary in advance, outlines, printed versions of lectures and notes, and preview of class material to allow time to work through the English used in the materials. The accommodations and modifications for each EL will be distributed to the appropriate teachers so that the supports are used in all classes. This includes the plan for all alternate materials and adapted texts that may be required to provide fair and appropriate access to class content. Because ELs present with levels of need on a spectrum, the staff will utilize previous test scores (such as ACCESS), current levels of academic performance, and other qualitative and quantitative metrics to ensure that the appropriate level of support is being provided to each student. This includes various tiers of accommodations and modifications, individualized supports, and numerous degrees of scaffolded supports and ELD instruction.

It is crucial that EA-LCS employs at least one teacher who is highly qualified to work with ELLs (TESOL endorsement) and has experience with language acquisition and development in a 6-12 setting in

order to provide an environment that is conducive to not only grade-level academic success, but also to improving English language skills until reaching proficiency on par with native English speakers. If the enrollment of the campus includes a large percentage of ELLs, an ELL director can be added to the staff to serve as the case manager for all ELL students and coordinate services with teachers.

Staffing and Training

Las Cruces has a lower percentage of English Learners than most other areas of the state. Many ELs at the 6-12 level are functioning at higher levels of proficiency (ACCESS scores of 4.0 and higher). With current projections at 10%, a teacher will function as the ELL Coordinator and facilitate the ELL program for the school. Classroom teachers will be responsible for the implementation of the ELL accommodations and modifications to ensure that all ELs are able to access content in class with equity and fairness. This includes adapting assignments and scaffolding instruction, tasks, and assessments as necessary and appropriate.

In the event that there are more ELs than anticipated, or the population has a higher need than what is projected based on research and data, the budget will be adjusted, and an ELL Coordinator will be hired at the FTE needed to meet the student need. This educator will be TESOL endorsed and ideally have ELL and bilingual program management experience in addition to in depth knowledge about language acquisition and its impact on students as they learn academic English concurrently with grade-level core content material. Administration, the flex coordinator, and the counselor will also work closely with the ELL coordinator/teacher to ensure the proper staff training, professional development, student accommodation and modification adherence, and program integrity and success for ELs.

All EA-LCS staff will be actively participating in the education of ELs, and thus will receive ongoing training focusing on many English language development and acquisition topics, such as:

- Sheltered instruction
- Language acquisition characteristics in students
- Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking domain characteristics
- Differentiation for language level
- Integration of home language in content instruction
- Technology-based tools for content access equity
- Implementation of EL accommodations and modifications
- Cultural and linguistic sensitivity and inclusivity training
- Multilingualism and cognitive benefits training

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how the proposed school will identify English learners (ELs) and provide the required curriculum and instructional services/supports to students identified as ELs; • Identify how the school will implement the English Language Development Standards for ELs in its school; • Identify how the school will provide ELs with instruction and support to develop English language proficiency; • Identify how the school will provide ELs with access to grade-level content; • Describe how the school will address the spectrum of needs that ELs may present; • Identify specific responsibilities for school staff and classroom teachers; and • Identify specific training, professional development and support that will be provided to teachers and school staff to ensure they are able to fulfill their responsibilities.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

G. (2) (b) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive plan** to regularly evaluate and monitor the progress of English learners.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

To help students master academic English and eventually exit the ELL program, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will use performance data, the ACCESS score reports, and WIDA standards to monitor and support students as they improve their language skills. The goal for all ELL students is to score a level higher than they did the year before until reaching a 5 and qualifying for program exit. Their ELL case manager will help set yearly goals for each ELL and will assess them during their structured flex period to track academic data as it pertains to their progress in both their content classes and their language development.

In order to monitor ELs on an annual basis, Explore Academy - Las Cruces administers the ACCESS for ELLs to all students who are in program. This assessment, which will measure English proficiency in four domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing, allows EA-LCS and the ELL teacher to implement plans for each student based on their individual language needs. Not all students who are ELs have the same language background or proficiency, so the data from the ACCESS test and its domains will allow Explore Academy - Las Cruces to design supports that are specific to each student's needs.

As mentioned in section G.I - Special Education, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will operate using a system of data collection and analysis that allows the staff to monitor student progress in a variety of ways. These systems enable EA-LCS to monitor and support ELs to facilitate their success not only in academic English, but as successful students in general. These ELL supports include:

Formative Curriculum

As described in the Special Education section, the choice-based curriculum at Explore Academy - Las Cruces, which is built on the idea that students must continually work to improve in their learning, will allow ELs to work and demonstrate learning as they make educational gains at their own pace while being provided the freedom to work through their mistakes. A student's final grade is not penalized for a score earned in week one if they are able to demonstrate mastery in that same concept by the end of the term. This will allow students with language abilities the chance to work through the language barrier and demonstrate content knowledge at their own pace and without fear of being penalized. With formative assessments continually providing students feedback, students who may not connect well with a large class due to a lack of English language skills will be given individualized attention and guidance, providing them with the shelter and freedom to take risks and participate. Students will not be asked to merely hand in an assignment and wait two weeks for a grade; rather, they are working through class concepts with their peers and teachers in class, allowing the teacher to facilitate each ELs learning and language abilities simultaneously through support and feedback.

The ELL coordinator/teacher will distribute accommodation and modification reports to teachers of ELs each term so that the seminars are adjusted to meet student needs. Teachers will provide all accommodations and modifications, with the guidance of the ELL coordinator/teacher and administration, such as word-to-word dictionaries, vocabulary lists in advance, pre-reading opportunities, translations of content-specific texts into native language, etc. The charge of each teacher is to adjust the curriculum and instruction, with assistance and training from the ELL coordinator/teacher and administration, to make the learning environment fair, equitable, and accessible to students who are learning academic English and grade-level content simultaneously.

ELD Structured Flex

In addition to the five seminars each term, an English Language Development (ELD) structured flex period will be built into the schedule for each EL. This intervention is put in place not only to prevent students

from struggling in or failing seminars without academic support, but also as a dedicated time for language development and practice. The ELD structured flex also provides the student access to their ELL teacher, one on one, every day of the week. This individual attention means they are not lost in the system or overlooked as an individual and that their language needs are being met. Each student's needs are identified, and they will be able to work toward both their language goals as well as their academic content goals daily. The ELL teacher is able to monitor each student individually and design interventions and supports that address learning gaps and hurdles as they arise in each student throughout the year. This monitoring and individualized attention leads to greater success in all seminars each term.

Data Analysis

The ELL student data will be monitored at various intervals to inform supports and instruction. Due to the nature of Explore Academy - Las Cruces and its assessment practices, ELs will have many data points that are used to tailor the educational experience to each of them individually including their exit exam scores, formative assessment scores, teacher feedback on assignments, and standardized test scores. Similar to what was described for students with IEPs and 504s, ELs will be assessed regularly and have many data points that are used to analyze and monitor their progress individually and as a group. This analysis will be done at many intervals: daily, weekly, monthly, and annually.

In addition to the assessment and monitoring metrics mentioned above, ELL students will also meet with their ELL case manager daily during their structured flex/ELD time. The ELL teacher monitors and collects data and feedback regularly, both from teachers and assessment measures, in order to monitor academic and language progress for the ELL students. In the same way that students with disabilities and gifted students mentioned above will benefit from the constant monitoring and feedback systems in place at Explore Academy - Las Cruces, ELs will also benefit from the continual, coordinated support and attention.

Open Communication

As mentioned with IEP and 504 students, communication regarding Explore Academy - Las Cruces' ELs will be frequent and purposeful. All parents are notified of their child's participation in the ELL program. Additionally, they are sent reports detailing their child's progress in English language usage as well as class content regularly. These are in addition to the general reports that are sent to families such as At-Risk reports, grade reports, etc. At the beginning of each new term, modifications and accommodations will be shared with all teachers who have ELs in their seminars that term. This open line of communication will allow teachers to share best practices and experiences with each other continually, providing open dialogue about what works best for each student. The data collected each term from all seminars will allow administration and special education case managers to monitor each student and respond quickly to any issues that may arise. This monitoring and intervention will help to assign students to some of the many supports mentioned in the Special Education and ELL sections of this application. This constant monitoring and communication related to student progress will ensure students will have their needs met in all classes consistently, creating a safe and stable educational environment.

The At-Risk List and Report

As with special needs students and the general population, ELs will be monitored through the At-Risk list in addition to their ELL monitoring systems. At the end of each week and the end of each term, students who are struggling for any reason or who have failed a seminar will be placed on the list by their teacher(s). Being present on the At-Risk list will alert the ELL teacher as well as administration, parents, and counselors that an EL is struggling and requires more intense supports in order to succeed. Using the constant and frequent monitoring that the At-Risk report will provide, each EL is monitored and supported in the ways that he/she needs most. This means that Explore Academy - Las Cruces will not simply use

traditional ELLs strategies identically for all ELs; rather, the staff will tailor a plan that adapts to and supports each student and then adjusts that plan frequently in response to student data and performance.

Monitoring Years 1-3

All students who score a composite 5.0 or higher on ACCESS for ELLs, will be considered English proficient and will be exited from the program. This moves their status from EL to Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP). These “exited” students will be monitored for at least two academic school years to provide support and ensure that the student is successful without the ELL supports they once received. The RFEPs will not take the ACCESS test nor are they scheduled in the ELD Structured flex period, but they will be monitored by the ELL staff and their academic Data are analyzed monthly. If issues are noted, a SAT team will be assigned to review the student data and performance and implement a plan, if necessary. If the SAT team’s intervention plan is not successful, the student may be screened again for ELL status.

ELL Program Evaluation

Explore Academy - Las Cruces believes in continual data analysis in order to drive improvement. Thus, the ELL program will be evaluated annually in order to gauge its impact and effectiveness. This will include comparing ELL enrollment data to that of the schools around the site as well as the Las Cruces Public Schools ELL enrollment, comparing Explore Academy - Las Cruces ACCESS scores to the district and state, comparing Explore Academy - Las Cruces EL individual scores from one year to the next to monitor growth, and exit exam pass rates of ELs compared to the student body as a whole.

It is crucial to regularly assess the ELL program and its effectiveness. The staff will use the technical manual from PED and the Bilingual and Multicultural Education Bureau, *Serving English Language Learners Technical Assistance Manual*, to drive the program and program evaluation. EA-LCS will also use tools provided by PED and the Bilingual and Multicultural Education Bureau to analyze the performance of the program. This includes the Monitoring Checklist as well as the Parents of ELs Interview Form. The EL students enrolled will complete a survey to rate the ELL program and provide constructive feedback to the staff and administration. Some data collection that will be performed includes:

- ELLs in Las Cruces Public Schools
- ELLs in schools close to Explore Academy - Las Cruces
- ELL attrition rate
- ELL exit exam pass rate
- ELL enrollment levels across years
- ELL program exit rate
- Intervention usage and success
- School score according to PED related to ELL
- ELL staff attrition
- ELL IEP rates
- ELL gifted rates
- ELL student academic and behavior concerns
- Parent and community input, involvement, and data
- ACCESS scores and trends

These metrics will permit staff to make adjustments to the program annually to better serve the EL students.

Monitoring Timeline

The chart below shows the specific responsibilities for school staff, classroom teachers, and ELL staff as it applies to progress monitoring and reporting:

Action Item	Date	Deliverable	Responsible Group
ELL identification and program notification	first 20 days after enrollment	official ELL program list most recent ACCESS scores on file parent notification sent home and signed flex coordinator notified for ELD flex	ELL coordinator/ teacher, admin, flex coordinator, data analyst
At-Risk list	weekly	ELL students on the At-Risk list	teachers, admin, ELL coordinator/teacher
English Language Development instruction progress	monthly (each term)	student report for all ELs based on the ELD structured flex performance	admin, ELL coordinator/ teacher and/or teacher
Structured Flex assignment	monthly	students assigned to ELD structured flex	admin, ELL coordinator/ teacher, flex coordinator
Formative grades	weekly	grades in gradebook	teachers
Parent communication	as needed, at least weekly	email, phone call, reports signed	teachers, parents, ELL coordinator/ teacher, admin, flex coordinator
ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 testing and compliance	annually (January - March)	completed ACCESS testing	student, teacher(s), ELL coordinator/ teacher, admin, school test coordinator (STC)
Proficiency analysis, student achievement data	monthly (each term) annually (May-August as reports are released)	student analysis based on exit exams, ELA, math, and science (grades 8 and 11), and ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 performance, individual students, overall students with special needs subgroups	data analyst, admin, ELL coordinator/ teacher
Exited RFEP monitoring	monthly annually	student progress report and possible intervention plan	teachers, ELL coordinator/ teacher, admin
ELL and SWD program comparison	twice annually, fall and spring	report of students in both programs, plan for ensuring proper identification	ELL coordinator/ teacher, SPED director, data analyst, teachers, admin
Program evaluation	annually	action steps for improvement	admin, ELL coordinator/ teacher, Governing Council, stakeholders, students, teachers, data analyst, counselor

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how the proposed school will monitor the progress of ELs toward English language proficiency, both annually and within the school year; • Identify specific responsibilities for school staff and classroom teachers; • Identify the regular intervals at which progress will be monitored; • Identify specific actions/reporting that will engage students and/or families; • Describe how the school will evaluate the effectiveness of its EL program and services; and • Describe how the school will monitor exited EL students (reclassified fluent English proficient students—RFEPs) for two years for academic progress.
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G. (3) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive plan** to address the needs of Native American Students, Hispanic Students, and Bilingual and Multicultural educational plan to improve educational outcomes

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will create an equitable and representative learning environment and prioritize the needs of all students as individuals by maintaining an educational setting where students of all cultures, including Native American, Hispanic, Multicultural, and Bilingual students, are not only included, but are an integral part of the educational process, satisfying the goals of the Indian Education Act [22-23A-1 NMSA 1978], and the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act [22-23-1 NMSA 1978]. To this end, EA-LCS will address the needs of Native American and Hispanic students and maintain a bilingual and multicultural educational framework through teacher and staff training, a customized curriculum, student-driven practices, and an organizational focus on inclusivity. In response to the above statutes, and in the fairness of serving each student as an individual, the school will develop, with stakeholder input and guidance, and abide by policies that are culturally and linguistically responsive. The EA-LCS campus is projected to have over 80% of its students belong to the Native American, Hispanic, Multicultural, and Bilingual subgroups, so the need to ensure equal and quality education for these students is tantamount to the success of the school overall.

The school programs and policies will be evaluated regularly (see monitoring timeline below), aligning to our mission of data-driven operations, to improve educational outcomes. These efforts will facilitate the cognitive and affective development of the students through the use of cultural and linguistic student backgrounds in the formation of curriculum and school programs, the offering of student opportunities for expansion of linguistic abilities and concepts, and the focus on appreciation and value of all cultures and languages of the area and world.

More information about Explore Academy - Las Cruces' programs and plans for culturally responsive practices for all students, including Native American, Hispanic, Bilingual, and Multicultural students, are described in section C.I.C - Bilingual Multicultural Indian Education and Hispanic Education. In a target population where most students are Hispanic, multicultural, and bilingual, EA-LCS feels that the needs of the *whole school* represent this subgroup, thus, much of the student support services, student-driven curriculum and instruction practices, and school policies and procedures discussed throughout this entire charter application are also directly applicable to this section and to all students at EA-LCS.

Teacher and staff training

Explore Academy - Las Cruces prioritizes providing quality training to all staff regarding best practices to serve students who are at-risk of marginalization, especially Native American, Hispanic, Multicultural, and Bilingual students attending EA-LCS. An English Language Learner (ELL) coordinator/teacher will be on staff to serve students along with a flex coordinator and an activities coordinator who, as a team, will organize and implement training and programs on campus. To assist teachers and staff in serving these students, who will comprise the majority of the population at EA-LCS, training will be provided to teachers and other staff, such as tutors and counselors, both prior to the start of school as well as continually throughout the year. Training topics will ensure that the best practices are used in teaching, mentoring, counseling and administration are culturally and linguistically responsive to student and will include:

- Sheltered instruction practices
- Socio-emotional learning curriculum practices
- Cultural inclusivity practices

- Language acquisition research and benefits of multilingualism
- Use of home/native language to enrich academic outcomes
- Integration of culture in classroom instruction authentically
- Team-building initiatives and school culture training
- Sensitivity and bias in assignments and assessments training
- Cultural stereotyping and racial issues common to southern NM

Customized curriculum

Students at Explore Academy - Las Cruces will have an unprecedented amount of choice in their educational pathways. At each monthly junction, a student's course choices will reflect their personal beliefs, preferences, and background. Explore Academy's choice-based curriculum is designed to be meaningful specifically for the students of Las Cruces and their unique educational, personal, cultural, and linguistic perspectives. Higher student engagement combined with rigorous coursework and a standards-based assessment and credit system will lead to improved educational outcomes, with a decrease in learning gaps and an increase in student confidence and personal validation.

Student-driven practices

As students progress through their seminars across each school year, the instructional practices and policies implemented by the Explore Academy Las Cruces teachers, will be highly grounded in student-driven learning, including seminar-style instruction and inquiry design models. This level of student involvement will lead to a rich classroom environment where diverse perspectives, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds will form a melting pot that benefits all students both personally and academically. Teachers will adjust instruction, materials, and classroom structure to meet the needs of students every day in all class periods. The small class sizes will allow more individualized class adjustment that fluctuates as student needs fluctuate organically. Students will be in the driver seat as they reach cognitive and affective educational milestones, while teachers will operate as facilitators and guides through the customized curriculum, they have created specifically for Explore Academy - Las Cruces. Stakeholders from all subgroups, especially parents of Hispanic and Native American students, will have input in the creation and updating of school policies and handbooks to eliminate cultural biases and sensitivity issues.

Organizational focus on inclusivity

As a school, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will have an unwavering focus on inclusivity and acceptance for all students, staff, and community members. The school will incorporate cultural and traditional holidays and practices that are reflected in the community, into the school through curriculum, flex activities, school holidays, extracurricular activities, newsletter highlights, and community partnerships. Teachers and staff will promote the use of traditional dress and regalia, the presentation of traditional performances and skills, and the teaching of diverse cultures and peoples, both local and from around the world. The diversity in the curriculum is a reflection of the diversity of the school family; the educational focus is in turn a reflection of the cultural focus of the school. While students learn to take responsibility for their learning by becoming active members of the classroom dynamic, they will also learn to take an active role in their community by becoming inclusive thinkers with diverse world views and a deep appreciation for all cultures, linguistic backgrounds, perspectives, and schools of thought.

Program, policy, and plan evaluation

Aligning with the Explore Learning Model which is based on constant feedback and improvement, the bilingual and multicultural policies, programs and plans used at Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be evaluated at regular intervals (see below) in order to measure effectiveness, integrate parent and

community involvement and feedback, and tailor communication and reporting procedures to the EA-LCS stakeholders and Las Cruces community.

Feedback surveys - monthly, annually

Each term, students are given surveys that allow them to provide anonymous feedback about their experience that term at Explore Academy - Las Cruces. Through these surveys, which provide valuable curricular and instructional data as well, administration will evaluate the feedback surrounding Native American, Hispanic, Multicultural, and Bilingual students and their experience at school. This will allow for adjustment of aspects of the school that are not properly serving its students. Additionally, parents are given feedback surveys annually that elicit comments and input regarding the school's programs, policies, and plans in serving the Native American, Hispanic, Multicultural, and Bilingual students. These surveys, also anonymous, give voice to all families and allow comments, both positive and negative, to be heard and recorded.

Input meetings - monthly

The community information nights hosted by EA-LCS in addition to its PTO, parent meetings, and Governing Council meetings all provide a platform through which parents and community members can provide input to the school to improve the educational environment for Native American, Hispanic, Multicultural, and Bilingual students. These meetings are advertised well in advance and held regularly throughout the school year in order to make the school and its administration as accessible to families as possible. Specific agenda items will be added to these meetings, especially PTO meetings, to elicit feedback to guide programmatic evaluation and adjustment to improve student outcomes.

Annual program evaluation - May/June annually

Annually, EA-LCS will evaluate all data collected from the school year in regard to Native American, Hispanic, Multicultural, and Bilingual education and students of the school. This includes surveys, student performance data, participation rates in activities and sports, and parent involvement. These metrics will be viewed by administration along with a team of staff members to evaluate the school's service to these subgroups. Action steps will be designed to address any concerns, including timelines, responsible parties, and deliverables that will be required to improve the school's service to its students and community.

Monitoring and Reporting Timeline

The chart below shows the specific responsibilities for all school staff as it applies to educational framework and outcomes for Native American, Hispanic, Bilingual, and Multicultural students of EA-LCS, including reporting mechanisms:

Action Item	Date	Deliverable	Responsible Group
At-Risk list	weekly reports to families, teachers	Native American, Hispanic, Multicultural, and Bilingual (NH, H, M, B) students on the At-Risk list repeatedly	teachers, admin, ELL coordinator/ teacher
Seminar progress	monthly (each term) reports to families, teachers	student report for all NH, H, M, B students based on exit exam performance concerns	admin, data analyst
Structured Flex assignment	monthly	NH, H, M, B students assigned to structured flex repeatedly	admin, flex coordinator
Parent communication	as needed, at least weekly	email, phone call, reports signed	teachers, parents, admin, coordinators

Proficiency analysis, student achievement data	monthly (each term) annually (May-August as reports are released)	student analysis based on exit exams, ELA, math, and science (grades 8 and 11), and ACCESS for ELLS 2.0 performance, individual students, overall students from NH, H, M, B subgroups to chart progress, plan for improvement	data analyst, admin, coordinators
Input meetings	monthly	data collection from stakeholders, plan for improvement	admin, data analysts
Surveys	monthly	data from students regarding their experience and perceptions of teachers and the school, plan for improvement	admin, teachers, students
School NH, H, M, B student service evaluation	annually	action steps for improvement specific to curriculum, operations, instruction, and services	all admin, Governing Council, teachers, data analyst, counselors, teachers

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how the proposed school will develop an educational framework to address the educational needs of Native American, Hispanic, and bilingual studies within a multicultural approach to learning; • Identify specific responsibilities for school staff and classroom teachers, including professional development for teachers; • Describe how the proposed school will ensure that the best practices are used in teaching, mentoring, counseling and administration are culturally and linguistically responsive to students; • Describe how school policies will be culturally and linguistically responsive; • Describe how rigorous and culturally meaningful curricula and instructional materials will be developed and implemented; • Identify the regular intervals at which progress will be monitored; • Identify specific actions/reporting that will engage students and/or families; and • Describe how the school will evaluate the effectiveness of its programs to improve educational outcomes.
<p>INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.</p>	

H. Assessment and Accountability.

A charter school application should include a clear plan for evaluating student performance across the curriculum. This plan should align with state performance standards, as well as with the proposed school's student performance goals, and should be presented, along with a clear timeline for achieving these standards/indicators/goals. A clear explanation of the types of assessments and frequency of administration should be included, reflecting thoughtfulness given to tracking student progress. A plan for the use of data gathered through assessments should include procedures for taking corrective action (both individually and collectively) if pupil performance falls below expected standards.

A quality assessment plan will include summative (end-of-year) assessments as well as formative (more frequent) assessments to track student skill and knowledge development and to inform instruction. The plan will include how this data will be used to guide professional development of teachers, as well as how this data will be used to guide refinement of the curriculum and instruction.

When developing the assessment plan, you should consider: 1) the appropriateness of assessments to the curriculum; 2) what will serve as baseline for student progress comparisons; 3) the inclusion of school, state, and other assessments to demonstrate appropriate student growth; 4) the ability of the assessment plan to provide for the early detection of students struggling with curriculum content; and 5) the ability of assessments to reflect the use of basic skills at grade-appropriate levels (e.g., reading, writing, problem-solving).

**Be aware that all New Mexico public schools, including charter schools, are subject to a variety of testing requirements, which are aligned with state and federal content standards. For more information on NM assessment requirements, please see: <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/assessment/>*

H.(1) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive assessment plan** that identifies what measures will be used to indicate that students are making academic progress, the grade levels at which the assessments will be used, frequency of assessing, and how the assessments will be used to inform instruction. Please provide **clear** evidence that the applicant has considered the common core standards, all federally and state required assessments, and the proposed school's projected student population.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

There are a variety of assessments that will be used for grades 6 through 12 to measure academic progress for students at Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS). These assessments range from daily formative assessments through annual state-mandated assessments.

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces curriculum is designed completely around the required New Mexico standards for all content areas including the common core standards for English language arts and mathematics, the NM STEMReady! Standards for science, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) World-Readiness Standards for foreign language, the NM Social Studies standards, and the common core standards for literacy in science, social studies, and technical subjects. The scope and sequence of all contents at all levels is grounded in and developed from, the standards for each of those contents. Rather than approach a broad set of standards across a semester or year, the seminars at EA-LCS will each focus on a small subset of standards, allowing the teacher to assess student progress and proficiency with more accuracy and at much more frequent intervals than what is achievable in a traditional classroom setting.

Assessment Overview

The continual cycle of formative and summative assessment at Explore Academy - Las Cruces will allow for constant progress monitoring and a feedback mechanism to inform instruction, provide specific

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remediation, and to continuously improve the school's instructional practice. The system of monitoring, data collection, and data analysis will consist of several components: formative classroom assessments, exit exams, and state test performance, all of which invite their own in-depth data analysis. As required, the school will make available any assessment report to meet state assessment and data reporting requirements.

Because Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be standards-driven, each evaluation of student learning, be it formative or summative, is tethered to a measure of student learning for a specific state standard. As such, the school's academic model focuses on measuring the learning of standards rather than the completion of work or tasks specific to standards.

In considering the target population (Las Cruces), students have consistently underperformed on many assessments, including state-mandated assessments as well as college readiness measures when compared to the state average (See Section I.F.3 - Anticipated Student Population for more information). The goal of formative and summative assessments, when utilized purposefully in tandem, is to facilitate student growth and then allow students to demonstrate their academic progress. The Explore Learning Model's comprehensive system of formative and summative assessment, in conjunction with its curricular and instructional methods, will specifically address the lower proficiency rates witnessed within the target population.

Formative Assessment

Explore Academy - Las Cruces' academic model utilizes formative assessment and continuous student feedback as the mechanism through which learning and improved learning practices will take place. Students in the target population demonstrate very high graduation rates but extremely low proficiency rates in ELA and math annually. The assessment plan for EA-LCS is designed to eliminate the learning gaps that grow over time in the traditional model of cumulative grades and social promotion. By structuring the assessments to be formative in nature throughout each term, students learn to work toward mastery rather than working toward an arbitrary grade. In each seminar, student progress will be monitored constantly to provide them with feedback for improvement and facilitation of learning. This monitoring will also serve to track each student's progress on the required standards for that seminar throughout the academic term so that interventions can be implemented at any point the teacher deems appropriate. This will allow Las Cruces students to close learning gaps and achieve higher levels of proficiency in core academic areas which in turn leads to greater success in all classes.

Each seminar will be assigned specific required state standards to which the teacher and students are bound. The assessment and monitoring that will occur on a daily basis will provide the students, parents, and teachers with a continually updated measure of how each student is performing in each standard. This information is used to identify students who are at-risk (Explore Academy - Las Cruces "cuspies"), students who are not enrolled in the proper class for their proficiency level, and students who are on track to demonstrate proficiency in the seminar's standards. In the target population, which struggles with proficiency in core content areas, the benefit of an academic model which promotes formative evaluation and student growth, coupled with a system of constant assessment-based feedback, will provide vital insight into areas of strength and weakness in each student individually and will thus result in an increase in student achievement.

The format of formative assessment will vary throughout each seminar and within each flavor of each seminar, but may include general practice, practice assessments, projects, presentations, oral reporting, debate, and written work in a variety of formats to name a small sample. The teacher will have the discretion to utilize the formats of assessments they feel is most appropriate to the student and the seminar in general, although it is stipulated that the students will be provided short formal practice exams on a weekly basis to provide practice and exposure to what the exit exam will require of them at the conclusion of the term.

Within the school's gradebook, which is shared with parents and students through a parent/student portal, the most recent measure of each student's progress on each standard will be shown. While daily work and assignment grades will be shown within the instructional platform (Google Classroom), the teacher gradebook will simply illustrate the most recent, comprehensive measure taken of each standard, thus providing parents and students with the most recent data available on their student's learning progress for each standard within the class.

These standard grades will change on a weekly basis so as parents and students review grades as they see fit, they will see new grades for each standard based on the most recent measure taken by the teacher.

Exit Exams

There is a demonstrated need for student growth in the Las Cruces area students. In order to move the needle so that students are not just getting grades in classes but actually *learning* class material and *earning* those grades, it is necessary to hold them accountable for each standard that is required by the state of New Mexico in order for a student to graduate with a diploma. Explore Academy - Las Cruces exit exams will serve as the summative, credit-determining measure of proficiency for each seminar. Since this will occur every quarter (two months) for grades 6 -7 and every term (one month) for grades 8-12, there will be several opportunities for the staff and school leadership to collect progress data and focus efforts on interventions when there is not adequate progress being made. The exit exam component of the school's educational program will be specifically tied to its evaluation from its authorizer through the charter contract via its mission-specific goal.

Exit exams measure proficiency (and mastery) for each academic standard, and thus align specifically with the academic standards required by the state. Students must demonstrate proficiency (80% or above) for each academic standard for the seminar in question in order to earn credit for that seminar. Proficiency on standards is only measured on the exit exams with all other evaluations (see above) functioning as formative for the purposes of feedback. As such, students who graduate from Explore Academy - Las Cruces will have been deemed proficient in every academic standard.

Exit exams incorporate questions from Bloom's Taxonomy* levels, with lower-level seminars utilizing Bloom's levels 1 to 3 and higher-level seminars incorporating Bloom's levels 4, 5, etc., depending on the seminar level. Every exit will be broken into two sections, with the half assessing the lower-level Bloom's skills common across all flavors of a particular seminar. The other half, assessing higher order Bloom's skills will be specific to the flavor in question. The question levels and test question design increase in difficulty as students progress through each tier, thus exit exams at the 100-level have questions that are less rigorous than those at the 500-level.

Exit exam scores will be reviewed each month by teachers and administration. This data is used to inform instruction, both at the classroom and school level. Teachers are required to reflect each month on a variety of metrics, one of which will include pass rates for each different seminar they taught during that time. There is time built for professional development and reflection at the end of each term to allow for this reflection and curricular/instructional adjustment. This includes reviewing exam items that may be of a low quality, reviewing whole exams for quality, reviewing specific standards and how they were addressed throughout the term, etc.

State Assessments

State assessments will be administered annually during the state assessment administration windows to students in all participating grade levels. This will include the state-adopted standards-based assessment for ELA and mathematics, the NMASR (New Mexico Assessment of Science Readiness, the WIDA screener for potential ELs, the ACCESS for ELLs for students with ELL status, and the NM EoCs (End of Course exams)

for social studies and ADC application in ELA and math. The chart below shows all state or district mandated assessment periods, the grade levels at which the assessments will be administered:

Assessment	Students and Timing	Purpose	Application of data
ELA/math standards-based assessment (formerly PARCC)	Annually April-May Grades 6-11	ELA and math assessments that are aligned to the common core standards and allow for students at Explore Academy - Las Cruces to demonstrate proficiency in the standards assigned to their current courses. The test also allows for comparisons across all NM schools to provide EA-LCS insight into its student achievement levels.	<p>Scores from the annual state assessments allow for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -individual student growth from year to year -school performance from year to year -grade level and subgroup performance -comparison to NM averages -ELA and math proficiency levels and areas of strength/weakness <p>Teachers are provided with this data when it becomes available in order to adjust the instruction in math and ELA to meet student need and address learning gaps that are apparent in the standardized testing.</p> <p>Data are also compared to exit exam performance to better align the exit exams to the standards and accurately reflect student proficiency.</p>
NMASR (formerly SBA Science)	Annually March Grades 8, 11	The NMASR is aligned to the NM STEMReady! +6 standards for science instruction and allows all students to demonstrate proficiency in science for grades 8 and 11 at EA-LCS. It also allows for EA-LCS science achievement to be compared to NM state performance levels.	<p>Scores from the annual state assessment allow for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -school performance from year to year -grade level and subgroup performance -comparison to NM averages -science proficiency levels and areas of strength/weakness <p>The science department is provided with this data when it becomes available in order to adjust the instruction to meet student need and address learning gaps that are</p>

			<p>apparent in the standardized testing.</p> <p>Data are also compared to exit exam performance to better adjust the science exams to meet the new standards and reflect student learning.</p>
EoC - Social Studies	<p>Annually spring</p> <p>Grade 12</p>	<p>One social studies EoC is required for graduation purposes. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will ensure that all seniors have met this requirement with a thorough review of student records and test scores.</p>	<p>Social studies data are provided to the social studies department after exams are administered. This allows the team to identify potential areas of weakness in the social studies content scope and sequence and adjust the seminars to correct those areas. The seminars aligned to the social studies standards and their corresponding exit exams are reviewed to maintain their integrity when there are areas in the EoCs that are seen as downward trends or areas of weakness.</p>
EoC - senior retakes	<p>Annually spring</p> <p>Grade 12</p>	<p>For any student who did not pass a required EoC, there will be opportunities to retake the exam in order to meet NM graduation requirements for each content area (ELA, math, science)</p>	<p>Results are used to inform students of graduation status and, when needed, proceed to another ADC for graduation assessment compliance.</p>
ELA/math senior retakes	<p>Annually fall</p> <p>Grade 12</p>	<p>Students who did not demonstrate the minimum level of proficiency for ELA 11 or a qualifying math exam (Algebra II, Geometry, Integrated Math II, Integrated Math III) on the NM-adopted standards-based assessment (PARCC, Standards-Based Transition Assessment, SBA, or other legacy exam), there is a window each fall when Explore Academy will offer senior retake versions of these exams</p>	<p>Results are used to inform students of graduation status and, when needed, proceed to another ADC for graduation assessment compliance.</p>

Science senior retakes	Annually fall Grade 12	Students who did not demonstrate a minimum level of proficiency for 11th grade science on the NMASR (or legacy SBA Science exam), there is a window each fall when EA-LCS will offer a senior retake version of this exam.	Results are used to inform students of graduation status and, when needed, proceed to another ADC for graduation assessment compliance.
Exit Exams	Monthly, end of each term, eight times annually Grades 6-12, every seminar	Explore Academy - Las Cruces has designed and reviewed common exit exams for core content courses as well as exit exams for other content courses that are standards-based, peer reviewed, and based on Bloom's Taxonomy to vary the question level based on the student level, grade level, content, and task. These exams will be administered at the end of each seminar. Students must pass each standard from the seminar with at least an 80% in order to earn credit for that seminar. Thus, the exit exams serve as the credit-awarding factor for each seminar. This allows the teachers, and Explore Academy - Las Cruces, to certify that its students have mastered all required standards in all contents without learning gaps or areas where they may have unnoticed academic weaknesses.	Exit exam results are used in a variety of ways to inform instruction and improve student performance and academic outcomes. -The overall pass rate for exit exams each month is a goal, as identified in section C.I.B of this application, that is mission-specific and used to measure the overall performance of the school and its model. To that end, each term's pass rate is recorded and provided to the staff and the Governing Council. EA-LCS will use this as a measure of overall school performance. Pass rates for each teacher will be analyzed and provided to the teachers within a few days of final grade submission each term. This allows administration to see any trends or areas of weakness that need to be addressed. This will be done across all seminars individually, so within each content and within each teacher's schedule from that term, there is a breakdown of student performance for each seminar. This can be further analyzed to pass rates by standard, by student, by subgroup, by period, etc. Exit exam performance will also be analyzed by content area. This will allow the administration and each

			<p>content to monitor the progress in each content individually and course correct in a way that best meets the needs of that content. EA-LCS knows that students struggling in ELA often do not require the same interventions as a student struggling in math or in PE. By reporting exit exam data by content, the team will be better able to adjust to meet student need and eliminate learning gaps and areas of weakness.</p> <p>Exit exam scores reflect performance on all state standards, thus the student results each term will be used for progress monitoring for all students, but particularly for special populations (IEPs, 504s, ELs, and At-Risk students) in order to adapt services and improve student outcomes.</p>
<p>Formative Assessments</p>	<p>At least weekly Grades 6-12</p>	<p>Every seminar at EA-LCS employs formative assessments at regular intervals in order to monitor student progress, inform instruction, and facilitate student learning and progress. These assessments take various forms to meet the needs of the student, content, and level, but can include: multiple choice quizzes and tests, essays, long and short answer prompts, presentations, outlines, experiments, lab notebook entries, lab reports, debates, posters, pamphlets, extended project checkpoints, narratives, oral exams, demonstrations, etc. Each of these tasks is viewed as an assessment and students are given “grades” in the form of scores, feedback, assistance, and edits. This will allow teachers to</p>	<p>Data analysis resulting from all formative assessments is teacher-driven and highly integrated into all seminars. The teachers use this constant stream of student checkpoints in order to customize the instruction that is being provided to each student in each seminar.</p> <p>Small class sizes, less than 18 even at their largest, allow teachers to take data from a plethora of formative assessments and tailor the instructional approach to best meet student needs. When formative data shows an area of strength or weakness, each classroom teacher then shifts the 22-day term’s plan to meet those needs and thus the class is data-driven and (potentially) in constant states of adjustment.</p>

		keep an active measure of student performance in each seminar-required standard while simultaneously providing students with the support and instruction needed to make progress in each standard as they work toward mastery.	
Frontloading	Daily Grades 6-12	Frontloading is an instructional practice that will be required in all classrooms and contents at Explore Academy - Las Cruces. Similar to an anticipatory set, frontloading is a small, deliberate assignment that is given to students to complete before stepping into class the next day. These can include tasks such as reading a passage, taking a set of notes, watching a video clip, identifying the parts of an animal, or bringing in four lines from a news article. The teachers design each class period in a way that immediately and purposefully incorporates the previous night's frontloading into the day's activities so that students enter each class period engaged, prepared, and connected to the content. The performance and mastery of the frontloading tasks allows for further progress monitoring and this is then reflected in the student grades for each standard, in addition to other formative assessment scores, as a reflection of their proficiency level in each standard at any given time during at term.	Similar to the formative assessment data, teachers in the classroom will use frontloading performance to drive classroom instruction and methods. But, where formative assessment data often has a period, albeit small, where the teacher has to grade or comment on or review a task, the frontloading data analysis is instant. As students enter the room and jump into the day's instruction, their level of performance is measured in that instant by their teacher using the frontloading they bring in with them. This means that there is instant adjustment and differentiation based on student data in real time, every day.
PSAT	Annually October	Each fall in October, the PED pays for all NM sophomores to take the PSAT. This test is designed to allow students to	PSAT score reports, unlike most other standardized tests that are given to students, are returned along with the actual test booklet.

	Grade 10 - all Grade 11- opt in	practice the concepts that are tested on the SAT and receive insight into their predicted performance on the SAT and other aptitude tests. It also allows them experience with the PSAT that can assist them as 11th graders in order to retake the exam and qualify for the National Merit Scholarship. All Explore Academy 11th grade students are given the opportunity to opt in and take the PSAT for the second time.	This allows students to see their overall scores as well as the question breakdown indicating right and wrong selections. Counselors and teachers use these reports at Explore Academy - Las Cruces to help guide students on their path to college. The staff can assist students in recognizing areas of weakness where they must improve their academic performance. They can also identify areas where the student may have rushed or second-guessed themselves. These conversations based on PSAT data lead to higher PSAT and SAT scores, more confident test takers for college entrance exams, and more inquisitive students who are able to analyze their own performance data with the intention of learning from it in order to improve rather than remaining passive and accepting a score without analyzing its meaning and implications.
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Example Testing Calendar
Based on 2019-2020 proposed testing dates

August	September	October	November	December
Placement exams for new students	Term 1 Exit Exams (9/6)	Term 2 Exit Exams (10/10)	Term 3 Exit Exams (11/22)	Term 4 Exit Exams (12/20)
Data collection from STARS for all students (Assessment Facts)	Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, At-Risk)	Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, At-Risk)	Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, At-Risk)	Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, At-Risk)
WIDA Screeners if needed (within 20 days)		PSAT (10/16)	Senior HSGA retakes (ELA, math, science)	
January	February	March	April	May
Start ACCESS testing (1/13-3/6)	Term 5 Exit Exams (2/6)	Term 6 Exit Exams (3/9)	Term 7 Exit Exams (4/17)	Term 8 Exit Exams (5/21)
	Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, At-Risk)	Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, At-Risk)	Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, At-Risk)	Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, At-Risk)
		NMASR Science exam for grades 8 and 11 (3/2-27)	Start ELA/math state assessment for grades 6-11 (4/6-5/8)	Finish all EoC exams
		Finish ACCESS and return materials	Senior EoC exams as needed	Close all state testing portals and rectify all POs/invoices

Total Points Available	Expectations
6	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include an assessment calendar that identifies all state or district mandated assessment periods and dates related to teacher analysis/use of assessment data to inform instruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Include assessments/progress monitoring for special populations; • Identify, for all state or district mandated assessment periods, the grade levels at which the assessments will be administered; • Describe, for all state or district mandated assessment periods, the specific data that will be collected, reported, analyzed, evaluated, and utilized to inform instruction; • Describe how the data identified will be used to inform instruction; • Align with all state assessment and data reporting requirements; • Describe how the assessment plan meets the specific needs of the proposed school’s projected student population; • Describe how the assessment plan aligns to the proposed school’s mission; and • Include any assessments that may be negotiated as part of the performance framework and contract.

H.(2) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** description of the how assessment data will be analyzed and what corrective actions will be taken if the proposed school falls short of achieving student academic achievement, or growth expectations, or goals at the individual (remediation/at-risk student) **and** school-wide levels. Provide a complete explanation of what would trigger such corrective actions, who would be responsible for implementing them, and how the proposed school will assess effectiveness.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Data Analysis

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will be based heavily on the collection of, analysis of, and response to student and school data. This data collection will happen at several levels: ongoing performance monitoring in classrooms, proficiency data from every term, seminar effectiveness evaluated each term and annually, and annual state assessment data. The data will be broken down by subgroups and cohorts to ensure that there is a comprehensive view of trends and areas of need and achievement.

Student achievement data will be collected throughout each term on a continual basis in each seminar, providing frequent reports to students, parents, and administration on each student's progress in each standard. The generation of this data will lie with each teacher as they evaluate their students' learning and report it through the student information system, through Google Classroom, and through the progress monitoring systems including the At-Risk Report. Teachers will use this data within their seminars to adjust instruction and materials to meet each student's individual needs along with providing students with feedback and remediation that facilitates their learning. The teachers will be in direct communication with parents, keeping families in the loop regarding student progress or lack thereof.

At the end of each 22-day term in grades 8-12 or the end of each 44-day quarter for grades 6-7, achievement will be evaluated through the students' scores on the exit exams. Since exit exams are standards-based and contain common questions across all flavors of any particular seminar, the student performance results allow for data analysis related to specific standards, questions, and flavors. This data will initially be collected by teachers as they administer and grade the exit exams. As schoolwide data comes in, the data analysts will evaluate the data and provide reports to the administration that outline areas of strength and weakness. These reports also contain the list of students who failed a seminar and require a structured flex period during the upcoming term, students who failed multiple seminars, overall exit exam data (trends, averages, and success rates, etc.), and progress towards goals reports for students with special needs. At the end of each school year, these reports will be viewed by each department, with the help of the data analyst and administration, in order to review exit exam questions for quality control (too easy or hard, mistakes, confusing, two correct answers, etc.) so that exit exams are improved across the board to better indicate student performance and proficiency on state standards.

In addition to student data that is analyzed to assess student progress, the data analysts will also provide reports that are focused on curricular and instructional improvement and reflection. This will include the analysis and reporting of student survey data at the end of each term. The survey Data are used to create reports for each teacher as well as for the Principal to consider instruction from a global perspective and this data connects to assessment results. This will include the break-down of flavors that showed uncharacteristic success or struggles in relation to other flavors of the same seminar and student feedback on the efficacy and quality of the seminars from that term. These reports will allow the Principal to lead the staff in reflective discussion about what is working and what is not in each of their seminars. These surveys will then be compiled at the end of each school year so that teachers can make annual adjustments to their curricula based on student data and engagement.

This in-depth data analysis each month will allow administration and staff to intervene with students who are showing a lack of progress, to adjust seminars or exit exams that are ineffective or

otherwise not successful, and to collaborate and share best practices that have resulted in student success. The collaboration and content-specific data analysis will ensure that the focus of all instruction is student-centered and data-driven across the entire curriculum and teaching staff.

The last area of data analysis that is vital for determining whether there is significant student achievement is student performance on the annual state testing. For assessment in science, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will administer the New Mexico Assessment of Science Readiness (NMASR) each spring to students in grades 8 and 11. This data will be used to analyze the quality of the science instruction as well to track trends across multiple years. For English language arts, students in grades 6-11 will participate in the state-adopted standards-based assessment for ELA. The data from this assessment will be used to measure student growth from year to year, to track trends for particular grade levels, cohorts, or subgroups, and to identify schoolwide areas of strength and weakness in ELA performance and achievement. Similarly, the students in grades 6-11 will take the state-adopted mathematics assessment each spring as well. This data, analyzed in the same way as the ELA data, will be used to measure and improve math instruction at all grade levels.

The administration, teachers, Governing Council, and data analysts will use the assessment data to discuss next steps and interventions that are necessary for better student achievement. The entire school staff will then decide on implementation timelines and tasks to ensure that the student achievement gaps or shortcomings will be addressed going into the next academic school year. Since the seminars at Explore Academy - Las Cruces are completely standards-based and credit is earned through demonstration of proficiency on a standards-based exam for each seminar, the data from the school's assessments will be compared to and partnered with, the state assessment data annually, thus the two assessments can be used in tandem to drive academic improvement initiatives.

In order to report school data and progress to the school community, the school will publish a newsletter that outlines school activities, lunch menu, current flavors being taught, achievement data, upcoming test administrations, etc. This newsletter will be delivered via email to all members of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces distribution list as well as kept in pdf format for printing or viewing by the general public. The EA-LCS website will also be used for posting of special announcements related not only to events and school business, but also to student highlights, academic successes, and achievement data. Social media platforms are also vehicles through which achievement data and school progress will be shared with the community.

Corrective Action

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 (and midterm scores for grades 6 and 7) are compiled at the end of each term, the data analyst, in conjunction with the principal, will perform data analysis to determine the need for corrective action. There will be three components in the Explore Academy - Las Cruces corrective action plan: remediation, credit recovery, and seminar evaluation.

Remediation

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will promote the theory 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 EA-LCS philosophy.

The school's schedule structure (which includes two free periods out of seven daily for all students) will allow 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/frontloading, enrichment, study sessions, make-up work, extended

teaching time, extended work time (projects, labs), and parents-teacher conferences. 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 as well as through assignment to structured flex periods that serve as study hall periods. Assignments and objectives during these flex periods will be specific, with the teacher and administration utilizing constant communication with the flex tutoring staff to inform all parties as to the precise area(s) in which the student shall receive additional assistance.

If more structure is required to assist a student who is not making adequate progress based on assessment results and/or class performance, the student will be assigned to a structured flex period. There are three triggers that will cause a student to be placed with a teacher into a structured flex period: failing one or more seminars the previous term, appearing on the At-Risk list for one or more seminars any given week, or self-selection to receive more focused attention and assistance. Students will be assigned on a weekly or monthly basis, depending on the level of need, in order to receive tutoring, progress monitoring, mentoring, and focused study time. This intervention will allow immediate and focused attention for students who are at risk for a variety of reasons including absences, lack of academic progress, low assessment data, etc. The At-Risk list and structured flex periods are two corrective actions that will be available to all students and are adaptive on a constant basis to meet the individual needs of the student body at any given time throughout the school year.

For those students overseen by a case manager, either those under a 504/IEP or those identified as ESL/ELL, tutoring or structured flex periods may be assigned on an individual basis based on the recommendation of the case manager. In the Explore Academy - Las Cruces system, one with greater focus on student comprehension, these corrective measures will 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.

Credit Recovery

Based on the data analysis that will be performed at the conclusion of each academic term, those students who fail a seminar will be identified by the administration. This trigger indicates that the student needs more support and monitoring in order to prevent further academic struggles. Within the first week at the beginning of the new academic term, counselors or administrators will meet with each student in his or her academic flex time to reflect on the previous term and determine a plan in rectifying the issue(s) at hand and resolving the issue of lost credit. This process is in addition to assigning the student to a structured flex period to assist them with the next term's coursework.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces' schedule will provide a convenient path toward credit recovery for high school credits, having minimal negative impact on the student. The EA-LCS graduation requirements build in twenty-eight credits which can be used for credit recovery. The proposed graduation requirements mandate 178 total high school seminar credits out of a possible 200 seminars (seminars New Mexico Public Education Commission adopted April 12, 2019.

taken over 5 years, grades 8-12). This is explained in more detail in section C.I.E - Graduation Requirements. This difference of twenty-eight (28) seminars will allow students a buffer in which credit recovery can easily occur without alteration of their five-year high school academic plan. 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 assist in the student in registering for a future version of the seminar in question.

A second option available to students will be to register for a sixth seminar in a future academic term, thereby making up for lost credit. The trigger for this option will be when a student has failed seminars and there are not enough credits remaining in the buffer to allow the student to remain on track for graduation. In this instance, the student will be able take a 6th seminar during a given term. This allowance will be 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 these meetings, the Explore Academy - Las Cruces staff member will provide a brief report certifying that plans for corrective action have been implemented for each student. This will allow for consistency and transparency for each student so that parents, students, and EA-LCS staff can work together as a team to improve student academic outcomes.

Seminar Evaluation

At the conclusion of each term and at the end of each year, each seminar flavor will be analyzed for instructional patterns that raise concern, specifically low exit exam scores within a seminar flavor or across a seminar itself. The seminar evaluation will result in a trigger if there is an abnormally low pass rate. Such an instance will dictate a required corrective action for the teacher or content in question.

Low exit exam scores or high failure rate within a given seminar flavor would be indicative of an ineffective flavor, 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 flavors of a given seminar would indicate an issue with the overall instruction of the seminar, perhaps including the exit exam itself, as a common component is shared by all flavors of a given seminar. If such patterns come to exist, the administration, data analysts, and instructional coach 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 flavors for the seminar(s) in question. This process may include both student and parent participation.

It is expected that some flavors will naturally be more popular and more successful than others, and the continuous evaluation of the flavor offerings will be an ongoing process in the school's evolution and will be a significant component in the work of the school's administrative and instructional staff. This element of the Explore Learning 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 flavors that meet students' satisfaction levels and promote student success. 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 - Las

Cruces philosophy, allowing the curriculum to truly evolve and continually keep up with its changing student population.

Preventive Measures

Explore Academy - Las Cruces' short-course (44-day for grades 6-7 and 22-day for grades 8-12) 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 will allow for more efficient corrective action against student failure, since the areas of student failure can be more specifically determined and thus more accurately remedied. This, of course, doesn't include the feedback provided on a weekly basis prior to the conclusion of each term.

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. The academic flex period additionally aids in the prevention of student failure as it provides a time specifically devoted to remediation.

Effectiveness

To monitor the success of the programs described, the administration, Governing Council, and data analysts will work with school counselors to monitor students currently in some phase of remediation. It is one of the goals of Explore Academy - Las Cruces to ensure that all students make continuous academic progress in all content areas, thus the assessment, monitoring, and remediation efforts described above will continuously work toward that end. EA-LCS' assessment and accountability 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 reanalyze student 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 seminar effectiveness component described above represents a critical component in the Explore Academy - Las Cruces curriculum for it serves to continuously drive instructional innovation based on student feedback. To this end, the goal of the school will be to see both an increase in overall student satisfaction and instructional effectiveness with the learning options available each academic year. Both of these goals, also mentioned in this application in section C.I.B - Goals, serve to measure student satisfaction as well as student success because both are essential parts of the EA-LCS model. As corrective measures are employed, as needed for individual seminars, the success of such mechanisms will be based on student satisfaction levels and instructional effectiveness for that seminar in subsequent years.

Further Corrective Action

In the event that Explore Academy - Las Cruces requires further corrective action, all matters of instruction are open for reanalysis, including, but not limited to (a) instructional methodologies within all of the school's seminars, (b) exit exams and the required skills and content included therein, (c) the daily schedule, including daily and annual instructional hours, (d) flex periods, their utilization, and effectiveness in tutoring and overall remediation and (e) the instructional staff (teachers) including but not limited to teaching assignments, special education and ELL case management.

Through the proposed process outlined above, which includes data analysis, remediation, credit recovery and seminar evaluation, annual ratings; letter grades; ratings based on standards-based assessments; right to school choice; distance learning; responsibility for cost; use of funds; additional remedy, remediation programs, academic improvement programs and promotion policies shall be aligned with school-district-determined assessment results and Explore Academy - Las Cruces will meet the requirements of NMSA 1978 § 22-2C-6(A) and (B) and 22-2E-4(E). All data analysis that shows areas of concern will result in action steps and plans for improvement and correction in the short- and long-term. EA-LCS is dedicated to growth and improvement in its students as well as its staff, teachers, and school overall.

Assessment Data Timeline

Action Item	Date	Deliverable	Responsible Group
At-Risk list	weekly	At-Risk report to assign students to support services	admin, flex coordinator
Exit exam pass rates	monthly (each term)	report of full student body performance on exit exams	admin, data analysts
Student survey data	monthly	report of data by teacher, department, and schoolwide	admin, data analysts
State assessment data	annually	subgroup breakdown of achievement on all state tests (ELA, math, science, social studies, ACCESS)	admin, data analysts, school test coordinator, counselors
Subgroup assessment data	monthly, annually	specific report for at-risk subgroup performance starting with: SWD ED ELL Hispanic	admin, sped director, ELL coordinator/ teacher, data analysts, school test coordinator
college readiness assessment data	at least annually	breakdown of college readiness exam data such as SAT, ACT, PSAT, Accuplacer, ASVAB, and other tests taken by EA-LCS students	admin, counselor, flex coordinator, school test coordinator, data analysts

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the processes the school will use, including specific action steps, triggers that would prompt action steps, responsible parties, timelines, and associated costs, to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ monitor academic performance and ○ take appropriate corrective action if the school is not on track to or does not meet academic performance expectations; • Address specific responsibilities related to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ meeting student academic achievement or growth expectations <u>at the school-wide level</u> and ○ meeting student academic achievement goals <u>at the individual student level</u> (remediation/at-risk student); • Describe how the school will regularly evaluate the effectiveness of its academic program generally and the effectiveness of specific corrective actions or interventions; and • Describe how the proposed school's processes meet the requirements of NMSA 1978 § 22-2C-6(A) and (B) and 22-2E-4(E).
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

H. (3) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** plan that explains how student assessment and progress will be appropriately communicated to students, parents, the proposed school's Governing Body, the proposed school's Authorizer, and the broader community. Please consider your selected community, their accessibility and communication options when answering this question.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) believes in involvement and transparency in all its practices. Assessment and progress data will be shared with stakeholders consistently through regular communication and announcements. The type of data and reporting that is shared varies between stakeholders, as outlined below.

Students

Students at Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be included in the educational process as active participants at all levels. They will be afforded academic choice across the curriculum; they will also be provided a very hands-on role in their assessment and progress data and response to the data. Each student will be equipped with a school Google account that will allow them access to Google Classroom, the platform used in all classes for materials, guidance, feedback, calendars, etc., as well as to their Google Drive which houses all school material for them on a secure server that is accessible to them through their Chromebook or smart phone at anytime, anywhere. The Google for Education account will allow the administration and teachers to send documents to the student to keep them informed regarding their academic progress such as unofficial transcripts, credit analyses (sent out monthly), graded assignments, test scores, score reports, At-Risk reports, teacher emails, etc. This level of communication will allow students to ask questions at any time through email or on the Classroom page, creating a constant open dialogue for their educational progress and assessment results.

Additionally, all students will have their own account to access the student information system, PowerSchool, portal to view their grades, both for the current term as well as all previous terms. This will allow students to see real time grades as they are updated by teachers, at minimum once a week in each seminar. In a model where demonstrated proficiency on each standard through the exit exam is the only criteria for passing or failing a seminar, students will be encouraged to track their standard grades regularly. Using the student information system in conjunction with the Google Apps will provide students with ample opportunity to receive information from Explore Academy - Las Cruces relating to their academic performance and assessments, as well as any corrective measures that they may require such as structured flex period or credit recovery.

Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians will be encouraged to be active partners in each student's education at Explore Academy - Las Cruces. EA-LCS believes that families should receive frequent and reliable student data in order to maintain an active role in the education of their child. To facilitate this, the administration will send progress reports home to parents weekly. The At-Risk report will also be generated weekly and sends a report home automatically to any student who is identified as At-Risk by one or more teachers for that week. This report will include the class as well as the reasons for the classification so that parents are aware of their child's progress and trouble areas. Parents will also be granted parental access to their child's Google Classroom account so they will be able to view each seminar, all assignments, all feedback, and all grades on the Classroom page. This level of communication will allow parents to see assessments and progress in real time through the Google system or the student information system.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will provide a weekly newsletter to its parent and community lists in order to update all stakeholders on progress, assessments, events, and student affairs. This newsletter, along

with many other announcements and communications, will be distributed to parent emails and will be available on site. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will utilize social media to remind families about upcoming test dates (state tests, exit exams, etc.) as well as other school matters such as due dates, transportation affairs, apparel order updates, etc. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Remind will keep many students and families in constant contact with the school and serve as quick and efficient methods of information dissemination.

Additionally, the student information system, social media, and Google for Education Apps are all optimized for smartphone access. For many parents in Las Cruces, access to their smartphone is a part of everyday life, so Explore Academy - Las Cruces will prioritize the use of school technology that is accessible and user friendly on cell phones and not only on computers.

Staff

Explore Academy - Las Cruces teachers will embrace a system of open communication and authentic data-driven instructional practices. Exit exam results, survey results, standardized test results, and other assessment and performance data will be distributed to staff regularly through staff email. This will allow staff to preview assessment data, just like students complete frontloading, prior to attending any meetings or conferences concerning the data and its implications. Administration will share performance data with the staff at all levels and it is expected that staff will use this data to drive their instruction from that point forward. Data that will be shared includes: exit exam pass rates (for that individual teacher, department average, school average), standardized test history for all students enrolled (compiled from STARS and cumulative files by administration by August 31 annually), PSAT and other college entrance assessment scores, and Accuplacer scores (used for all students to enroll for their required CNM or UNM course).

This data will be housed on and disseminated from a secure staff Drive that allows all staff access from their computer or other device through their school user credentials. Staff will have two periods per day for planning and grading, so it will be required that they use assessment data to inform their planning and instruction. Specific ways to accomplish this will be discussed in professional development, staff meetings, content meetings, and administrative meetings so that staff are supported and informed throughout the data-driven process.

Governing Council

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will update its Governing Council on all assessment and performance data each month. This will include reports containing the exit exam pass rate as well as the exit exam breakdown by subgroups as needed, the assessment data for state assessments as it is released along with longitudinal data to show school trends as that comes available, and progress data such as attendance, other assessment scores, and student survey results. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will also report its annual assessment compliance percentage to demonstrate the percentage of students who were adequately assessed on state-mandated assessments when that Data are released by PED.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will also promote an active governing body, so reporting to the Governing Council will expand and adjust to meet the needs of the group. Thus, the members will be encouraged to request additional information or analysis at any time and Explore Academy - Las Cruces will provide this information at the next Council meeting.

Public Education Department - PED

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be dedicated to the maintenance of its relationship with the Public Education Department (PED) as well as the Public Education Commission (PEC). In order to promote this partnership, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will report accurate and timely assessment and performance data, including local and state assessment scores, attendance, survey results, and other achievement data.

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EA-LCS will maintain accurate records and files and will make those available to the PEC and PED at any time.

Community

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will develop a model that involves students, families, and the communities not only in daily school routines, but much deeper into the curriculum itself as it is designed specifically for the students, teachers, and community of Las Cruces. The founding team is excited for the school to open and will be just as excited to share the school's success and progress with the broader community throughout the year. As mentioned above, transparency is something that Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be proud to promote, so allowable assessment and achievement data will be made available to the community through the website, social media, and postings at the schools. EA-LCS plans to be a community presence at events and gatherings so that the students and families can showcase the unique school and its benefit to the community. This will often include announcements about school performance and student achievement. The school will also create an annual report that will be shared with the community to provide a snapshot of the school's performance throughout the school year and inform the community about the academic performance of all Explore Academy - Las Cruces students and subgroups.

Communication Plan for Assessment and Achievement Data

The data collected throughout the school year will be shared with parents, students, teachers, and the Governing Council in order to facilitate student growth and school accountability. The methods through which information is shared is multi-modal and highly accessible, allowing parents and students to access information in person, through email, through phone calls, through texts, and through websites and portals. This information is also accessible on mobile devices and tablets, allowing for greater accessibility. The comprehensive nature of the data dissemination allows for effective sharing of assessment and achievement data to the stakeholders to which it pertains.

Assessment	Communication Plan
ELA/math standards- based assessment (formerly PARCC)	Individual Student Report (ISR) to student, parent, and student cumulative file Score data to teachers and Governing Council
NMASR (formerly SBA Science)	Individual Student Report (ISR) to student, parent, and student cumulative file Score data to teachers and Governing Council
EoC - Social Studies	Score to student, parent, cumulative file
EoC - senior retakes	Score to student, parent, cumulative file
ELA/math senior retakes	Score to student, parent, cumulative file
Science senior retakes	Score to student, parent, cumulative file
Exit Exams	Score disseminated through student information system monthly to parents and student

	School-wide performance submitted to Governing Council monthly Annual school performance reported to PEC/PED/CSD
Formative Assessments	Performance levels disseminated continually to parents and student through Google Classroom, student information system, At-Risk list, and in person
Frontloading	Current performance levels discussed with students daily and parents weekly through Google Classroom, At-Risk list, and in person
PSAT	Score to student, parent, cumulative file, counselor for college planning and further test options

Total Points Available	Expectations
6	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify how student achievement and progress will be communicated to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students ○ Parents ○ The governing body ○ The authorizer ○ The broader community; • Identify the communication plan for each of the specific sources of student achievement data identified in H.(1) and any other relevant sources of student achievement data; • Provide information that demonstrates the plan is effective in reaching the targeted population and the specific community in which the school plans to locate; and • For elementary level students, ensure to address how the school will meet the requirements of NMSA 1978 § 22-2C-6 (E)-(I).
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II. Organizational Framework

A. Governing Body Creation/Capacity.

A.(1) Summarize and incorporate **all** key components of your governance structure, **specifically** outlining the roles and responsibilities of the Governing Body members (number of members, length of terms, offices to be created, committees, grounds for removal from office, and relationship with the proposed school’s administration). Provide comprehensive “bylaws”, attach bylaws as **Appendix A.**

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Introduction

Explore Academy - Las Cruces 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 Governing Council meetings will be published on the school’s website.

Academic data will be published to the school website semi-annually. Such information will permit parents, 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 Governing Council by the school’s 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 Governing 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 Governing Council members who have financial experience, will, alongside the school’s business manager, provide the Governing 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 operate with complete transparency. The school’s Leadership Council, consisting of department heads and administration, will meet at least twice per month after school and 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 within five business days after the date of the request.

In Governing Council and Leadership Council sessions, minutes will be taken by the respective Secretaries, and both sets will be posted to the school’s website.

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces’ daily operations will 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.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be an independent charter school, managed and overseen by its Governing Council.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council:

The authority of the Explore Academy Governing Council is derived from the school’s charter, the laws governing public schools, and the New Mexico Public Education Department 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 Governing Council is responsible for the fair and uniform application of all federal, state, and local laws as well as rules, regulations, and policies of Explore Academy - Las Cruces in the operation of the school in accordance with its charter.

The Governing Council serves to propose, recommend, review, and approve policy in conformance with the philosophy of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces' charter. It will set annual objectives that continually promote increasing academic excellence within the Explore Academy system. All business undertaken by the Governing Council will be held in public through an open access policy to local city and county community members and stakeholders.

At the time of submission of this application, the Explore Academy - Las Cruces founding team is in the process of building a local school Governing Council. As the founding team continues to build connections in the community (Section IV – Evidence of Support), it will continuously seek Governing Council members for the local Council, focusing on the following characteristics/experience in board members: legal background, finance background, strong community connections, parents of future Explore students, and former or current educators. Positions on the local Governing Council are open to members from a variety of backgrounds, and it is the intent of the founding team to form a council that is well-rounded in experience, knowledgeable of academic and business operations, and enthusiastic about Explore Academy - Las Cruces and its success and community impact.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces' founding Governing Council will be positioned with individuals committed to the improvement, expansion and delivery of the Explore Learning Model to the families and students of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County; by extension the Council members will be best characterized as possessing strong professional skill sets in education commitment, business acumen, community activism, and responsibility to the families and students in the care of Explore Academy - Las Cruces. Explore Academy is as committed to the Governing Council as they are to the community at-large.

In its effort to craft a community-driven, diverse Governing Council, Explore Academy - Las Cruces initiated early processes for meeting with community leaders, families, students, and stakeholders (Section IV – Evidence of Support) with the purpose of identifying and recruiting prospective Council candidates and members; this process has been ongoing since Fall/Winter 2018 and extended to the Spring 2019. These contacts have been in-person and virtual, electronic communications.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces shares the school's mission, philosophy and learning model as an opening to a dialogue about Explore Academy, the Las Cruces and Doña Ana County needs and their own desires, objectives for education in the area. We believe that engagement is essential to building a relationship first before recruitment and appointment to the Governing Council. That engagement permits Explore Academy to assess qualifications including:

- Does the candidate have a skill set that would add value and contribute to the Governing Council?
- Does the candidate have the activism and commitment to provide the time needed to be an **active** Governing Council member?
- Is the candidate enthusiastic on all aspects of being a member of the Governing Council?

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will continue to meet and recruit community leaders and stakeholders to select the most qualified and committed candidates for the Governing Council.

Responsibilities of the Explore Academy Governing Council

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will be the authority responsible for the ultimate success of the school, in alignment with the Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission and will hold school management accountable to the goals outlined in our charter application. The Governing Council is New Mexico Public Education Commission adopted April 12, 2019.

responsible for all matters related to governance and oversight of the school, as well as oversight of the Head Administrator. Upon authorization from the Public Education Commission, the first action items for Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will be electing officers, adopting the Bylaws and Conflict of Interest policy found in Appendix A, and complying with all sections of the New Mexico Open Meetings Act (NMSA 10-15-1). As recipient of the charter, Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will be responsible for the organizational, academic, and financial health of the school, and will oversee school management in a legally and ethically responsible way. The primary responsibilities of the Council include the following:

- **Alignment to the Mission.** The Governing Council will ensure that all long-term plans and decisions align with the school's mission, as well as to the school's vision and educational philosophy. The mission will be the guiding force in the evaluation of school goals and progress.
- **Financial Oversight.** To ensure the short- and long-term fiscal health of the school, the Governing Council will conduct monthly reviews of the management of the funds and the overall financial standing of the school and will approve the annual budget yearly.
- **Academic Oversight.** Review academic performance of students and student subgroups on a monthly, quarterly, and annual basis, ensuring that Explore Academy - Las Cruces is on the path towards fulfilling the mission of the school.
- **Legal Compliance.** To ensure that Explore Academy - Las Cruces follows all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, the Governing Council will regularly and consistently review the school's compliance to all requirements.
- **Evaluation of School's Principal.** The Governing Council will establish the job description for, select the best candidate for, and set compensation for, hire, support, and annually evaluate the Head Administrator, to whom it will delegate management for the daily operations of the school.
- **Public Accountability.** Using Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission as guide, the Governing Council will engage with community stakeholders, including promoting and addressing any concerns about the school as they may arise, and will publish all academic results as aligned to our goals.
- **Strategic Planning.** The Governing Council will be responsible for developing long-term strategic goals related to longer term financial planning, acquisition of a permanent facility, and other goal-setting endeavors that would not be accomplished in a single year.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces' Governing Council Founding Membership

The Founding Governing Council will be responsible and have the authority for management and governance of Explore Academy - Las Cruces. The anticipated recruitment will be for a minimum of 5 Council seats with the potential to recruit and seat an additional 4 members. The Governing Council will be responsible for managing, abiding by and protection of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces charter; they will be responsible for accountability of the school's founders to the mission, financial sustainability, fiduciary responsibilities, and that they are following the provisions as stated in the charter. The council will be seated with an odd number of members to avoid deadlock voting. Terms of service on the Governing Council will be set at 2-year terms from the date of appointment; this term may be extended by the Governing Council in the event a successor is not identified (Explore Academy Bylaws in Appendix A).

Officer Structure

The structure of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces officers within the Governing Council will consist of a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Secretary. Officers will be appointed by the Governing Council. The process for the elected positions is: The founding Governing Council will present a listing of the candidate officers, based on current member of the Council, to the entire Governing Council. Candidates will be

voted on by all members. These annual appointments will be effective from 1 July through 30 June of the following year. Officer positions on the Governing Council subject to election will include Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Secretary at the Governing Council's annual meeting. The officers will remain in office until his/her successor has been elected or until his/her prior death, resignation or removal ([Appendix A](#)).

Chair of the Governing Council

The Chair of the Governing Council will provide leadership and direction on carrying out the functions as the Governing Council of Explore Academy - Las Cruces with the members of the board.

The Chair is responsible for ensuring that the Governing Council has approved policies for the effective and compliant government of the organization and performance of the Council. The Chair must oversee the ongoing recruitment, development and participation of members of the Governing Council. The incumbent coordinates annual performance review of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Head Administrator and leadership; the Chair will be responsible for establishing a collegial relationship the charter school's Head Administrator and leadership team. The Chair will preside over the meetings of the Governing Council and will have the authority and responsibility/duties as assigned by the Board Governing Council.

Vice Chair of the Governing Council

The Vice Chair of the Board will be responsible for performing the duties of the Chair if he/she is absent or in the event of his/her death. The Vice Chair is responsible for assisting the Chair in creating agendas and setting priorities of upcoming Board and Committee Meetings. The Vice Chair is also responsible for organizing other related functions of the Board as well as performing other duties as assigned by the Board of Directors.

Secretary of the Governing Council

The Secretary of the Governing Council will manage the Council's communication, scheduling, materials, minutes, and record maintenance. The Secretary will serve as the nexus of information between the Council and the school's Principal and leadership. The Secretary will give notice of meetings and ensure that agendas, materials and meetings are distributed in a timely fashion. The Secretary will keep Governing Council meeting minutes. Accurate records of meeting discussions and agenda items and hold confidential to any special information discussed or presented at a meeting and archived for the Governing Council record. The Secretary will be responsible for all organizational records of Explore Academy - Las Cruces and be familiar with the organization of these records in the event of record request and access. The Secretary will keep a record of names, addresses, phone numbers, and email information for each Governing Council member for communication purposes. The Secretary will perform other duties as assigned by the Governing Council.

Governing Council Committee Structure

The committee structure for Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will consist of legally required committees and school-specific committees: The portfolio of committees includes, at minimum, the Finance Committee and the Audit Committee.

The Finance Committee

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will form a standing Finance Committee to be composed of Council members with relevant financial management and charter school finance experience and expertise. This committee will meet monthly to review the finances of the school as evidenced by its financial statements and other financial analysis produced by the school's business manager.

Note: Based on the size of the Governing Council, the Council members may elect for the entire Governing Council assembly to meet as a whole to represent the Finance Committee. In this sense, the Finance Committee would exist as a “committee of the whole”.

As necessary, this Finance Committee will request any supplemental information, either or both from the school’s business manager or school administration to otherwise facilitate its analysis and decision-making. The Finance Committee will also be responsible for assessing the continued adequacy and appropriateness of its standing financial policies and procedures, making financial recommendations to the Council, and developing and recommending the annual budget for approval each year.

The Governing Council will make all formal decisions, including but not limited to formal annual budget adoption and contract approvals. The Finance Committee will ensure that EA-LCS is meeting compliance with financial requirements associated with funding sources through its work with the school’s business manager and school administration. Lastly, the Finance Committee will ensure that the Governing Council takes action that is free from conflict of interest or that said conflicts are adequately and appropriately disclosed. Per NMSA 22-8-12.3, the Finance Committee is a standing committee required by the State of New Mexico.

The Audit Committee

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will annually form an Audit Committee with the expressed purpose of facilitating and overseeing the audit process. The Audit Committee will be comprised of a subset of Council members (at least two (2), with relevant audit expertise and experience, with a majority of the Audit Committee members not otherwise on the standing Finance Committee to avoid any conflicts of interest. Per NMSA 22-8-12.3, the Audit Committee is a standing committee required by the State of New Mexico and will include two Governing Council members, the Head Administrator, a business office representative, a parent of a currently enrolled student, and a community member (preferably with accounting or financial experience). To the extent necessary, the Audit Committee will look outside of its Council to utilize volunteers and advisors to provide requisite expertise and need in the absence of Council members with the required expertise.

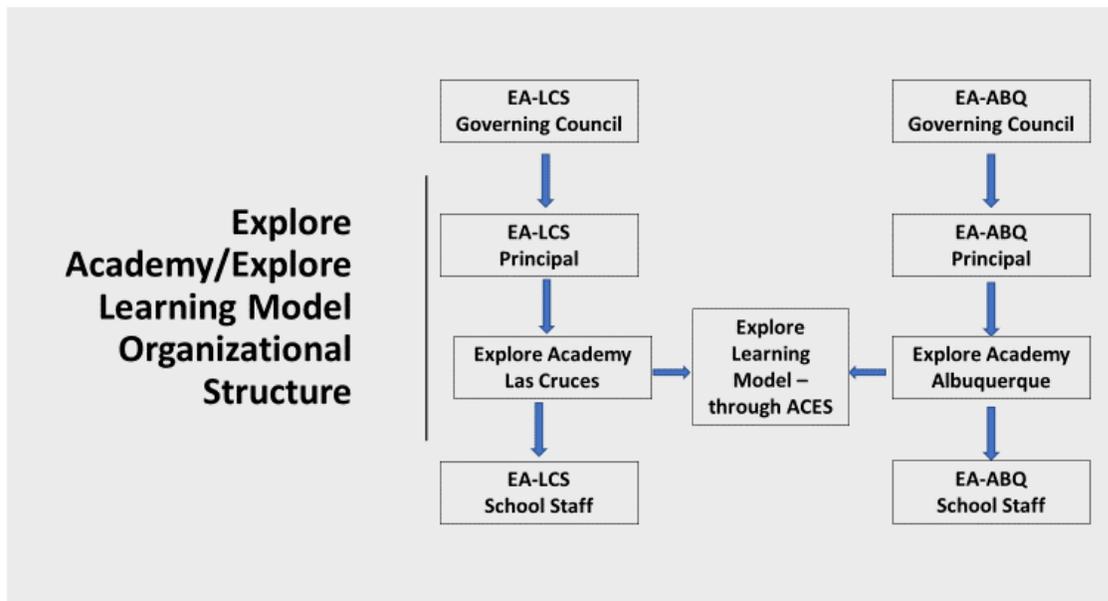
The projected budget for EA-LCS allocates \$13,000 to contract with the state-selected audit firm, beginning in its second year of operation.

The committees, whether the standing Finance Committee or the Audit Committee, will interact with school’s administration in a manner that preserves and is deferential to the broader Governing Council prerogative. Specifically, the said committees will work closely and collaboratively with school’s administration to meet their responsibilities, but these committees will not unilaterally take action or otherwise engage in decision-making that is typically reserved for the Governing Council. The committees will look to facilitate and enhance decision making by sharing of their expertise and providing oversight over their respective subject matter competencies for the Governing Council to then leverage. Ultimately, the principal/head administrator will report to the Governing Council, not individual committees, but the committees may otherwise be allowed to request information from the principal otherwise relevant to carrying out its respective areas of oversight.

Explore Academy Learning Model

The Explore Learning Model is a non-management support service, designed to help implement and support the Explore curriculum. As an organization, its philosophy is to maintain a balance between academic and operational fidelity, and the freedom and independence of each independent academic institution (governed by the Governing Council of Explore Academy - Las Cruces).

The Explore Learning Model requires fidelity to the Explore Learning academic framework, however within that framework it encourages the creative development of teacher-driven instruction (its flavors) for each of its seminars, thus encouraging EA-LCS to become a unique, customized school serving Las Cruces. In the area of academic accountability, specific portions of each seminar's exit exam will be common across seminars of all Explore Academy campuses, while a portion of each exit exam will remain teacher-designed per the creative uniqueness of the seminar's flavor at the Las Cruces campus. In this sense, there is a balance between teacher and school autonomy, and the adherence to a core academic foundation and model.



In the area of operational oversight, the Explore Learning Model promotes the individuality of each of its campuses, allowing each site to develop its own cultural and community-lead personality in a fashion derived organically from its school leader, staff, students, parents, and other community members. While there are fundamental principles that make a school “Explore Academy”, the Model recognizes the importance of ownership and investment by each school’s local stakeholders as a key to sustained success.

The Explore Learning Model’s primary objective is implementation and support new schools at their inception and development to build a foundation, and support each school reach its goal of long-term academic and community success. From this perspective, it values the independence of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Principal and Governing Council in establishing and maintaining a culture conducive to long-term success. To this end, the Explore Learning Model Academic Team will provide data on a continuous basis (academic, financial, etc.) to the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council and Principal to provide the most current and comprehensive data it can so that they may make informed decisions on the Explore Learning curriculum of EA-LCS. The Explore Learning Model Academic Team will be available as mentor and guide through a Governing Council-approved contract, through the Association of Charter School Education Services (ACES), in an effort to ensure that the Explore Academy - Las Cruces has all of the assets, resources, and mentorship at its disposal, thus providing Explore Academy - Las Cruces the opportunity to focus on its academic and operational goals. In this sense, the Explore Learning Model will function as a mentor and academic guide to promote and help maintain success. All

agreements for this service provision will be at the discretion of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council.

The Explore Learning Academic Team will consist of the following individuals:

- Justin Baiardo - model founder and academic program director, data analysis program manager
- Elisha Varela - academic program director, English academic program manager, ELL program manager, assessment program manager
- Kimberly Dimiceli-Blanton - instructional program director, social studies program manager
- Felicia Boatman - mathematics program manager, scheduling program manager
- Natalie Ballew - science program manager

Justin Baiardo is the developer of the Explore Learning Model and the founder of the inaugural Explore Academy campus in Albuquerque, NM. Mr. Baiardo is an educational administrator as well as a National Board-certified educator with over fifteen years of experience. His qualifications include expertise in the Explore Academy model as well as extensive experience in the launch and operations of an independent, state-authorized charter school.

Elisha Varela is a member of the founding team of the inaugural Explore Academy campus in Albuquerque, NM. Working both in the classroom as an English teacher and in various administrative positions, including curriculum and instruction, assessment, data management, and bilingual education, Ms. Varela has worked to directly oversee the operations at the existing Explore Academy (Albuquerque) campus.

Felicia Boatman, Kim Dimiceli-Blanton, and Natalie Ballew are all content-area experts and have extensive experience within the Explore Learning Model as both teachers and instructional leaders within their respective content areas. As master teachers and members of the founding team of Explore Academy (Albuquerque), they have compiled comprehensive experience in both the instructional methodology and the general administrative operations of the school using the Explore Learning Model. They have been responsible for training highly effective cohorts of new teachers who have add to Explore Academy's staff as the school has grown and will continue to serve as the leader training staff for future Explore Academy teachers.

Governing Council Member Discipline and Removal Process

Per Governing Council By-Laws (Appendix A), a Governing Council member may resign at any time by filing a written resignation with the Chair of the Council or Secretary. A resignation shall be effective on the date it is accepted by the Council.

Occasionally, a Council member may need to be removed from the Council. In some cases, a conflict of interest or unethical behavior may be grounds to remove an individual from the Council. In other cases, the behavior of a Council member may become so obstructive that the Council is prevented from functioning effectively. The best councils often have strongly felt disagreements and heated arguments. Challenging groupthink and arguing for an unpopular viewpoint are not grounds for removal of a Council member. But if a Council member consistently disrupts meetings or is otherwise destructive and demoralizing, it may be appropriate to consider removing the individual from the Council. There are several avenues available for removal of Governing Council members:

Personal intervention: One-on-one intervention by the Council Chair or other Council leadership is a less formal solution to managing problem Council members. If a Council member fails to attend several meetings in a row, or has become an impediment to the Council's work, the Chair will meet informally with the Council member in question. The conversation can occur in person or on the telephone; the Chair can specifically request a resignation.

Term limits: Per Governing Council By-Laws, Council members are term limited.

Impeachment: Per Governing Council By-Laws a Council member can be removed by vote, if necessary. Individual members of the Council serve at the pleasure of the full Council. Therefore, the Council may remove and replace any member (including the Chair), at any time, by a majority vote of all Council members, at a regular or special meeting of the Council. There is no appeal or recourse for removal of a Council member.

Total Points Available	Expectations
8	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include governing body bylaws in Appendix A; and • Summarize <u>key</u> governance components in the application response as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Membership structure (number, roles, length of terms) ○ Officer structure (roles, election process, responsibilities, length of terms) ○ Committee structure that includes both legally required committees and school-specific committees (selection process, responsibilities, membership, length of service terms) ○ Member selection, discipline, and removal processes.
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A. (2) Enumerate the qualifications desired for governing body members that will ensure the proposed school's governance is competent to operate a public school. Provide a **list** of all proposed, initial Governing Body members along with their experience, skills, and qualifications. Ensure that the **membership reflects** the diverse experiences and skills necessary to oversee all aspects of the proposed school. In your list of proposed initial governing body members, describe the expertise represented in order to demonstrate their capacity to initiate the opening of the charter school (e.g., ensure student success, develop, implement, oversee the management of public funds, and oversee the proposed school's compliance with legal obligations).

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council is in the formative stages. Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) is dedicated to providing a strong governance, oversight, and organizational structure to ensure the academic, financial, and organizational success of the school and students. When building the Governing Council, the founding team considered the Charter School Governing Council best practices outlined by the National Charter School Resource Center. The team's goal is to identify Council members that have a diversity of skills, as well as a Council with diverse personal characteristics and experiences. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be using the following criteria for potential Council members:

- Individuals with experience and skills in the areas of accounting or finance, law, education, governance, senior management, strategic planning, community engagement, fundraising, charter school management and facilities and property management.
- Individuals aligned to the mission of charter schools and the mission of Explore Academy - Las Cruces.
- Individuals with the time, enthusiasm and availability to participate in an initial Governing Council.
- Individuals who have a demonstrated record of serving successfully on nonprofit Councils.
- Individuals willing to use and share their personal network for the development of Explore Academy - Las Cruces.
- Individuals who would add to the diversity of the Council by age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, gender, skillset, nationality, etc.

Utilizing these criteria for choosing our Governing Council, we ensure that Explore Academy - Las Cruces' Governing Council is made up of people with diverse personal and professional skill sets. By representing the majority of the targeted skills areas as described above, which align to the central components of the successful operations of a charter school, the Governing Council will be able effectively oversee, monitor, and manage the aspects of school operation to ensure the successful long-term viability of the school.

In addition to examining individual skill sets, proposed initial Governing Council members will be evaluated based on how the individuals would complement one another to create a Council strong enough to ensure the success of Explore Academy - Las Cruces as an institution, and our students as individuals.

The proposed initial Governing Council takes the financial oversight of the school very seriously, and we demonstrate this by having selected individuals with business and financial experience. The noted financial expertise will guide the work of the Governing Council's Finance Committee, as well as support the full Council in understanding the finances of Explore Academy - Las Cruces and the expectations for ensuring financial viability.

One of the primary responsibilities of the Governing Council is to hire, evaluate, and oversee the Head Administrator, along with overseeing the academic and financial health of the school. Nonprofit Governing Council experience was an attribute the founding team sought when recruiting for the initial

Governing Council of Explore Academy (Albuquerque). The initial founding team sought out initial Governing Council members with skills sets and qualities that would ensure the Governing Council would have an assembly that holds high expectations and accountability for the Head Administrator, which will directly correlate to the fulfillment of our mission. Explore Academy - Las Cruces recognizes and understands the importance of a team that is strong in strategic planning experience. If authorized, the initial Governing Council and the founding team will need the skills to take the charter application plan and transition the plan into action during the Implementation Year. The depth of knowledge and specificity of this endeavor requires individuals who are strong in strategic planning. Several of the proposed initial Governing Council members were selected because of their experience and success with strategic planning and the start-up and management of their own business.

As of the date of this application, confirmed Founding Governing Council Members are:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces Founding Governing Council	
NAME	EXPERIENCE and SKILLS
DeAnna Jaramillo	Ms. Jaramillo is a licensed social worker LSW and psychotherapist from Las Cruces. She has served the Las Cruces community at La Clinica de Familia and earned her degree in social work at New Mexico State University (NMSU). She is a licensed social worker. Her passion for mental health and healthy families drives her work in Las Cruces. Skill sets: community engagement, fundraising, strategic planning, law
Clara Graham	Ms. Graham is the NMSU College of Engineering STEM Program Manager and has a valuable history in education, post-secondary studies, writing, and program management. She works with the Engineering New Mexico Resource Network as well as NMSU Engagement and Recruitment. She earned her BS and MBA degrees from NMSU. She taught science in the Las Cruces Public Schools for 3 years. Skill sets: education, community engagement
Claren Wilson	Ms. Wilson earned her bachelor's degree in animal science from New Mexico State University. She is a self-made entrepreneur in the Las Cruces area, starting her own dog training business five years ago. She has had immense success and her business and community reach has grown significantly since its opening. Skill sets: finance, strategic planning, facilities and property management, community engagement
Louis J Lafrado, PhD	Dr. Lafrado has experience as a NM charter school Governing Council member. He earned his PhD from The Ohio State University. He has been a bench research scientist and now owns a program development and grantmaking firm in New Mexico focused on nonprofit, community health, and education issues. Skill sets: charter school management, senior management, law, strategic planning, governance

Jacob Slavec	<p>Mr. Slavec is one of the owners of NAI 1st Valley, a leading commercial realty brokerage in the Las Cruces area. Mr. Slavec specializes in industrial, office, retail, property evaluation adjustments, investment sales, and NNN sales. He has worked and represented companies such as CBS and US Bank.</p> <p>Skill sets: accounting and finance, community engagement, facilities and property management, senior management</p>
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Skill Application

In ensuring student success, the Governing Council will devote significant energy to selecting and mentoring the school's head administrator, thus setting the school in the best possible position to succeed from its inception. Further, in monitoring student success on a monthly basis, the Governing Council can maintain meticulous oversight on the level of student achievement as evidenced by the data presented each month, making adjustments as necessary with the insight provided from the head administrator. Members of the Governing Council have the appropriate skill sets to manage school leadership in this regard to ensure that the academic direction of the school remains focused on continual growth.

As it pertains to the responsible management of public funds, the skill sets of several of the board members include the managing of finances for their own personal businesses and thus ensure that they have the experience to manage the use of the school's funding in a manner that is responsible and in support of the school's mission and vision. With the school's business manager providing not only monthly reports but charter school financial experience, there exists an additional layer of support that Governing Council members can refer as it pertains to the school's budget.

The Governing Council members described above hold positions and have experience in which many of them abide by local or state law in the scope of their professional lives. The Council members selected are held as ethical and law-abiding members of their communities and will utilize that same ethical guidance in their oversight of the school's operations. As needed, the Council will have the services of the school's contracted legal counsel in order to help supplement their knowledge and experience as it relates to charter school, education, and state/federal law.

As the selected Governing Council members show a commitment to the Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission and vision through the development of the plan as proposed in this application, their work will continue to support the founding team and head administrator in seeing the plan become reality following applicant approval. The experience of the Governing Council will provide the founding team and head administrator with an exceptional knowledge base from which to utilize in preparing the school for launch within the planning year and in the early stages of its operations, both of which will be key in the ensuring the long-term success of the school into the future.

In addition to the applications described above, as also described within the scope of this application, Governing Council members will receive state-required trainings in the above areas to help supplement their knowledge and experience in these key areas of charter school governance.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify all qualifications and skill sets that the governing body will require and ensure those are represented within its regular membership; • Explain why and how the identified qualifications and skills will ensure the governing body has the required capacity and enable the governing body to operate a successful, high-quality public school; • Include a list of all proposed initial governing body members, describe each proposed member’s specific qualifications and skill sets through verifiable prior experience, and ensure the represented qualifications and skill sets align with the previously identified qualifications and skill sets that the governing body will require; and • Specifically address how the governing body will have the skills to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure student success and academic achievement; ○ Oversee the stewardship and management of public funds and responsible government accounting; ○ Ensure compliance with legal obligations related to government organizations and public schools; ○ Select and oversee a qualified and highly effective school leader; and ○ Support the applicant team in moving from an application to a fully operational school.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

A.(3) Provide a **clear and appropriate process or plan** for selecting new Governing Body members that is focused on selecting **quality leaders** who have the identified skills necessary to govern the proposed school. Describe how governing body members will be recruited, evaluated, and selected as vacancies arise.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Identification and recruitment of individuals who are aligned to the mission of Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will be a continuous process. The Governing Council (GC) will use the following steps for the recruitment, evaluation, and selection of new Council members.

1: Review

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will begin by reviewing the current skill sets of the current Council, as well as areas in which the Governing Council is lacking. A list of skill sets desired will be generated. The GC will track the remaining terms for each of the current Council Members, enabling the group to anticipate the upcoming recruitment needs for the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council. The GC will ensure that the process of recruitment, evaluation, and selection of Governing Council Members aligns with the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Bylaws (Appendix A) to ensure that the process complies with state requirements for Governing Council Members.

2: Working List

Once the GC establishes the areas of need for the Governing Council, the group will then be charged with identifying community members who may be good fits as future members of the Governing Council. The Council will seek out prospective candidates through recommendations or referrals, as well as online advertisement of the open Council positions. Members of the Governing Council will utilize their personal and professional connections, as well as the school's community-based relationships for recommendations for individuals who are aligned to the EA-LCS mission and may be interested in being considered for Governing Council membership. In addition, the GC will utilize the Explore Academy - Las Cruces website, newsletter, and social media accounts to communicate to the public that the Council is always searching for high quality candidates to be considered for a seat on the Governing Council. Finally, the Council will utilize other online resources for identifying individuals interested in Council membership, including posting on the notice boards of the following organizations:

- The Center for Nonprofit Excellence
- New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools
- Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce
- United Way of Southwest New Mexico
- Thomas Branigan Memorial Library
- Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum
- New Mexico State University
- Dona Ana County Community College

By utilizing various sources for seeking out high quality candidates for future Council membership, the Governing Council will develop a substantial working list of candidates.

3: Initial Contact

After the working list of candidates is developed, the Governing Council will reach out to candidates, based on needed skill sets, inquiring about the candidate's interest in discussing potential Council membership. Included in the inquiry will be a request for the prospective Council member's resume. A meeting will be

scheduled with a prospective Council member. During this initial meeting, the GC and Principal will determine if the candidate is a mission-fit with Explore Academy - Las Cruces based on their responses to information presented about the school's mission and academic programming. Further, the Governing Council will give a detailed overview of the EA-LCS Governing Council structure and expectations. After the meeting, if a candidate is interested in continuing the application process, they will be invited to attend an upcoming Governing Council meeting.

4: Attend a Council Meeting

Prospective Council members who demonstrate alignment to the Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission will be invited to attend a Governing Council meeting. As part of the new business during the meeting, the Council will ask the candidate to introduce themselves, provide an overview of their work and life experiences and the Council will ask a set of prepared questions to the candidate. Governing Council Member questions may include:

- Tell us about your personal and professional experiences and how those experiences will help you to provide guidance to support Explore Academy - Las Cruces' mission to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of its students.
- What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in the Explore Academy - Las Cruces school area, Dona Ana County and the surrounding areas?
- What experience do you have with complicated budgets? When you are given a budget for Explore Academy Las Cruces, what will be your process to determine if it is a good budget for the school?

5: Evaluation and Selection

After the prospective candidate attends a Governing Council meeting, the Governing Council will review the candidate's qualifications, skill set, and commitment to the Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission the Council. Candidates' skill sets will be formally evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Individuals with experience and skills in the areas of accounting or finance, law, education, governance, senior management, strategic planning, community engagement, fundraising, charter school management and facilities and property management.
- Individuals aligned to the mission of charter schools and the mission of Explore Academy - Las Cruces.
- Individuals with the time, enthusiasm and availability to participate in an initial Governing Council.
- Individuals who have a demonstrated record of serving successfully on nonprofit Councils.
- Individuals willing to use and share their personal network for the development of Explore Academy - Las Cruces.
- Individuals who would add to the diversity of the Council by age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, gender, skillset, nationality, etc.

Within the measured areas above, evaluators will score prospective candidates on a scale of 1 (no experience) to 5 (strong experience), after which, results will be compiled, and the Council will vote.

The candidate's references will be contacted, and background check form processed. The candidate will be contacted and notified of their election to the Council. The candidate will sign a Council Member Agreement and Conflict of Interest form before officially joining the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council. Candidates who are not selected to fill a seat on the Governing Council will be considered as candidates for future Governing Council seats, if appropriate, ensuring efficient filling of unoccupied seats on the Governing Council. The Governing Council will maintain contact with these candidates.

After authorization by the Public Education Commission, the Founding Team will transition in handing over operations to the Governing Council (who will in turn move to hire the school’s head administrator, who will come to manage operations of the school itself). The focus will be on recruiting the highest capacity, highest quality candidates to our team, adding value through their alignment to the Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission and bringing necessary skills to develop a diverse, well-rounded Governing Council. The recruitment and selection efforts will be in alignment with NMSA 22-8-12.3, ensuring that the school has at least two Council Members who are qualified to participate on the Finance Committee. Steps one and two (review and working list) will be a continual process for the Governing Council, to ensure strong candidates and the ability to replace Council seats within 45 days of an opening.

The process as outlined above, will ensure the addition of quality candidates elected to the Council, leading to the increased quality of Explore Academy - Las Cruces.

Total Points Available	Expectations
8	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a regular and on-going governing body recruitment process, including identification of action steps, timelines, and responsible parties; • Identify a formalized governing body potential member evaluation and selection process, including identification of action steps, timelines, and responsible parties; • Describe how the processes will ensure that all governing body vacancies are filled within 45 days; • Describe how the processes will ensure the regular governing body membership will have all of the required qualifications and skill sets identified in question A.(2); and • Describe how the processes will ensure that governing body members are vetted appropriately to ensure they are able to meet the obligations and fulfill the responsibilities of governing body service.
<p>INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.</p>	

B. Governing Body Training and Evaluation.

B.(1) Provide an **ongoing, clear, comprehensive, and cohesive plan** for annual Governing Body training that complies with state requirements, meets your governing body training needs, includes training on the Open Meetings Act, and is **completely supported** by the budget you propose.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Life-long learning and teacher and staff development are crucial to developing and maintaining an effective school. The Governing Council will participate in ongoing training and professional development as well. Training will include but is not limited to: Initial training for the Council, training for new Council members, and ongoing training for all members.

Initial Training for founding Governing Council

Original members of the Governing Council will become involved in the work of the school immediately. A system will be in place to allow new members to learn processes and procedures as soon as they join the Council. All new members of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council must complete 10 hours of governing council training as required by Public Statute 22-8B-5.1 and New Mexico Administrative Code 6.80.4.20. This training, provided by the Public Education Department (PED), will focus on school governance, ethics and responsibilities, charter school fiscal requirements, understanding and evaluating academic data, open government requirements, and legal and organizational performance requirements. Before the beginning of the fiscal year on July 1, 2020, the Secretary will review any updated training requirements and provide Governing Council members a calendar of training events for the summer and fall. The Secretary of the Council will track each member's participation and completion of training to ensure all members meet State Guidelines. Funding for registration and travel for required training will be included in the overall school budget on an annual basis as need is expressed by current GC members.

Once approved, the Founding Governing Council will begin the process of training through the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED). This training will be supplemented by unofficial trainings conducted by the founding team to include introductory sessions on the school philosophy and the overall academic model as well as the general procedural requirements as defined by the Open Meetings Act.

The Council will build a meeting calendar and formalize the following procedures:

- Council meeting dates and times – not to conflict with holidays.
- Meeting preparation – time needed to distribute materials to all members
- Agendas – clear agendas to include the responsible parties for action items, resources required and a timeline for completion of tasks
- Record keeping – Council Secretary will take and distribute Minutes promptly for all members to review and provide feedback. Once approved, minutes will be posted to Explore Academy - Las Cruces website
- Open meetings and voting – all meetings will be open to the public and will comply with the state laws and Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council Bylaws

Along with the new Governing Council training required by Statute and the New Mexico Administrative Code, Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will offer an orientation and additional training opportunities for incoming members. Each new Council member will be provided with the following overview and materials:

- Explore Academy - Las Cruces' mission and core values
- Bios of current Council members along with contact information

- Governing Council job descriptions and expectations
- Explore Academy - Las Cruces' Conflict of Interest policy
- A copy of the Bylaws and Charter for Explore Academy - Las Cruces
- A calendar of Council meetings, Committee meetings and Council activities for the year
- PED Calendar of Governing Council Professional Development Trainings
- General discussion of the Open Meetings Act (PED training on this topic at a later date)

Training and Evaluation of Council Members

Governing Council Members, with a year or more of service, must complete eight hours of training approved by the Public Education Department (PED) annually (NMAC 6.80.5.9). Annual training includes specific requirements: one hour on ethics, three hours on fiscal requirements, two hours on academic data, one hour on open governance, and one hour dedicated to organizational goals. These trainings may be completed with the Public Education Department or other approved agencies, including the New Mexico Coalition of Charter Schools or New Mexico School Councils Association.

New Council Members: New Governing Council Members, including our Founding Team after they transition into a Governing Council, will receive external and internal training as part of their onboarding process. Internal training is based on best practices highlighted in the text Charter School Council University and the United Way of Central New Mexico's Center for Nonprofit Excellence.

External Training: As outlined by New Mexico Administrative Code (NMAC 6.80.5.8), new Governing Council members will complete training with the Public Education Department prior to being able to be a voting member on the Governing Council. In addition, new Governing Council members will complete an additional three hours of training within the first twelve months of Council service. The last three hours can be internal training approved by the Public Education Department (see below), or training provided by any other Public Education Department-approved training. Explore Academy - Las Cruces' Governing Council will attend the first Governing Council Introduction training available after authorization. The initial training focuses on Governing Council ethics and responsibilities (2 hours), fiscal requirements for charter schools (2 hours), evaluation of academic data (1 hour), Open Meetings Act and Inspection of Public Records Act (1 hour), and legal and organizational performance (1 hour). As these trainings are offered throughout the year, new Council Members who join the Council after the beginning of the school year will be able to attend the required Public Education Department training prior to having voting rights on the Council.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces' Governing Council intends to complete the remaining three hours of required training internally, pending approval from the Public Education Department. However, in the case that a Council Member misses our internal training, or individual Council Members need additional training in a specific governance area, Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will utilize the training provided by the Public Education Department. Any additional training done by Governing Council members will be reported to the Secretary, who will keep a record of the trainings attended by our Governing Council members, including the date, times, instructors, and the course code assigned by the Public Education Department. Council Members who join the Council after the beginning of the fiscal year will attend the Public Education Department trainings to complete their remaining three hours of required training.

Internal Training: Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council intends to complete the additional three hours of required training internally, pending approval from the Public Education Department. The Department suggests that Governing Councils develop a three-hour onboarding training that includes the following topics: governance structure and requirements, other governing body status, financial status, history, contract, goals, model, staff, strength and challenges, and current academic, organizational, and financial performance. Training outside of the onboarding process can include ethics

and responsibilities, evaluating and understanding academic data, open government, or organizational performance requirements. After authorization, Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will submit an Application for Approval to Provide Governing Body Training, to get its onboard, initial Governing Council Retreat approved for our last three hours of required training.

The school's initial Governing Council will be onboarded during its inaugural Governing Council Retreat, which will occur shortly after authorization and attendance of the Public Education Department seven-hour training. After establishment of the Governing Council's leadership structure and adoption of Bylaws and Policies, the Governing Council retreat will focus on the training topics approved by the Public Education Department.

Council Members who join the Governing Council after the inaugural retreat will be onboarded individually with the Council Chair and member of the school leadership team. The Governing Council member will mentor the new member. During this individual training, the new Council Member will review and sign the Council Member Agreement (Attachment J) with a member of the Governing Council. The new member will also review the Council Handbook, which will include the following topics: member responsibilities; school mission, vision, and core beliefs; school organization; school calendar; academic performance and data; Council Bylaws; review of Council Committees; finance and audit overview; Open Meetings Act requirements; and all Council policies. A member of the Governing Council will review the handbook with the new Council Member, but the Council Member will be expected to review the document with more depth independently. The rest of the independent onboarding will reflect the internal onboarding training approved by the Public Education Department.

Experienced Council Members: Council Members who have served on the Governing Council for more than a year must complete eight hours of Public Education Department-approved training annually. This includes training provided by the Public Education Department, the New Mexico Coalition of Charter Schools, or the New Mexico School Council Association.

External Training: The Public Education Department outlines the focuses of the eight hours of annual training: one hour of Governing Council ethics and responsibility, three hours of fiscal requirements, two hours on academic data, one hour on open governance, and an hour dedicated to organizational goals. The Public Education Department training is offered locally in the greater Albuquerque area, and at no cost to the Governing Council members. Training completed by Governing Council members will be reported to the Secretary, who will keep a record of the trainings attended by our Governing Council, included the date, times, instructors, and the course code assigned by the Public Education Department.

Internal Training: In addition to the Public Education Department-required eight hours of training, Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will conduct an annual Governing Council Retreat at the end of each fiscal year. During this retreat, the Governing Council Bylaws and Policies will be reviewed. In addition, the academic, organizational, and financial priorities and goals will be reviewed and assessed.

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will complete the required training each year, and evaluate further training needs individuals, or the Council as a whole, need to be most effective. As part of the process of self-evaluation, the Council, as a whole or individual member, will identify areas of strength and areas of growth. The Governing Council will seek opportunities for further training, for the whole Council or for individuals, as needed. If the Public Education Department does not offer training on the specific topic needed, the Governing Council will seek training with the New Mexico Coalition of Charter Schools, Association of Charter School Education Services (ACES), the New Mexico School Council Association, or other sources of training suggested by the Public Education Department.

The training of Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council is based on the requirements outlined by the Public Education Department, as well as best practices for non-profit and charter school Governing Councils. The budget for Governing Council training is outlined in Appendix G, Function:2300.

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The Governing Council Secretary will maintain a training log for each of the Governing Council Members, which outlines the all completed training, identifies required and targeted training with due dates, and a system for reminding individual Council Members of upcoming training obligations.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a process for governing body member onboarding to ensure new members are properly trained and able to meet the meet the obligations and fulfill the responsibilities of governing body service, include action steps, timelines, and responsible parties; • Identify a plan for annual governing body training, including action steps, timelines, and responsible parties, include how it will be tracked and monitored. • Describe how the plan will identify governing body training needs, meet governing body training needs, and comply with state requirements, including any requirements that may change from year to year; • Identify any costs required to support the training plan or onboarding process and describe how those costs are supported in the budget; and • Ensure the onboarding process and training plan address training on the open meetings act and responsibilities.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

B. (2) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive plan** for an annual self-evaluation of the Governing Body that reflects that body's effectiveness and focuses on continuous improvement.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

The importance of a thriving, active, and functioning Governing Council is not lost on Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS). The EA-LCS Governing Council will conduct a formal annual assessment of the Council's effectiveness, as well as more informal evaluations at the end of each Governing Council meeting. The Governing Council will identify improvement areas to begin each new term, develop specific objectives, and put a review process into place to track progress for each of the improvement objectives on a quarterly basis. The self-evaluation process for the Governing Council will include a full Council evaluation, focus on individual Governing Council member's individual self-evaluation and be informed by the best practices presented in Charter School Council University, and the resources available at the Center for Nonprofit Excellence. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will consider engaging a program evaluator with experience and expertise in this field.

Following each Governing Council meeting, the Council Secretary will distribute a survey to assess the effectiveness and satisfaction associated with each of the monthly Governing Council meetings. The school will be committed to the ideal that seeking regular feedback from the team will help to identify strengths and weaknesses within the Council, prior to the annual review. Monthly feedback will ensure that Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council acknowledges and problem-solves potential concerns, and keeps the Governing Council focused on the fulfillment of our mission. The survey will include the following questions:

- On a Likert scale*, rate the effectiveness of the Governing Council meeting.
- In what areas was the Governing Council effective, and what made those effective?
- In what areas was the Governing Council ineffective, and for what reason?
- On a Likert scale, how effective was the Governing Council in its focus on the mission of the school and the achievement of the school goals (i.e. oversight).
- Do you have suggestions for improving our effectiveness and efficiency?
- Other comments or concerns?

*The Likert scale is a series of questions or items that ask your customers to select a rating on a scale that ranges from one extreme to another, such as "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Conducted monthly, the survey will serve as a continuous quality improvement instrument, through individual assessment of satisfaction and perception of how effectively and efficiently the Governing Council is operating. The school is committed to the ideal that a highly engaged and proactive Governing Council will be key to the school's organizational success, and as such it will take all opportunities to assess its satisfaction and effectiveness, and we will use any collected data/information to further develop as a Governing Council. Collated and Analyzed data will be shared with the Chair of the Governing Council and the head administrator for Explore Academy - Las Cruces. All data and evaluation materials will be shared with the entire Governing Council prior to a wider distribution.

The annual Governing Council self-evaluation will be conducted during the April Governing Council meeting of the fiscal year, prior to the July Annual Council Retreat that will start off the new fiscal year. The data collected through the self-assessment will be used to identify priorities for the following year and to create goals for the Governing Council. The Governing Council will complete the self-assessment as a cohesive unit, as well as complete a section as an individual Governing Council Member.

The self-evaluation will examine the Council from a holistic perspective, as well as explicitly evaluate subcategories of Council performance. Those categories include the following:

- Fulfillment of Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission and academic achievement. Ensuring that the school is making progress towards the fulfillment of our mission, demonstrated through academic results. Active focus on evaluation of data, mission-specific indicators, and the development of an accountability plan and oversight.
- Financial Oversight. Ensuring that a fiscally responsible budget is developed and approved, oversight of the budget, review of financial reports, preparation for the annual audit, reporting and accounting records and the management of public funds, and fund development.
- Leadership Oversight. Ensuring that a high capacity Principal is identified, hired, and monitored by the Governing Council, including developing plans for evaluation and accountability, transition plans, and personnel policies.
- Council Structure. Ensuring the Governing Council is well-developed, including the requisite number of Council Members, variety of skill sets, functionality of committees, and following the expectations and skills outlined in Section II.A.(2).
- Council Function and Legal Oversight. Ensuring that the Governing Council is following Explore Academy - Las Cruces Bylaws and are following all legal and ethical standards of a strong Council. Analysis of Council attendance, duties of Officers, obligations to the state and federal government, and integrity of the application of the Open Meetings Act. In addition, the Governing Council will examine how often parental and community grievances are presented to the Governing Council and the process by which the Council responds. Ensuring that the Council is in compliance with all statute and laws for government organizations and public schools.
- Council Position Responsibilities. Ensuring the Council members are meeting their requirements as Council members, including their required state training hours, meeting attendance, etc.

The Governing Council will rank themselves on a 1-10 Likert scale overall in each subcategory, as well as on the individual elements outlined for each subcategory. The team will review each element and subcategory, discuss the Governing Council's overall performance, and come to consensus on a ranking.

The Governing Council will also review their individual performance and growth trajectory as a Council Member. Individual members will review their attendance, contributions to the creation of Council policy, contribution on the oversight of the school, and the strategic contributions to the creation of a wider Explore Academy - Las Cruces community. The individual self-assessment will ask Council Members to identify their most meaningful contributions to the Governing Council, as well as the areas where they need support to grow. Individual Governing Council Members will be encouraged to make recommendations for maintenance of organizational strengths, as well as ideas for supporting the Council's areas of growth.

External Outreach and Feedback

As a Governing Council that oversees a public entity, EA-LCS Governing Council recognizes the importance of soliciting feedback from students, families, community members, and EA-LCS staff, to ensure that governance is reflective of the community EA-LCS serves, as well as to ensure transparency in governance. Each year, Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will seek out feedback from the community, via a community input survey. That survey will be available to families, community members, and EA-LCS staff in electronic and paper form, in both English and Spanish. The community input survey will be distributed to Explore Academy - Las Cruces community during the month of April, through the school website and social media pages, and in paper copy form at the school.

The Governance Council will review and analyze the data collected from the Council self-assessments and community input survey. During the May Governing Council meeting, the data collected from the Council self-assessments and the community input survey will be presented to the whole Council, along with any recommendations for improvements for the functionality of the Governing Council. These

recommendations and the discussions around the recommendations will inform the goal setting during the July Council Retreat. The results, recommendations, and discussion will be presented in an open meeting, and reflected in the Governing Council Meeting minutes, available for public access and review.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) Governing Council aims for staff and families to resolve conflict with Explore Academy - Las Cruces at the school level. However, in the case that a conflict cannot be resolved through the methods outlined in Section II.E.(1) and in the Governing Council Policies in Attachment G for EA-LCS staff or the process outlined in Section II.F.(2) for families and community members, then Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will act to resolve the conflict between the school and the staff or community member.

The Governing Council will first ensure that the complainant followed the method outlined in the previously mentioned sections. If the complaint is about the Principal and is unable to be resolved, then it should be presented to the Governing Council. The Governing Council will review the complaint and respond in writing within 15 days of originally receiving the complaint. The decision of the Governing Council shall be considered final.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council is a Council with a growth mindset, and the monthly council surveys, community input survey, and the more comprehensive annual self-assessment are tools that will be used to determine the focuses for professional growth and rationale for professional development priorities. In addition, the results of each of these surveys will inform the priorities for the following year, determined at the annual Governing Council Retreat. The pointed focus for development as a Governing Council will strengthen the council’s oversight capabilities and further support the fulfillment of Explore Academy - Las Cruces mission.

Timeline



Total Points Available	Expectations
8	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a plan for annual governing body self-evaluation, include action steps, timelines, responsible parties, and identified criteria or standards; • include action steps to obtain feedback from, at a minimum, parents and families and all willing staff; • The plan must include action steps to evaluate the effectiveness of the governing body in the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ maintaining regular membership that has all of the required qualifications and skill sets identified in question A.(2) ○ <u>meeting all training requirements</u> ○ ensuring student success and academic achievement ○ ensuring fulfillment to the school’s mission ○ overseeing the stewardship and management of public funds and responsible government accounting ○ ensuring compliance with legal obligations related to government organizations and public schools ○ selecting and overseeing a qualified and highly effective school leader ○ addressing grievances received from staff and parents and families; and • Describe how the identified plan will focus on and support continuous improvement.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

C. Leadership and Management.

C.(1) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive plan** for how the governing body will monitor organizational, financial, and academic outcomes on an ongoing basis to ensure that the proposed school is successfully meeting its mission and providing a quality education.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces' Founding Team understands the importance of Council oversight and recognizes the legal obligations to which the Governing Council must adhere. In addition to the requirements set out for charter school governing bodies in New Mexico State Statute (Public School Code 22-1-1 and (Local School Boards; Powers; Duties 22-5-4), the EA-LCS Governing Council will comply with all requirements as laid out in New Mexico Administrative Code (Procedural Requirements 6.29.1.9). EA-LCS Governing Council oversight plan is informed by best practice from the National Charter School Resource Center and the New Mexico Public Education Commission (PEC) Charter School Performance Framework.

The Governing Council oversight plan includes both deep goal-driven work of Council Committees, and analysis and discussion of the full Council. In addition, Explore Academy - Las Cruces Leadership Team, including the Principal, Business Manager, and school administration, will be a strong partner in the work of oversight by providing timely and consistent financial, organizational, and academic data to the Council and its Committees, as the Leadership Team will have greater insights about day-to-day finances, operations, and academics within the school building. To that end, the Council recognizes the importance of differentiating governance and management. The Council's role is oversight, while the school Leadership Team's role is implementation. The Principal will report directly to the Governing Council and its Committees, with input from the school administration as necessary. Maintaining the distinction between governance and management allows for the most effective school overall.

Further, the Governing Council is charged with ensuring the success of the school's academic mission, vision, and goals, and providing the oversight of public dollars that are managed ethically and responsibly in compliance with all state regulatory requirements and national standards. The Council and its Committees are charged with ensuring that the school is an academic success, an organizational success, and fiscally sound in both the short- and long-term.

Academic Performance

The Governing Council will closely oversee and monitor the school's academic performance on an ongoing basis. Informed by academic data provided by the school Principal, who reports directly to the Governing Council. Academic updates will be presented to the full Council via the Council's monthly meetings. A dashboard format for these data will be used. The Council will review and discussion performance at monthly meetings held under the Open Meeting Law. The performance data dashboard will show academic performance data aggregated by subgroup for ethnicity, special education, English Learners, and economically disadvantaged students as well as the current summary for the overall progress toward the school's mission-specific goal(s) as set forth in the school's contract with the Public Education Commission.

Further, the Council will review the dashboard for informed decision-making, and data that allow the Council to measure past, current, and future progress. The dashboard will permit the Council to consistently evaluate the degree to which Explore Academy - Las Cruces is an effective school, executing successfully on the school's mission and achieving ambitious, measurable goals for all students across all subgroups and in all classrooms. In addition to review of the dashboard at monthly meetings, the Council will review the NMPEC's Performance Framework for Explore Academy - Las Cruces on an ongoing basis,

and at a minimum, quarterly. The two major components of the academic performance indicators of the Performance Framework include meeting standards according to the currently adopted state-chosen school evaluation system and identifying mission-specific indicators which show the implementation of the school's mission.

The Council will be well-acquainted with the academic performance indicators in the Performance Framework, as well as the state's school evaluation system. In particular, the Council will ensure that progress toward the school mission and mission-specific indicators is reviewed and discussed at all full Council monthly meetings. During full Council meetings, members will discuss trends in data, successes, and areas for growth for the school, and ultimately identify actionable steps based specifically on data and previously identified criteria to ensure that Explore Academy - Las Cruces is fulfilling its mission for all students.

Organizational Performance

The organizational performance of Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be monitored by the full Council, with specific components assigned to relevant task forces, as this area of the Organizational Framework encompasses many components of school and Governing Council operations. As the organizational performance framework will require the Council to work and collaborate closely with the school Leadership Team, particularly the Principal, it is imperative that the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council clearly understand the role of management and governance as related to organizational performance. As noted in administrative code NMAC 6.29.1.9, the Council will refrain from involvement in delegated administrative functions. The PEC Performance Framework will serve as the guide for identifying criteria and standards for success.

Major components of the organizational performance framework include indicators, measures, and metrics related to attendance, recurrent enrollment, and governing body performance, including compliance with all applicable laws, rules, and terms of the charter contract with the Public Education Commission. The organizational performance framework is divided into different sections: educational plan, business management and oversight, governance and reporting, employees, school environment, and school-specific terms.

The Governing Council will monitor the educational plan section monthly as well as oversee the components of the business management and oversight section monthly. The Council will take charge of the components of the governance and reporting section monthly. Lastly, the Finance and Audit Committees will monitor the section on employees, as part of its cyclical work in support of the annual audit. Each committee will review their sections at monthly committee meetings and include an update on organizational performance in their designated report at each full monthly Council meeting.

Financial Performance

The financial performance of Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will be monitored by both the Finance and the Audit Committees and will report to the full Governing Council at all monthly Council meetings. Reports to the Governing Council will include reviews of financial data in the Council's encrypted Cloud Drive, as well as the balance sheet, cash position statement, income and expense statement, and budget versus actual expense report. The Governing Council will receive these specific reports on a monthly schedule, and all documents will meet the criteria of timeliness, accuracy, and clarity.

The Finance and Audit Committees will work with EA-LCS leadership, including the Principal and Business Manager as necessary, to ensure that all financial reports are prepared in a timely manner, contain complete and correct information, and are presented in a way that they can easily be understood by all members of the Council. In addition to oversight of the required reports and the financial data portion of the monthly dashboard, the Finance and Audit Committee is also tasked with monthly oversight of the financial performance framework. The financial performance framework addresses multiple New Mexico Public Education Commission adopted April 12, 2019.

elements on operating budgets, audits, periodic reports, expenditures, reimbursements, audit reviews, meals, and general information.

The Finance and Audit Committee will address all of the financial performance framework sections at all monthly committee meetings and will provide an update to the full Governing Council at all monthly Council meetings.

During Council meeting updates, the Finance and Audit Committees will discuss financial standing, projected status, expenditure impact on school operations and mission, and identify actionable next steps for development and budget activities. Responsible and thorough oversight of academic, organizational, and financial performance is not only the legal and ethical obligation of the Governing Council, it reflects the Council's belief in and commitment to the mission of Explore Academy - Las Cruces. A structured school community, with high-quality instruction and intensive and individualized academic supports, only exists if it is closely monitored and supported academically, organizationally, and financially.

The founding team of Explore Academy - Las Cruces fully understands that the Governing Council must act as a responsible public entity, ensuring all students receive a quality education. Explore Academy - Las Cruces' goal is to do so with the school's mission as the ultimate guide.

Timeline

Action Steps – Monitoring	Proposed Timeline	Group Responsible
Organizational Performance will be monitored by the full Governing Council. Indicators will include attendance, recurrent enrollment, and governing body performance, including compliance with all applicable laws, rules, and terms of the charter contract with the PEC.	July through June of each academic year	EA-LCS Governing Council
Financial Performance will be monitored by the full Governing Council committee work. Reports will be made based on financial statements including balance sheet, cash position statement, income and expense statement, and budget versus actual expenditures. Reviewed data will inform decision-making by the Governing Council.	July through June of each academic year	Finance and Audit Committees, Leadership Team, Business Manager

Academic Performance will be monitored by the full Governing Council. Reports will be made to the Governing Council in monthly meetings. Collated data from EA-LCS will inform decision-making.	July through June of each academic year	EA-LCS Governing Council, Leadership Team
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Total Points Available	Expectations
12	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a plan for how the governing body will monitor academic performance on an ongoing basis, include action steps, timelines, responsible parties, and identified criteria or standards; • Identify a plan for how the governing body will monitor organizational performance on an ongoing basis, include action steps, timelines, responsible parties, and identified criteria or standards; • Identify a plan for how the governing body will monitor financial performance on an ongoing basis, include action steps, timelines, responsible parties, and identified criteria or standards; and • Describe how each of the monitoring plans will focus on ensuring the school is meeting its mission, providing a quality education, and acting as a responsible public entity.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

C. (2) Identify and provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** plan for hiring a head administrator. Include a clear, comprehensive, and cohesive description of the leadership characteristics and qualifications for the head administrator needed to run the proposed school. In your description, take **into account the mission of the proposed school**. Include **evidence of a clear plan** (e.g., job search process, timelines) to hire and evaluate a highly qualified administrator no later than July 1.

If the proposed head administrator is a founder or already identified, provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** description of his/her leadership characteristics and qualifications for running the proposed school and delivering its unique mission.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Following the approval of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) charter school application, the Governing Council will seek to hire a high quality and dynamic leader for the school's head administrator: the Principal. A Position Description for the EA-LCS head administrator has been included as Appendix B. The EA-LCS head administrator is expected to embrace the Explore Learning model and translate the model to the students and families of Las Cruces and Dona Ana County. In brief, the head administrator will possess the following skill sets and qualities to be considered for interview.

- A valid New Mexico 3B Administrators License
- A well-spoken, confident demeanor
- Prior successful experience in school administration, including oversight of curricular and financial operations
- Strong belief in and commitment to the philosophy of the school (and Explore Learning Model): 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
- Strong commitment to consistent and meticulous oversight of the school's operations including the school's budget and spending
- Exceptional interpersonal communication skills
- Dedicated passion toward educational reform
- Acclaimed professional and character references
-

As they relate to candidates considered for the head administrator position, the above-mentioned characteristics support the mission and vision of EA-LCS in the following ways:

Characteristic	Supporting of the Mission and Vision
Well-spoken, confident demeanor	Essential for the establishment of a new school program, specifically one that is innovative and novel to the local educational landscape
Prior successful experience in school administration	Experience as an administrator is essential in the starting and maintaining of a new school
Strong belief and commitment to the philosophy of the Explore Learning Model	An appropriate administrator, leading a school of choice with a distinctive educational model, must possess steadfast commitment in pursuing the success of the model
Proponent of teacher creativity and flexibility in offering curriculum in different forms	Supporting teacher creativity is a fundamental component of the Explore Learning Model
Openness and transparency in overall operation and conduct, willingness to allow for stakeholder input in the decision-making process	An Explore Learning Leader would have to be open to a democratic structure in school operations, and as such, be open to transparency in the operations of the school and the choices made toward that end. Such an individual would be required to operate in openness with members of the school community including students, teachers, and parents
Strong adherence to established policies for student conduct and consistency in the enforcement of these policies	Higher levels of student accountability are a component of the school's student expectations. A prospective principal would have to align with a higher expectation for student conduct
Exceptional interpersonal communication skills	As a leader of both children and adults, an Explore Academy principal would have to have exceptional skill in communicating ideas, policies, procedures, etc. to all stakeholders in addition to answering questions and handling concerns and disputes appropriately
Dedicated passion toward educational reform	As a charter school operating amidst a landscape of student choice, and with the prospect of becoming the head administrator at a school whose model is unlike any traditional academic model,

	an individual who intends to pursue the principalship would have to embody an equal belief in the effectiveness of non-traditional education programs
Acclaimed professional and character references	As a candidate, the past performance of any potential candidate would be best described by those who worked with, above, and for the individual at previous places of employment

At the time of this application, there have been several candidates interested in the principal position. Upon charter approval, the school's founding team will immediately initiate the advertised postings for the open administrator position. From the candidates who apply and those who have already submitted interest, the founding team will gather basic information and initiate a first-round pre-screening for candidates through a phone or online conference. Through this process, the founding team will work to create a final candidate pool to present to the Governing Council.

At this juncture, the founding team will work with the Governing Council to run the interview process for the candidates in the applicant pool. It is proposed that interviews will be begin on or before January 15th, 2020 with the final principal selected by the Governing Council on or before January 31st, 2020.

Timeline (Planning Year)

Action Steps	Proposed Timeline	Group Responsible
The founding team will advertise the principal position through various online forums, including job posting websites (eg: Indeed.com), national education forums (eg: National Association of Secondary School Principals), and social media (eg: Facebook).	September, 2019	The founding team
The founding team will collect materials for interested applicants/candidates including resumes, cover letters, and references.	September, 2019 through November, 2019	The founding team

The founding team will initiate pre-interview contact with interested candidates via phone or online platform (Skype) as a pre-screening measure.	December, 2019	The founding team
Candidates will interview before the Governing Council and founding team	January, 2020	The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council and founding team
Discussion will take place over the candidate field, a candidate will receive a recommendation for hire, a candidate will be approved, and an offer letter will be drafted and sent to the selected candidate	January, 2020	The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council

Ongoing Process for Hiring the Head Administrator

After the school commences operations, it may be necessary for the Governing Council to hire a new head administrator for the start of the subsequent school year. The chart below describes the action steps, timeline, and responsible parties for this process.

An outgoing head administrator is expected to notify the Governing Council by February of the year of departure, and it is around this supposition that the below timeline is generated. Within the basis of this anticipated timeline, it will be the goal of the Governing Council to hire a new head administrator by May 1st of the school year in question (and prior to the school year as required).

Action Steps	Proposed Timeline	Group Responsible
The Governing Council will establish a steering committee to embark on the hiring process for a new principal	February	The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council
The steering committee will advertise the principal position through various online forums, including job posting websites (eg: Indeed.com), national education forums (eg: National Association of Secondary School Principals), and social media (eg: Facebook)	February	The steering committee

The steering committee will collect materials for interested applicants/candidates including resumes, cover letters, and references	February through April	The steering committee
The steering committee will initiate pre-interview contact with interested candidates via phone or online platform (Skype) as a pre-screening measure. A final candidate pool will be generated	April	The steering committee
Candidates will interview before the Governing Council	May	The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council
Discussion will take place over the candidate field, a candidate will receive a recommendation for hire, a candidate will be approved, and an offer letter will be drafted and sent to the selected candidate	May	The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council

In the event that a principal vacates the position within the school year, the Council will advertise for the position immediately upon notification. Within the time required for an outgoing employee to remain on contract prior to departing (30 days notice), the Council will move to gather candidates within the first two weeks, conduct interviews within the third week, and move to select and onboard the newly-selected principal in the fourth week. During such times, the Council will remain open to the possibility of contracting for a temporary principal for an interim period until such time that the position can be filled with a quality, permanent candidate.

Total Points Available	Expectations
12	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify an ongoing process for hiring a head administrator, both for the initial hiring and for any time the position becomes vacant, include action steps, timelines, responsible parties, and identified criteria or standards; • Identify all leadership characteristics and all qualifications the head administrator must possess; • Explain why and how the identified leadership characteristics and qualifications will ensure the head administrator has the required capacity and enable the head administrator to operate the proposed school as a successful, high-quality public school; • Explain how the identified leadership characteristics and qualifications take into account the mission of the proposed school; • Describe how the identified process will ensure the school is able to identify and hire a highly qualified, licensed administrator no later than July 1, 2018; and • If a potential head administrator has already been identified and/or is a founder, include an assurance that the individual understands they must be selected and hired by an independent governing body and identify the individual's specific leadership skills and qualifications, through verifiable prior experience, that makes them qualified for the position, including holding the required licensure.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

C. (3) Describe how the governing body will convey and distinguish their roles and responsibilities with those of the proposed school's head administrator. Provide a proposed job description for the head administrator including responsibilities that are significant and unique to charter school leaders and the proposed school's mission, goals, and educational philosophy. Attach the job description as **Appendix B**.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

After its initial assemblage, one of the first duties of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) Governing Council will be to establish the expectations for the school's head administrator. These expectations will include but will not be limited to:

- Thorough understanding of and adherence to EA-LCS's mission, vision, academic philosophy, instructional practices, charter contract, and mission-specific policies and procedures
- 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 Governing Council to include the above contents among any additional as set forth by the Governing Council. The principal will further be assessed on the communication of said information with the Governing Council including the promptness and degree of detail in the reports provided, as well as the responsiveness to questions and concerns posed by Governing Council members.

As EA-LCS' operations proceed, it will be vital for the principal to identify, report, and effectively evaluate areas of concern, 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 Governing Council, will be vital toward this end.

The Head Administrator (Principal) will demonstrate a clear understanding of the commitment the Explore Academy - Las Cruces to the Public Education Commission described in this application. For a new hire, the candidate's application will include review and evaluation of Explore Academy - Las Cruces charter contract, to ensure that the prospective Head Administrator is cognizant of the commitments made through acceptance of the offer of the position. Candidates will be queried on the Explore Academy - Las Cruces application, complete Leadership Scenarios, demonstrate the philosophical and mission commitment of Explore Learning Model. The successful candidate will affirm their understanding and acceptance of expectations and goals of Explore Academy - Las Cruces and that it is their role to ensure that Explore Academy - Las Cruces achieves its academic, cultural, community, and mentoring expectations and goals.

As previously stated, it is essential that the roles and responsibilities of the EA-LCS Governing Council and EA-LCS head administrator are explicit and well defined. These roles and responsibilities are codified in the EA-LCS bylaws for the Governing Council and the head administrator. These roles and responsibilities are to be firmly established and distinguished from one another as EA-LCS moves to assume implementation and operation. In this sense, it is important to differentiate the notion of governance and management. The EA-LCS Governing Council's role is oversight, while the role of the EA-LCS school leadership is implementation.

The job description of the principal/head administrator is provided in Appendix B. The chart below summarizes and distinguishes the role and responsibilities of the Governing Council and head administrator:

Category	Governing Council	Head Administrator
Adherence to charter contract	Oversees school performance and operational adherence to the school's charter contract	Oversees the school's day-to-day performance and operational adherence to the school's charter contract
Hiring	Hires the head administrator	Hires the school's staff
Financial Responsibility	Oversees the school's financial standing and budget monitoring, ensuring that all financial policies and transactions are performed in accordance with state and federal law	Conducts the school's financial business, adhering to state law and responsible financial practices including the school's internal controls policies
Implementation of school mission, educational model, and instructional practices	Ensures that the head administrator operates the school in accordance with the school's charter, charter contract, and educational model as a whole	Ensures that the staff and instructional systems in place align with the school's educational model and charter components as stated in the charter and charter contract
Evaluation	Evaluates the head administrator, the school's operations overall, and the efficacy of the Governing Council itself	Evaluates all school staff
Progress Monitoring	Monitors the school in its operational efficacy, state evaluation, charter contract including performance framework and mission-specific goals	Monitors student performance, teacher performance, staff performance, and overall school operational metrics (budget, facility, school initiatives, etc.)
Obligation to Stakeholders	Accountable to the State (PEC/PED), communicates board business with the public in accordance with the OMA, represents the school to parents and community members	Accountable to the Governing Council and, by proxy, the State, communicates the school's operations with staff, students, and parents, represents the school to community members, continuously interacts with stakeholders in pursuing the school's mission and vision

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the process the governing body will use for distinguishing their roles and responsibilities with those of the head administrator; • Include specific actions the governing body will take to ensure the head administrator understands the obligations of the charter contract and the requirements of all elements of the plan contained in this application; and • Attach a job description in Appendix B that includes the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lists all major responsibilities of the head administrator ○ Includes responsibilities that are unique to charter school leaders ○ Includes responsibilities that specifically relate to the school’s mission, goals, and educational philosophy ○ Identifies all hiring requirements including all previously identified requirements related to characteristics and qualifications.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

C. (4) Identify and provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** plan for annually evaluating the head administrator. In your description, take into account the mission and goals of the proposed school.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) recognizes that evaluation of the school's Principal will be a continuous process and not simply a brief, in-person meeting between the principal and Governing Council at the end of the academic year. The evaluation will be formative-, process-, and outcomes-driven.

As highlighted in a report from the Wallace Foundation (*Getting Intentional about Principal Evaluation*) *, in some school districts, performance evaluations of principals are a yearly exercise in compliance, described by one principal as amounting to roughly: "You do a great job. Sign this." What is missing are ideas about how the principal might improve his or her efforts. These end-of-year "assessments" accomplish little in determining effectiveness of the incumbent and their impact on a school or its student population, community, or academic outcomes. The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will take an approach to Principal assessments more closely aligned with formal evaluation processes. The evaluation of the Principal will be based, in part, on the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE); this system remains the standard of practice in New Mexico. The HOUSSE and NMTEACH assessments will be utilized in coordination for Principal evaluations. The NMTEACH Educator Effectiveness system was designed as a framework for continuous improvement and professional growth for teachers and principals. The NMTEACH system ensures that every student has access to an effective principal and teacher every day they are in school. Implementing a rigorous, uniform observation protocol, providing immediate constructive feedback, using meaningful student data, and other multiple measures will provide valuable information to aid the personal development and growth of each teacher and principal.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will perform mid-academic year and year-end formal evaluations through NMTEACH and HOUSSE evaluation protocols. Monthly Governing Council meetings may include, as an agenda item, Principal self-assessment updates, results of teacher and staff satisfaction surveys, academic and school-specific metrics, and student/family satisfaction survey instrument data. Quantitative and qualitative data will be collected throughout the academic year for mid-term and year-end review and included in the formal assessments by the Governing Council. Data collected throughout the academic year will permit adjustments in school practices, Principal activities, and assist the Governing Council management decisions.

*Mendels, Pamela *Getting Intentional About Principal Evaluation*, Educational Leadership, May, 2017; p52-56

Explore Academy - Las Cruces Evaluation Process

The Principal evaluation process will address requirements of New Mexico Administrative Codes 6.69.7.8 and 6.69.7.9. The process requires incumbent Principals to draft professional development plans within the 40 days of the school year; mid-year and end-of-year evaluations will be included. The Principal evaluations will be aligned with the four HOUSSE competencies: instructional leadership, communication, professional development, and operations management. New and incumbent Principals will be made aware of the expectations of the Governing Council approved evaluation instruments and processes including changes and metric assessment data. New and incumbent Principal contracts will contain all requirements and expectations and notices of changes to metrics.

Measure of Effectiveness	HOUSSE Domain
Ensuring student success and academic achievement	Competency 1 - Instructional Leadership Competency 5 - Scope of Responsibility in Secondary Schools
Fulfillment of the school's mission	Competency 1 - Instructional Leadership Competency 2 - Communication Competency 3 - Professional Development Competency 5 - Scope of Responsibility in Secondary Schools
Overseeing the management of public funds and responsible accounting	Competency 4 - Operations Management
Ensuring compliance with legal obligations	Competency 4 - Operations Management
Addressing grievances from stakeholders	Competency 2 - Communication

The formal, annual evaluation cycle will begin with the Principal completing a self-assessment and professional development plan. The self-assessment will be aligned to the HOUSSE competencies and indicators and it is accessible on the New Mexico Public Education Department's website. Completion of the strengths-based self-assessment will inform the Principal of their measured strengths and assets and inform them of challenges and limits to that success within the four HOUSSE competencies. This information will inform the Principal in the development of the professional development plan. The plan will include competencies of focus, a developed action plan in response to challenges, a response timeline, and evidence of accomplishments. Each year, this professional development plan will be created by the 40th day of school.

The Governing Council will conduct a mid-year formal evaluation of the incumbent Principal in January of each academic year; evaluation results will determine contract extensions for the incumbent. The year-end evaluation of the incumbent Principal will be consistent with the mid-term process with the addition of academic outcomes and satisfaction surveys coming forward. Student assessments, academic progress, and meeting of expectations of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces charter and goals will provide quantitative data to be evaluated in concert with qualitative data collected from student, family, and stakeholder satisfaction surveys, continuous data collection of feedback, complaint, and assessment data, to provide a global assessment of the incumbent Principal. The end-of-year evaluation will be conducted after the last day of school and before the close of our fiscal year. This mid-year evaluation will be instrumental in determining if the Governing Board will offer the incumbent a contract extension.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces Summative Evaluation

The Summative Evaluation will be consistent with NMTEACH Summative Head of School Evaluation; it will include scoring for academic achievement (proficiency and growth based), the quality of the Principal's teacher observations and feedback, and multiple measures (including HOUSSE competencies and teacher surveys). These data elements will be combined with a global assessment through qualitative data retrieved through feedback and surveys from stakeholders at Explore Academy - Las Cruces; NMTEACH Summative Evaluation permits opportunity for qualitative feedback from the Governing Council, with all data providing opportunity direction for professional development or professional reading. The

Summative Evaluation will include effectiveness ratings, suggested goals/areas of growth, strengths, and next steps. Aligned with NMTEACH, the evaluation will consider student achievement, teacher observations, and Governing Council-driven metrics.

Student Achievement: The Principal will be evaluated on their ability to meet the mission-aligned long term and short-cycle academic goals for the school. For the mid-year evaluation, the student achievement goals will be adjusted to reflect the timing within the school year, as the goals are written as year-long goals. Student achievement is the most important data element in the Explore Academy - Las Cruces metric database; growth-based and proficiency-based student achievement measures will provide the foundation of accountability assessments for new and incumbent Principals.

Teacher Observations: The Summative Evaluation will measure the completion and quality of teacher evaluations. Per NMTEACH, Principals are evaluated on the completion of the state-required teacher evaluations. Explore Academy - Las Cruces is committed to developing teachers and will require frequent observations and coaching of all teachers regardless of experience. The mid-year evaluation will focus upon the Principal's capacity to complete the weekly internal observation cycles, while the end-of-year evaluation will add completion of the state-required evaluations, in the required timeframes. The evaluation will focus on quality of teacher responses to the feedback instrument.

Multiple Measures: This metric of the evaluation system will include HOUSSE competencies and teacher surveys. Using the Form D Scoring Rubric, the Governing Council will rank the Principal on each of the HOUSSE competencies at the mid-year and end-of-year evaluation. The HOUSSE competencies will be used to inform the Governing Council's evaluation. Teacher surveys will be included in the Multiple Measures section; these will inform teacher satisfaction and for future management goals. Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will consider engaging with an external program evaluator with experience in academic evaluations as prescribed here. Survey instrument creation, data collection and collation and data analyses will be important to Principals, staff, teachers, stakeholders, families, and students. An effective, efficient and professional program evaluation is deserved by Explore Academy - Las Cruces to determine the impact of the Principal on the entire enterprise.

Total Points Available	Expectations
8	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the plan for annually evaluating the head administrator, including action steps, timelines, responsible parties, and standards or criteria; • Include action steps to evaluate the effectiveness of the head administrator in the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ensuring student success and academic achievement ○ ensuring fulfillment to the school's mission ○ overseeing the stewardship and management of public funds and responsible government accounting ○ ensuring compliance with legal obligations related to government organizations and public schools ○ addressing grievances received from staff and parents and families; • Describe how the plan specifically takes into account the mission and goals of the proposed school; and • Ensure the plan meets the requirements identified in NMAC 6.69.7.8 and 6.69.7.9.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

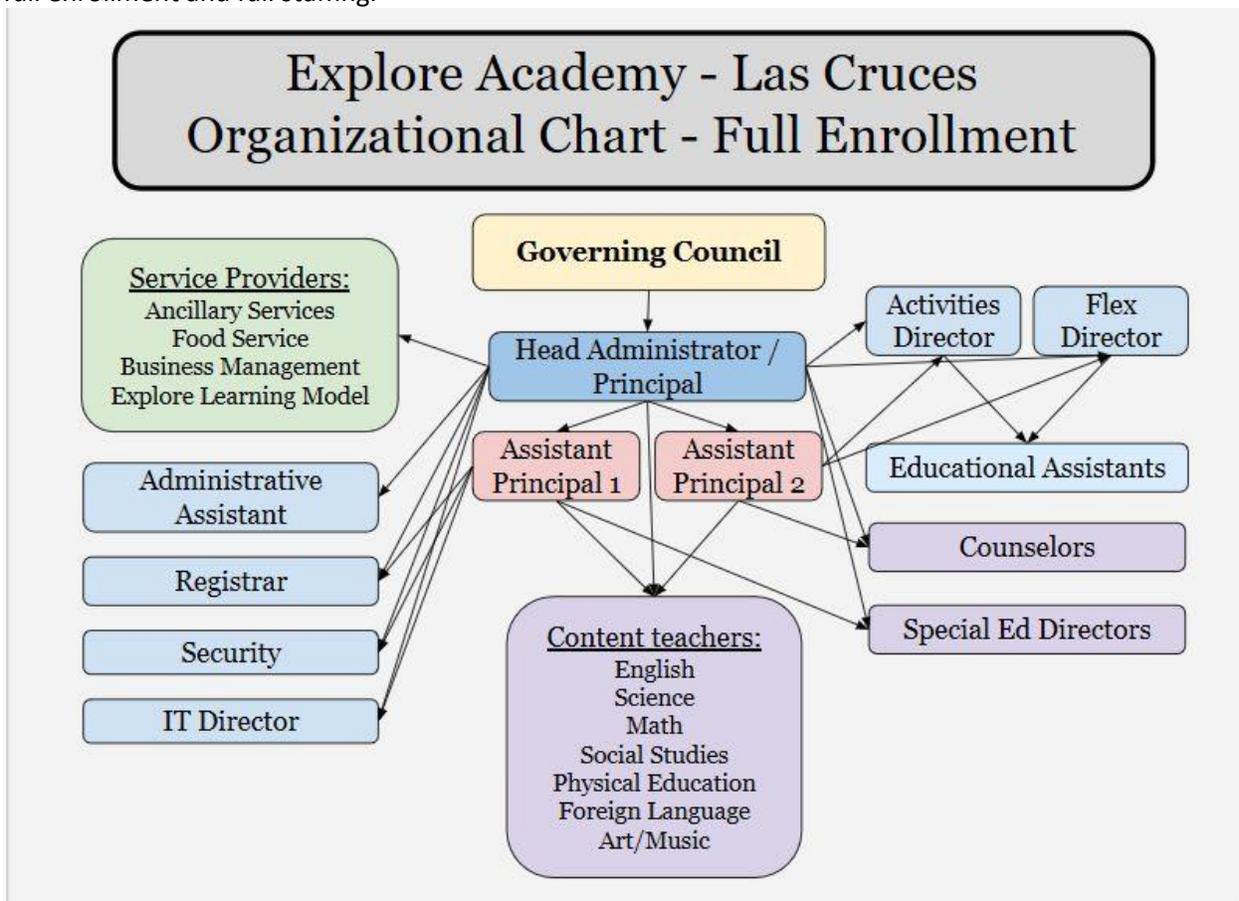
D. Organizational Structure of the Proposed School.

D.(1) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, cohesive, and reasonable** organizational chart and narrative that **aligns structures with the mission of the proposed school** and demonstrates a **clear** understanding of appropriate relationships between governance, administration, teaching, support staff, and external agencies that are essential to the proposed school.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Organizational Structure

Explore Academy - Las Cruces' (EA-LCS) organizational chart is presented as a final structure for the school upon full enrollment. Early organizational concepts will evolve quickly as the school, staff, and campus mature over the first year of planning into the first year of implementation. Our anticipated growth will render early structures irrelevant. The organizational chart presented here reflects the ideal graphic for full enrollment and full staffing.



The EA-LCS Governing Council assumes the full responsibility and authority over EA-LCS. This is clearly stated in the organizational chart. At the heart of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces school is the Head Administrator/Principal who is the central piece of the structure; the incumbent to this position will be responsible to the Governing Council for the day-to-day operation of the school and its ultimate success, measured by the life and academic successes of the enrolled students. Despite the centralization of responsibility and authority held by the Head Administrator/Principal, there is significant delegation of authority to the assistant principals, of which there will be two by full enrollment. As defined in the organizational chart, the Principal will have a point of contact with each component of the EA-LCS

school. The lines of connection radiate from the Principal to each of the school’s components and activities.

Importantly, two assistant principals will be part of the organization to support and serve as primary points-of-contact to relieve and assist the Head Administrator. The two assistant principal positions will manage the non-academic side of the chart and the academic staffing, in concert and at the direction and guidance of the Head Administrator. On the non-academic side of the organization will be service providers including ancillary services, food services, business management, and the Explore Learning Model. Engagement with approved providers will be undertaken in the planning year and will be managed by the Head Administrator before being decentralized and co-managed with an assistant principal position.

Each of the positions outlined in the Organizational Chart is essential to the fulfillment of the EA-LCS mission, in the day-to-day operations and long-term development of the school. Independent of the Head Administrator/Principal, as outlined in NMSA 22-10A-18, all hiring, evaluation, and accountability will be the responsibility of the Head Administrator/Principal, NMSA 22-8B-10. The Governing Council will be responsible for hiring, assessment, and accountability for the Head Administrator/Principal position. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will follow the delineation of duties between the Head of School and the Governing Board, as outlined in NMAC 6.29.1.9.

By Year 6 of EA-LCS operation, full enrollment will have been achieved as well as full staffing. This staff will accommodate 700 students, with a student-teacher ratio of 18:1. A more granular staffing description through the five-year timeline is presented in sub-section D.3, below.

Total Points Available	Expectations
8	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include an organizational chart; • Include a narrative that describes the structures and relationships represented in the organizational chart; • Include all entities essential to the operation and success of the proposed school; and • Reflect an understanding of the appropriate relationship between each of the relevant entities.
<p>INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.</p>	

D. (2) Provide **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** job descriptions for all certified and licensed staff and any other key staff (if your charter requires non-traditional roles or positions, identify and describe here). In the job descriptions, clearly outline necessary qualifications and **appropriate** reporting lines that are consistent with the organizational chart. In your descriptions, take into account the mission of the proposed school. Attach staff job descriptions as **Appendix C**.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces staffing model will have the positions as outlined below. We have provided a thumbnail sketch of the position, reporting structure and why these positions are important to the mission of the school. Full staff job descriptions are found in **Appendix C**.

Principal

The Principal is a licensed school administrator (Level IIIa license). This person is responsible for developing and maintaining Explore Academy - Las Cruces' academic goals, developing and implementing professional development and coaching for teachers, and monitoring and managing the complete implementation of Individualized Education Plans for students with special needs. This position represents the school in all capacities, both instructional and administrative and will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the school. This position reports directly to the Governing Council and the Head Administrator of Explore Academy.

Assistant Principal

The school's assistant administrator, or assistant principal, will be administratively certified (Level IIIa license) and will work under the principal to represent the school in all capacities, both instructional and administrative. He or she will be responsible for assisting the principal with the day-to-day operations of the school.

Administrative Assistant

The administrative assistant will provide direct support for the school's principal and will manage the school's front office operations. This position is integral to the daily operation of the school and is a direct report to the Principal.

Counselor

Counselors must hold a valid license in school counseling in accordance with NMAC 6.63.6.

This position will provide students with continuous academic and emotional support as well as guidance in personal learning styles, as indicated by preliminary testing. Additionally, this position offers guidance and assistance in preparation for college including registration for college admission exams, applications, financial aid, and college selection. The counselor position reports through the Principal and Assistant Principal.

Activities Director

The position will oversee the athletic and student activities across all grades on campus. The coordinator will create and maintain all sports schedules including intramurals, charter sports league, and club sports. Activities and athletics will be a key component of EA-LCS' success. The activities director reports through the Principal and Assistant Principal.

Flex Director

The flex coordinator will be responsible for all flex, structured flex, lunch flex, and tutoring management and assignments. This position will manage students during free academic flex periods and maintain behavioral standards in all common spaces. The flex director reports through the Principal and Assistant Principal.

Special Education Director

Special education directors will be teachers who are licensed instructors, holding a valid New Mexico teaching license with certification in special education. We look forward to educating and supporting a diverse group of students at Explore Academy - Las Cruces. This includes students with special needs, who are legally granted services through Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Our Special Education teachers will ensure that Explore Academy - Las Cruces students receive the academic and behavioral supports needed to make successful progress toward achieving grade level and individual goals. These teachers work in conjunction with Enrichment and classroom teachers to support all students' needs.

Educational Assistants

Explore Academy - Las Cruces Educational Assistants support students with special needs and the individualized academic program in general. These positions will be added to Explore Academy - Las Cruces team as student needs become evident through the registration and Special Education identification process. Educational Assistants' reporting structure is to the Activities Director and Flex Director.

Information Technology Director

Explore Academy - Las Cruces and the Explore Learning model are heavily based on the integration of high-quality technology in the classroom, allowing students to prepare for the technological world that awaits them after graduation. It also allows teachers to access the highest quality and relevant instructional practices and materials in class. The technology director will ensure that all technology on campus is functional and effective, as well as ensuring data privacy and integrity. The IT Director reports through the Assistant Principal and the Principal.

Security

EA-LCS prioritizes the safety and security of all staff, students, and visitors on campus. To ensure the safety of the whole community, a security guard will be employed full time. The position is intended to work with administration, staff, and students to keep the campus safe and secure. Security reports through the Principal and Assistant Principal.

Content Teachers

Explore Academy - Las Cruces understands that high academic achievement starts with quality instruction delivered by talented and creative teachers. Teachers at Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be committed to achieving the mission of the school and meeting the needs of all their students so they can achieve their highest potential. Explore Academy - Las Cruces teachers will be devoted to their own professional growth goals as well as sharing talents and leadership for the benefit of their peer's growth. As the people our students interact with the most their impact on student outcomes is immeasurable. Content Teachers report directly to the Assistant Principal.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ all certified and licensed staff identified in the application ○ all non-certified or unlicensed staff identified in the application who could be considered essential to the operation and success of the proposed school ○ any non-traditional roles or positions; • Describe why the identified roles are key to the operation and success of the proposed school; and • Attach staff job descriptions as Appendix C for all of the positions identified in the application response and include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ List all major responsibilities of the positions ○ Include responsibilities that specifically relate to the school’s mission, goals, and educational philosophy ○ Identify all hiring requirements including qualifications and licensure or certification ○ Identify reporting lines (“reports to”) that aligns to the organizational chart.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

D.(3) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** staffing plan that demonstrates an understanding of the proposed school’s staffing needs, is **reasonable and adequate** to support effective and timely implementation of the academic program/curriculum, and is aligned with the budget and projected enrollment. Include evidence of a clear plan (job search process, timelines etc.) to hire and evaluate highly qualified staff no later than two weeks prior to the start of the proposed school year.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Introduction

Explore Academy - Las Cruces has conceptualized its five-year staffing plan with experience gained from previous efforts. The five-year staffing plan addresses the needs of the school’s growth while maintaining fidelity to the mission and outcome objectives through the development strong teachers. The majority of staffing needs are within the teaching ranks; our hiring philosophy is recruit, hire and retain the teachers with the potential for making the greatest impact on Explore Academy - Las Cruces students. Each Explore Academy - Las Cruces staff member hired will demonstrate a profound belief that all students can learn and be aligned to the mission of Explore Academy - Las Cruces. To find these individuals, the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Founding Team will implement an intense local, regional, and state recruitment plan. The recruitment and selection process for staffing will be informed by the experience of the founding team and search for teachers equivalent to those with other high-performing charter schools in New Mexico and nationally.

Staffing Plan

The chart below illustrates the school’s staffing plan, which is aligned to the proposed budget for each of the first five operational years.

Staff - *	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Principal	1	1	1	1	1
Assistant Principal	-	-	1	1	2
Administrative Assistant	1	1	1	1	1
Counselor	1	1	1	1	2
Registrar	-	-	1	1	1
Activities Director	0.5	0.5	1	1	1
Flex Director	0.5	0.5	1	1	1
Special Education	1	1	2	2	3
Educational Assistants	1	2	3	4	5
IT Director	1	1	1	1	1
Security	-	-	1	1	1
English	3	5	6	7	8
Math	3	5	6	7	8
Science	3	5	6	7	8
Social Studies	3	5	6	7	8
Physical Education	1	1	1	2	3
Foreign Language	-	1	1	2	3
Art/Music	-	1	2	2	2

* Unit of measure is Percent of Full Time Equivalent (1 = 100%; 0.5 = Half time position; 6 = 6 FTEs)

**Explore Academy-Las Cruces
5-Year Staffing Plan**

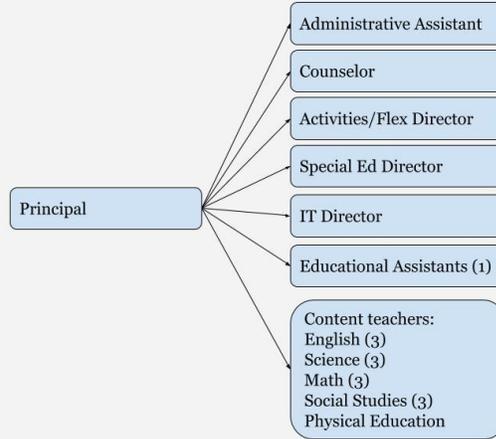
EA-LCS plans to phase in staffing to full employment by 2024-2025 academic year.

The objective is an 18:1 Student/Teacher ratio

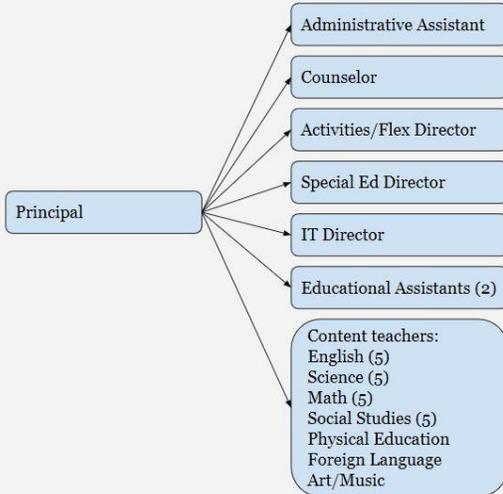
In the event that the above projections are different from actual enrollment data, the school will adjust staffing in accordance with proportional need per position to ensure that the specific ratios of staff to student are maintained with adequate ranges to fulfill the school’s staff needs in accordance with its mission and vision (teacher-to-student ratio, counselor-to-student ratio, special education director/teacher-to-student ratio, administrator-to-student ratio).

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will maintain a measured and reasonable growth rate in staffing to match needs, while not exceeding those needs, with full student enrollment occurring during our fifth year in operation (2024-2025).

Staffing Chart Year 1 - SY 2020-2021



Staffing Chart Year 2- SY 2021-2022



As outlined here in this section, projected staffing plan for the first five years of operation are based on our anticipated staffing needs. Each position is in alignment with the school’s mission of preparing students. Our staff projections for the five years are based on previous experience with a metropolitan campus. As a concept for Explore Academy - Las Cruces, we believe the plan is realistic, but we also recognize the school and community may face challenges that impact the plan, the school’s mission and the overall ability to recruit and retain students as well as teachers. We are prepared to develop alternative five-year plans that adapt and

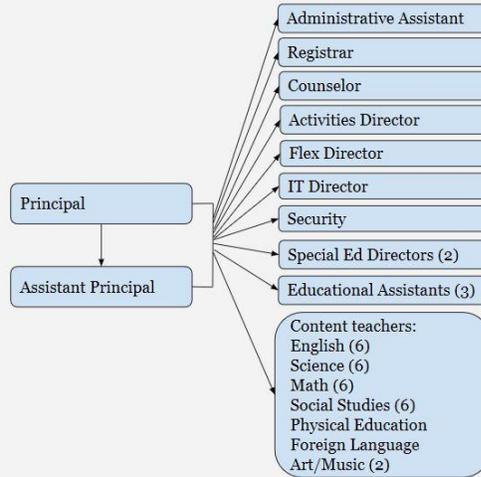
accommodate the changing environment in Las Cruces and Doña Ana County. An annual evaluation of the staffing plan and outcomes, in collaboration with our budget planning, we will assess staffing needs, ensuring that we have the staffing needed to fulfill our mission.

The staffing chart graphics outline the projected staffing breakdown for each of the first five operational years. This includes the expansion of positions and introduction of new positions as grade levels are phased in each year. These projections will be adjusted to accommodate the staffing necessary for actual student enrollment each year through a staffing analysis each spring to plan and hire for the following school year with the appropriate positions.

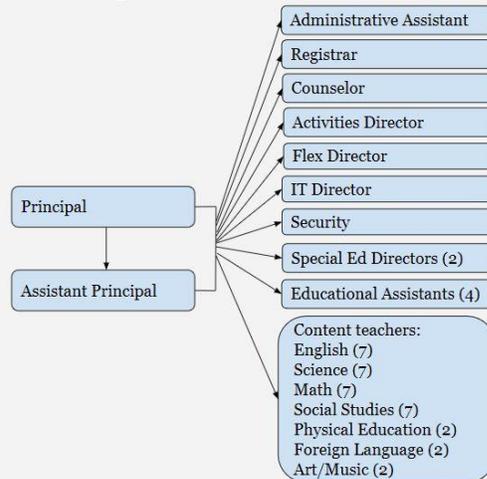
The Year 5 chart outlines the approximate staffing plan for the fully enrolled campus with all administrative and teaching positions represented. This plan will be the staffing model moving forward with 700 students and a full staff to serve student needs.

The only position that is not represented here but may be added based on student enrollment is the ELL coordinator. This position will be added at any time when there is student need, but with Las Cruces area ELL numbers lower than that of the rest of the state, it is not currently included in the model as a standalone position but rather as a position that will be held by a content teacher with ELL/TESOL/English Language Development background, often a Language Arts teacher.

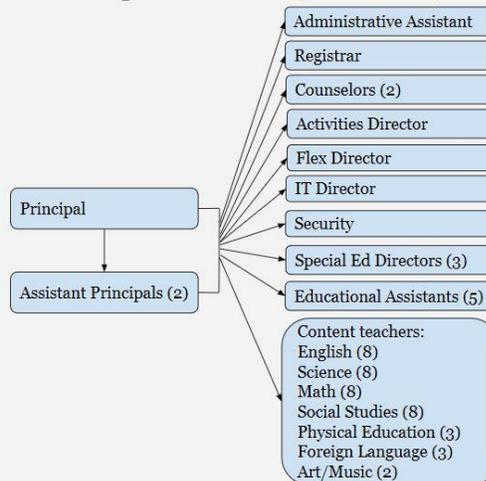
Staffing Chart Year 3- SY 2022-2023



Staffing Chart Year 4- SY 2023-2024



Staffing Chart Year 5- SY 2024-2025



Staff Recruitment Process

One of the most powerful recruitment methods for Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be word-of-mouth recommendations from educators, administrators, parents, and community leaders. By speaking about the school and its mission, the initial Explore Academy - Las Cruces founding team will develop relationships with community stakeholders, families, students, community leaders, and a variety of educators and individuals who are passionate about education (Section IV, Evidence of Support). This will permit Explore Academy - Las Cruces to recruit the most talented teachers from across Las Cruces and Doña Ana County as well as the region and state of New Mexico. The founding team and school administration will use the processes outlined in Section IV Evidence of Support, to foster relationships with local teacher organizations, teacher preparation programs, and community organizations to establish introductions to educators across Las Cruces and Doña Ana County. Once the foundation of student, parent, and teacher support is generated, general word of mouth will assist in continuing to draw in future staff members interested in joining the Explore Academy - Las Cruces campus.

As an establishment effort, the above approach may not be effective at first. As such, the founding team has several other recruitment methods. In making connections with the community, establishing a working relationship with New Mexico State University and University of Texas at El Paso, specifically with their teacher preparation programs and leaders, the founding team will recruit new teachers and provide them with focused training and mentorship as they embark on their teaching careers. Although many schools seek to hire veteran, experienced teachers, EA-LCS is open to recruiting from teacher preparations programs as well as programs such as Teach for America. The content knowledge and creativity that teachers bring with them is the key to their success at Explore Academy - Las Cruces, so all levels of teaching experience have the potential for recruitment.

Additionally, the founding team plans to attend professional conferences as well as continuing to introduce its presence into the area, allowing the Explore Academy - Las Cruces message to spread as a new school to the area but as an additional arm for the recruitment of educators and administrative staff members who are members of local and national organizations. Local career and job fairs will also provide an avenue where the founding team will be able to connect with the community and advertise the school's open positions. Incumbent Explore Academy - Las Cruces staff who are recruited early in the planning year will be present at all local events and conferences to inform educators and community leaders alike, about the opening of Explore Academy and available employment opportunities.

To further the marketing of employment opportunities and open positions, the founding team will also partner with Las Cruces and Doña Ana County organizations to recruit teachers. The team has met with city officials (May 2019) in Las Cruces, with elected officials, the Chamber of Commerce, and possibly educator organizations. The goal is to foster relationships with leaders and members of these and other organizations to help Explore Academy - Las Cruces become known and increase awareness of job openings and teaching position vacancies.

In addition to the above mechanisms, the founding team has and will continue to advertise through internet platforms to post open positions. These include job search websites but also through social media platforms and the school's website. The goal is to make Explore Academy - Las Cruces and its mission known widely throughout the area, thus increasing its reach in attracting potential teachers to apply for a position.

Retention of high-quality teachers and staff

The Explore Learning Model allows teachers to do something that is often overlooked and hard to accomplish in traditional schools; it allows them to teach, and to do so authentically and creatively. In many schools across the country, curricula are uniformly aligned horizontally and vertically within a subject area with assigned texts and teaching schedules that keep all teachers, and in turn their students, on an identical path that does not allow for variation or improvisation. The mandated adherence to a strict

scope and sequence paired with the averaging of grades, often inflated with curving practices and extra credit, results in a system where teachers are not using their pedagogical skills to teach, and students are not actually responsible to learn all the required material to earn course credit.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will retain teachers because it completely changes this paradigm; its teachers will truly *teach*. Each teacher creates their seminar curriculum (Section 1, Academic Framework) based on their own experiences, personal and academic interests, and understanding of their students and community. This allows teachers the ability to have autonomy and creative license to design and create their own curriculum. It is understood that high-performing teachers truly take pride in their craft and work continually to improve and adapt their lessons to meet the needs of their students. At Explore Academy - Las Cruces, the small class sizes paired with the engaging seminar curricula allows teachers to facilitate student learning daily with frequent opportunities for feedback, adjustment, individualization, and intervention. Teachers know where each student is in their path to proficiency for every standard within the focused, 22- or 44-day seminars that focus on a few standards/skills at a time. When quality teachers are given the ability to design their own pathways in order to reach common goals, the results are astonishing. Teachers who excel in the craft of teaching remain at Explore Academy because the model provides satisfaction and fulfillment every term.

Another crucial practice that will help Explore Academy - Las Cruces retain high quality teachers is the continual support of the administration and support staff, including those who directly support the implementation of the Explore Learning Model. Teachers who are highly successful in the classroom bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to their instruction. The founding team of Explore Learning Model are both teachers with over two decades of teaching experience. That, combined with a subset of experienced teachers who have worked and operated the Albuquerque campus, will help continue to support the growth and success of the new implementation of the model. Where some charters are founded by businesses or parents, was founded by teachers who share a similar drive in finding the freedom to teach a creative, choice-based curriculum and to do it effectively. This has allowed Explore Learning Model staff to develop comprehensive support systems for teachers, including collaborative weekly staff meetings, ongoing data-driven professional development, detailed staff training materials related to all aspects of the school (such as educational model, technology integration, instructional and grading practices, etc.), and built in collaboration time at regular intervals to promote sharing of best practices and strategies as well as materials and ideas.

There are other aspects of a school that promote retention such as competitive teacher pay, flexibility related to teacher's personal needs such as appointments and emergencies, quality and availability of classroom supplies and teaching materials, and community building and appreciation initiatives built into the school culture. These are focus areas as well, thus providing the best possible teaching experience for Explore Academy teachers. The current rate of staff retention at the New Mexico campus is over 95%, showing that the model is truly appreciated and embraced by the teachers. Teachers using the Explore Learning Model from the 2017-2018 academic year, all scored Highly Effective or Exemplary, the two highest score levels possible in the New Mexico teacher evaluation system, demonstrating that Explore Academy - Las Cruces will have right systems in place to retain high-performing teachers and to allow them to make astonishing academic progress with Explore Academy students.

Hiring Plan

Explore Academy - Las Cruces recognizes that positions will become vacant by departing staff, and new, open positions may become available through unplanned expansion of staffing. Efficient and expedited recruitment will be a hallmark of the EA-LCS response to these vacancies. The first step will be based on the effective human resources management including maintenance of position descriptions for all staff at Explore Academy - Las Cruces. All positions will be updated regularly and reviewed by school leadership

and the Governing Council. This first step will be critical to initiating the recruitment and hiring process. Identification of position descriptions and review for accuracy and assessment of appropriateness for the time will be reported to the Principal and leadership within one week of the vacancy announcement.

The second step in the process will be management of the open position and its impact on the EA-LCS budget for the impacted academic year and forward budgeting. The timeline for this step will vary depending on urgency of position (Principal) and the status of the next monthly Governing Council meeting. The objective is to ensure expedited review of the position description, assess financial impact and approve the position description and access impact on the budget and approve the third step in the process, advertising and recruitment of qualified candidates.

The third step in the process will be advertising and recruitment of qualified candidates. Because of its outreach to the Las Cruces and Doña Ana County stakeholders, Explore Academy - Las Cruces believes it will be in an ideal position to recruit from local assets and resources including New Mexico State University; however, in the interest of recruiting quality, talented staff to the school, recruitment will be local, state-wide, regional, and national, depending on level and urgency of the position. A conservative estimate of 4 months is expected to recruit and identify qualified candidates for open positions.

Advertising will be by traditional outlets including newspaper and direct mailing and supplemented with social media, LinkedIn and established community networks in Las Cruces and Doña Ana County.

The final step in the process will be interviewing, assessing, offering, and hiring the most qualified, talented candidate. From close of application announcement, to the review and interview of qualified candidates, EA-LCS expects to close this step within six weeks.

For senior leadership positions (principal and assistant principal) a search committee of teachers, senior leadership, parent representative, and Governing Council will be empaneled to manage the process.

Hiring Phase	Timeline
Evaluation of need	February 1 to February 28 (annually) or Upon vacancy of existing position (as needed)
Evaluation of budget allowance	March 1 to March 15 (annually) or Upon evaluation of need of position (as needed)
Advertisement of position(s)	March 16 to June 30 (annually) or Upon confirmation of budget allowance of position (as needed)
Recruitment and vetting	March 17 to June 30 (annually) or Upon confirmation of qualified candidates for position (as needed)
Interviewing and candidate selection	March 17 to June 30 (annually) or

	Upon confirmation of qualified candidates for position (as needed)
Job offer and onboarding	March 17 to July 31 (annually) or Upon confirmation of chosen candidates for position (as needed)

Planning Year Hiring

Similar to the plan described above, the staffing plan for the Planning Year will follow a similar timeline in order to ensure that the school is fully staff and adequately trained by July 15th of the Planning Year. While the timeline above represents a conservative approach to the hiring process within the Planning Year, the founding team will attempt to shift up the timeline when possible in order to better prepare the inaugural staff for the specific challenges associated with onboarding for a school that has yet to open.

Total Points Available	Expectations
8	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify an ongoing staffing plan and process for hiring all necessary staff, both for the initial hiring and for any time a position becomes vacant, include action steps, timelines, responsible parties; • Describe how the staffing plan and process will ensure the school is able to hire highly qualified staff, no later than two weeks prior to the start of the proposed school year, on an annual basis, and fill all vacancies within a reasonable time; include how the school will recruit and hire highly-qualified licensed staff; • Describe how the staffing plan and process is reasonable and adequate to support effective and timely implementation of the academic program/curriculum during the planning year and for all subsequent years; • Describe how the staffing plan and process is aligned with the budget and the school's projected enrollment; and • Describe how the school will make adjustments to the staffing plan in the case that there are differences in projected and actual enrollment.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

D.(4) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and compelling** plan for Professional Development that meets state requirements and supports the implementation of the proposed school's educational plan, mission, and performance goals. Ensure that the plan is supported by the budget.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Introduction

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will provide mentorship, professional development, and support to teachers and staff of through the service provision agreements with Association of Charter School Education Services (ACES) with a significant collection of strengths-based data on a monthly basis to assess areas of teacher need for mentorship as well as teacher and staff development. To make these data the most beneficial and usable, there are several ways Explore Learning Model (ELM) may provide mentorship, professional development and curriculum guidance, through the Association of Charter School Education Services (ACES) (with the approval of the Explore Academy Governing Council), to familiarize them with the types of data to which they will have access, and may request and use to adjust the local curriculum and for local implementation to drive school operations and instructional outcomes.

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Principal will be trained in all aspects of the Explore Learning Model. The reports provided to the Principal will include exit exam data, seminar pass rates, student failure list, student seminar surveys, cuspie progress, special education student progress toward goals, and at-risk student progress reports. The Principal will communicate directly with ELM mentors to fully discuss and analyze the data for the month as well as joint recommendations to address the data with teachers and staff.

Teachers will be offered training (by ELM through ACES) on the types of data that will be used, both data that must be collected by them on a regular basis as well as data that will be imparted to them through ELM reports each month and at the end of the year. The teacher training that takes place before the school year begins includes grading policies, seminar standard breakdown, scope and sequence of the content they are teaching from 6-12, exit exam structure and examples, cuspie and at-risk processes and interventions, Google Classroom and student information system tutorials, etc. This permits teachers to have a solid grasp on what will be expected from them throughout the year. This then carries into the school year where every Friday, staff gather for a meeting during which they are given specific professional development to deepen their knowledge of the model, enhance their instructional effectiveness, and increase their comfort level when working in a standards-based and data-driven system. These trainings are both digital, through presentations, and in person, by the Principal and ELM staff.

At the culmination of each term, staff will have two professional development days (students will be off) where further discussions, analysis, trainings, and professional development can take place, depending on specific need.

Teacher and Staff Development

Staff development is a vital part of Explore Academy due in large part to the innovative and unique educational model employed by the school. Explore Learning Model staff will partner with school leadership (upon approval by the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council, through a contract with ACES) to ensure that staff are trained and supported starting before the beginning of the school year and throughout the year.

Staff development involves coaching in areas such as instructional model, curriculum development, pedagogical coaching, technology integration, student-driven instruction, and data-driven reflection. In order to teach successfully at Explore Academy - Las Cruces, teachers must first be taught the instructional model to grasp the flavor and choice-based learning on which it is based. Teachers are instructed in how to build their curriculum for each seminar using themes, or flavors (as explained in the

school model section), as well as how to gather materials for the flavors they create. There are templates and examples that are provided by Explore Learning Model content experts that can help guide new teachers until they are able to create curriculum on their own. Explore Learning Model staff and site leaders also instruct staff in methods of instruction that correspond with the learning model, such as Socratic lessons, seminar-style teaching, problem-based learning, and student-lead lessons. This method of facilitating student investigation and learning rather than lecturing and assigning work can take adjustment time, so content experts and instructional video examples are available to help teachers learn the model and the methods it uses.

In addition to classroom-related training, teachers are also taught the scope and sequence of seminars from grade 6-12 so they understand the way students progress through the curriculum. This includes training in the daily schedule and flex period usage (such as tutoring, mentoring, collaboration, and planning time). This training also includes the breakdown of graduation requirements, the breakdown of standards assigned to each seminar in the teacher's content area, the common exit exams that will be administered for the seminars the teacher is teaching, and the grading system for formative and summative grading processes and reporting.

Teacher training sessions occur throughout the school year: during sessions throughout the summer before each school year, during on-site orientation days before the start of school, during allotted times on term break days, and during weekly staff meetings. The term break days and weekly staff meetings allow site administration and ELN staff to hold full staff training as well as breakout sessions to address teacher needs throughout the year. This built-in staff time also allows for immediate response to staff needs as they arise.

To support teachers throughout the year, there are several methods of data collections and teacher effectiveness monitoring. Site leadership will conduct both frequent walkthroughs as well as formal observations to evaluate teacher effectiveness and provide support for teachers when they are struggling with any aspect of the position. These are meant to be both formative and summative in nature, allowing for reflection and improvement but also holding teachers accountable for their performance and for student progress. Along those lines, students are surveyed at the end of each term (see School Model section for more information) about the seminar and the teacher for that term. These surveys provide valuable insight into the efficacy of the teacher, the flavor, and the instruction for the term. This data is compiled and given to teachers in order to promote reflective practices that lead to improved instruction and therefore improved student achievement.

The school calendar includes specific periods between terms (previously mentioned "term breaks") for professional development and training, thus this allotted time is independent of the time set aside for content and staff meetings.

In addition to the school-wide support and development for teachers, there are also two types of teacher mentorship that also provide coaching and support for staff at Explore Academy. For first year teachers who are entering the teaching profession for the first time, whether from a student teaching and a teacher-training program, or from an alternate licensure program or fellowship, mentor teachers are assigned to provide support and guidance through their entire first year teaching. This partnership is meant to provide the teacher a point of contact who can lend their support above and beyond what is provided by site leadership and Explore Learning model team members. Starting in year two of operation, there will also be mentors assigned to teachers who are new to Explore Academy, even if they are experienced educators from other school systems. This school-specific mentoring relationship will provide support as the teacher adjusts to the unique model and instructional practices that are required to teach at Explore.

Mentorship Program

Explore Academy - Las Cruces is dedicated to the support and continual improvement of both students and staff. In order to support teachers who are new to the profession, the Mentorship Program is designed to provide support, guidance, and constructive feedback throughout each new teacher's first year in the profession.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces leadership will work with the founding team and representatives from the Explore Learning Model to develop a systematic framework for professional development that provides training to ensure quality teachers, school principals and instructional support providers and that improves and enhances student achievement.

Pursuant to NM statute 6.60.10.8 NMAC - N, 07-01-02; A, 11-30-05, Explore Academy - Las Cruces' mentorship program for first-year teachers adheres to the following guidelines:

- A. provides individual support for beginning teachers from designated mentors; the support activities include collaborative curriculum alignment, design, and planning; they also include classroom observations, student assessment, individual instructional conferences, and instructional resource development
- B. is mandatory for all beginning teachers
- C. includes structured and research-based training activities for mentors; the training includes the development and needs of beginning teachers, the process of developing mentorship relationships, the process of documenting teacher growth, and best practices in working with novice teachers

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will ensure an active teacher-mentoring program for new teachers, as well as teachers new to the school itself, in compliance with NMAC 6.60.10.8, including classroom and curricular support, teacher development, and the study of the competencies needed for licensure transitions. The school will support mentor teachers with a stipend.

All Explore Academy - Las Cruces teachers and staff will participate in annual professional training related to the detection and reporting of child abuse and neglect, including physical and sexual abuse, and training related to the detection and reporting of substance abuse, as stipulated in NMSA 22-10A-32.

All teacher and staff professional development at Explore Academy - Las Cruces will support the school's vision and mission of building student capacity through the academic and life-skills necessary to reach their academic, career and life goals. All teacher and staff development will be aligned with the purposes and goals outlined in NMAC 6.65.2.8, as well as the program evaluation requirements outlined in NMAC 6.65.2.9. Furthermore, teacher and staff development will be in line with the New Mexico professional development framework and fulfill any funding requirements, as outlined in NMAC 6.65.2.10.

Budget Support

As seen within the projected budget (function 2400, under Contracted Services), the school allots money for teacher professional development, including its mentorship program, beginning in its first year of operation. Also, within the budget, it is predicted that the school will contract with ACES in order to provide its staff the required professional development in the implementation of the Explore Learning Model. The school's projected work with ACES will continue in allowing new staff to be trained and continuous professional development to be offered based on need as indicated by data collected.

Total Points Available	Expectations
8	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify an annual professional development plan with action steps, timelines, responsible parties, and associated costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Describe how the plan meets state requirements found in NMAC 6.65.2.8, 6.65.2.9, 6.19.8.10 ○ Describe how the school will ensure professional development time is not used for routine staff meetings; • Identify a mentorship plan for novice teachers, including action steps, timelines, responsible parties, and associated costs that meets the requirements of NMAC 6.60.10.8; and • Describe how the annual professional development plan and the mentorship plan for novice teachers ensure the following occur: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ are supported by the budget ○ support the implementation of the proposed school’s educational plan, mission, and performance goals ○ not only address required annual trainings but are also tailored to address school- and teacher-specific professional development needs.
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E. Employees.

E. (1) **Clearly describe** the employer/employee relationship and provide **clear terms** and conditions of employment for all classes of employees (administration, professional staff, and administrative staff). Include benefits, work schedules, annual number of contract days, pay terms. Please offer a **complete and appropriate explanation** of how you will address employees' recognized representatives.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Introduction

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) campus will be an inviting, engaging and successful environment for all staff. Explore Academy (EA) endeavors to create a friendly working environment for all employees.

In pursuit of this goal, EA-LCS has adopted the following employee relations objectives:

1. Provide an exciting, challenging, and rewarding workplace and experience.
2. Select employees on the basis of skill, training, ability, attitude, and character without discriminating.
3. Review wages, employee benefits, and working conditions periodically with the objective of being competitive in these areas, consistent with sound business practices.
4. Assure employees, after talking with their supervisor, an opportunity to discuss any issue or problem with the appropriate administrator.
5. Take prompt and appropriate action to resolve complaints which may arise in the everyday conduct of our business.
6. Respect individual rights and treat all employees with courtesy and consideration.
7. Maintain open communications and mutual respect in our working relationships.
8. Promote an atmosphere consistent with school's vision, mission, and goals.

The provisions of the EA-LCS Handbook will be developed in the planning year, at the direction of the founding Governing Council; the EA-ABQ will be a model for EA-LCS Handbook. The policies in the EA-LCS Handbook will be amended, revised, supplemented, or rescinded at any time, in the sole discretion of the EA-LCS Governing Council. Only the Head Administrator of Explore Academy may alter or modify any of the provisions of this Employee Handbook. Any such alterations or revisions must be in writing and approved by the Head Administrator and the Governing Council. Statements or promises by anyone other than the Head Administrator, shall not be interpreted as a change in policy and do not constitute an agreement with an employee.

The EA-LCS Employee Handbook will provide a comprehensive review of the relationships between the school and its employees, expectations, benefits, position classifications, requirements and qualifications for employment, compensation, conditions of employment, and robust review of the EA-LCS model. The following is a review of the terms and conditions for employment and expectations for all staff of Explore Academy - Las Cruces. For a full review of the Handbook see the attachments.

Employment Classifications

Positions at Explore Academy - Las Cruces are classified as either regular full-time, part-time or short-term. Further, positions are classified as either non-exempt or exempt.

1. **Non-Exempt and Exempt Employees.** At the time of hire, employees will be classified as either "exempt" or "nonexempt." This is necessary because, by law, employees in certain types of jobs are entitled to overtime pay for hours worked in excess of forty (40) hours per workweek. These employees are referred to as "non-exempt. This means that they are not exempt from (and therefore should receive) overtime pay. Exempt employees are Principal, business managers,

teachers, counselors, social workers, and others whose duties and responsibilities allow them to be "exempt" from overtime pay provisions as provided by the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and any applicable state laws.

2. **Full-Time Employees.** An employee who works 40 hours per week, is considered a full-time employee.
3. **Part-Time Employees.** An employee who is regularly scheduled to work less than 40 hours per week is considered a part-time employee. If you are a part-time employee working less than 25 hours per week, you are not eligible for the employee benefits described in this Employee Handbook. Benefits will be prorated for employees working between 25 and 39 hours per week.
4. **Overtime Pay.** If you are a non-exempt employee, you will be paid overtime in accordance with state and federal laws. Any overtime must be approved in advance by your supervisor; failure to obtain authorization prior to working overtime may result in disciplinary action. For purposes of determining overtime pay, Explore Academy-LCS' work week shall be from 12:00 a.m. Monday until 11:59 p.m. Sunday.

Daily Work Schedule and Annual Calendar

Based on the position in question, and the classification of employment, the employee's contract will specifically state the required daily work schedule and annual contract days (and calendar) to which the employee will be held as a condition of employment.

Requirements for Employment

Explore Academy - Las Cruces teachers and staff will be required to complete a background check, fingerprints, signature on their contract, and proof of licensure requirements for their position. These expectations align to New Mexico Administrative Codes:

- NMSA 22-10A-5 "Background checks; known convictions; alleged ethical misconduct; reporting required; limited immunity; penalty for failure to report,"
- NMSA 28-2-3 "Employment eligibility determination,"
- NMSA 28-2-4 "Power to refuse, renew, suspend or revoke public employment or license,"
- NMSA 22-10A-21 "Employment contracts; duration,"
- NMAC 6.66.2.8 "Licensed School Instructor Contract Requirements."

Compensation

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) is an equal opportunity employer. Employee compensation will be structured to attract, motivate, retain, and reward high quality personnel to effectively carry out the objectives of Explore Academy - Las Cruces without regard to race, color, ancestry, religion, age, sex, national origin, disability, medical condition, status as a veteran, sexual orientation, spousal affiliation, gender identity or any other basis protected by federal, state or local law. EA-LCS will prioritize its expenditure of resources to achieve a competitive compensation position in public education in the local area market. The Explore Academy Governing Council adopts a salary schedule each year based upon education, experience, and legislative mandates. Additionally, the Governing Council will set the salary schedule based on the school's annual budget. A licensed employee's salary will be based on the NMPED-mandated three-tier license salary schedule. Any salary increase will be based on the salary schedule and individual qualifications.

Benefits

Explore Academy is committed to sponsoring a comprehensive benefits program for all eligible employees. Full-time employees, or a part-time employee who work more than twenty-five (25) hours

per week, will be eligible to receive all of the benefits outlined below. Part-time employee benefits are prorated.

- A. **Group Insurance:** Employees may participate in the New Mexico Public School Insurance Authority (NMPSIA) Employee Benefits Group Plan, which consists of Group Medical, Dental, Vision, and Basic Life coverage. Members of the Governing Council are not eligible to participate in medical, dental, vision, and life insurance coverage.
 - 1. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will comply with the 1985 Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) in notifying employees of their right to continue health and life insurance coverage upon resignation, termination, or retirement. Dependents that are also losing coverage upon becoming ineligible will also be informed of their COBRA rights.
- B. **New Mexico Retirement Plan:** The New Mexico Educators Retirement Act is provided to eligible employees (those who have completed sufficient service) with a monthly pension benefit upon retirement. All employees who work more than 25% of the time (.25 FTE) are mandated by the New Mexico Educational Retirement Act to participate in the retirement plan.
- C. **Social Security:** Governing Council and staff will decide on participation; it is understood that “opt-out” is a onetime decision.
- D. **Workers’ Compensation:** Explore Academy - Las Cruces will maintain Workers' Compensation Insurance coverage for employees who sustain an injury or illness compensable under the New Mexico workers' compensation laws. Explore Academy - Las Cruces pays the full cost of the workers' compensation insurance. All workers' compensation claims are subject to evaluation and investigation by Explore Academy - Las Cruces and its insurance carrier.
- E. **Unemployment Compensation:** Explore Academy - Las Cruces employees will be covered in accordance with applicable unemployment compensation laws and regulations that also govern eligibility for unemployment benefits.
- F. **Family and Medical Leave (FMLA):** Explore Academy - Las Cruces is a covered employer for purposes of the Family Medical Leave Act. Explore Academy will provide employees unpaid leaves of absence to attend to family and medical needs in accordance with FMLA, if eligible. An employee is eligible for FMLA, if ALL the following criteria are met:
 - 1. Employee has worked for Explore Academy for at least 12 months in the last 7 years **and**
 - 2. Employee has worked at least 1,250 hours for Explore Academy during the 12 calendar months immediately preceding the request for leave.

Grievance

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will maintain an official grievance policy and procedure, outlined in the Employee Handbook (EA-LCS Handbook will be developed in the planning year, at the direction of the founding Governing Council; the EA-ABQ will be a model for EA-LCS Handbook), as well as in the Governing Council By-laws (Appendix A).

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be diligent in creating a supportive school environment; it will be safe, reflective, and productive. We understand issues will present challenges to this expectation; we will have a process by which employees can report any challenging issues. The development and implementation of a clear grievance review process is professional course of action.

A grievance is defined as an employee’s concern about any violation of personnel practices, and they can occur between an employee and their co-worker, or between an employer and an employee. The Explore Academy - Las Cruces grievance procedure will be established to give employees the opportunity to report misconduct in a way that protects the employee from any discrimination or retaliation.

An action response to grievance will include advisement that encourages employees to take their concerns directly to the co-worker with whom they have concerns. If the employees are not able to

resolve their differences, then they may request a supervisor provide mediation to work through the conflict. The resolution that is determined through this meeting should be considered final. The mediation process is one that is intended to be used to settle disputes between employees at Explore Academy - Las Cruces and is in alignment with our vision of a productive and proactive community.

In the case that a conflict is between a staff member and a supervisor, the employee may follow an informed grievance procedure.

1. If an employee feels he or she has been treated unfairly, the employee should reach out directly to their supervisor to discuss the situation.
2. If the discussion does not render the desired results, the employee should report the issue in written form, within two business days of receiving the initial response. The employee should inform the supervisor of the report.
3. The Head of School shall respond to the employee and the supervisor within two business days of receiving the complaint, in person and in writing.
4. If the complaint is about the Head of School, or if the Head of School is unable to resolve the complaint, then it should be presented to the Governing Board. The Governing Board will review the complaint and respond in writing within 15 days of originally receiving the complaint. The decision of the Governing Council shall be considered final.
5. Any form of retaliation against an employee posing a complaint is unacceptable.
6. An employee may choose to seek outside support to communicate a complaint.

Employee Unions or Other Representatives

Explore Academy - Las Cruces employees are not covered under a collective bargaining agreement and are not employees of a school district. Explore Academy - Las Cruces does not intend to have an employee bargaining unit; although if one is certified through employee-driven organizing efforts, the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will negotiate a collective bargaining agreement in accordance with the Public Employees Labor Relations Act. Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will ensure the Employee Handbook will be distributed to all staff. Work terms, conditions, and policies will be clearly outlined therein, and updated annually prior to board approval to ensure that all Explore Academy-Las Cruces employees benefit from clearly communicated, fair, inclusive, and equitable policies of employment.

Re-contracting, Termination, and Discharge

Contracts for employees will be based on a fiscal year, and the contracts should be signed prior to the first day of the new school year. In accordance with [NMSA 22-10A-22](#), employees will be informed of their reemployment or termination prior to the last day of the contracted school year. Per [NMSA 22-10A-23](#), employees who are being offered reemployment must accept the offer within 15 days of the offer, or within 15 day prior to the last day of school. Our staff recruitment strategy for ensuring we have a full staff hired prior to the first day of school is further outlined in Section II.D.(3).

Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council and Principal will follow all laws related to the termination of an employee, which includes giving notice prior to the last day of the school year or last day of the existing contract. The non-renewal of a contract for the following school year is defined as "termination." An employee with less than three years at Explore Academy - Las Cruces may have their contract terminated for any sufficient reason and are entitled to written reasoning within 10 days of a request. For an employee who has been employed at Explore Academy - Las Cruces for more than three years, just cause must be provided with the termination. Just cause could include insufficient performance or lack of follow through with outlined duties. Rationale for termination cannot be in violation of an employee's civil or constitutional rights. If an employee wishes to dispute their termination to the Explore

Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council, it is within their rights to do so, and the timelines found in NMSA 22-10A-24 and NMSA 22-10A-25 must be followed.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces may terminate an employee, defined as ending the employment relationship with a certified employee prior to the end of the current contract, as the process complies with NMSA 22-10A-27. Just cause must be given, meaning insufficient performance or lack of follow-through with outlined duties, and for reasons that are not in violation of an employee’s civil or constitutional rights. Written notice of intent will be provided to the employee. The terminated employee may request a hearing before the Governing Council (within 20-40 days of the request) with at least 10 days’ notice. Within 20 days of the hearing, the Governing Council shall provide a final decision. Explore Academy - Las Cruces Leadership Committee will attempt to avoid any discharges, through the development of continuous quality improvement plans (through coordinated external program evaluation); if these processes fail to yield satisfactory improvements (as outlined by the process in NMAC 6.69.2.8), an employee may be terminated, following the termination hearing procedures described above.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify all primary classes of employees the school will employ (e.g., administrative, professional, term, contract); • Identify the primary conditions of employment for each class of employees, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Benefits and pay terms ○ Daily work schedules and annual work calendars ○ Major conditions of employment ○ Employee conflict and grievance resolution processes ○ Employee discipline, re-contracting, and contract termination processes; and • Explain how the school, through the governing body and head administrator, will address employee unions and other school-specific employee representatives.
<p>INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.</p>	

F. Community/Parent/Employee Involvement in Governance.

F. (1) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** plan that describes school structures that will provide meaningful parental, professional educator, and community involvement in the governance and operation of the proposed school. The plan includes structures to facilitate **parental involvement that will help to advance** the proposed school's mission.

Please note that charter schools *may not require* community or parental support or involvement as grounds for accepting or not accepting a student.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will operate at four levels of Governing, all of which allow for involvement from various members of the school community. These levels include school staff and leadership, parents, students, and the Governing Council.

The school's Leadership Council, composed of both teachers and administrative staff, will meet at monthly. 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 facilitate the formation of a Parent Advisory Council (PAC). 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 PAC, but rather allow those interested parents to devise its role and structure. In addition to the PAC, the founding team will encourage the formation of a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) in order to better serve the school through community input, school events and initiatives, and open communication across all facets of school operation. Parents involved in either or both of these organizations will be vital in the launch of the school through their input and experiential contributions.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces students will play a significant role in the school's development, and as such, the school will help form a Student Council to represent its student community. Within the first two years of the school's opening, the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Student Council will develop its policies and procedures, formally establishing itself as a voice of the student population. The Student Council will contribute to the operation of the school through active engagement with the student body at large, with the administration and staff, and with the community of Las Cruces through student-driven initiatives and volunteerism.

The school's Governing 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 Governing 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.

Upon launch, the school will actively work to incorporate family involvement within the scope of the school day. The school's activities director and/or flex coordinator, who manage student initiatives outside of the classroom (specifically in the area of academic support for students), will be instrumental

in working closely with parents to incorporate volunteerism, outreach, mentoring, and workshops to support students and the overall mission and vision of the school.

It should be noted here that Explore Academy - Las Cruces assures its students, families, and stakeholders that it does not require family or parental support or involvement as grounds for accepting, not accepting, enrolling, dis-enrolling, or otherwise differentiating treatment of a student. The school recognizes the pressures and demands for time and effort placed on parents, parental support, and families and cannot be viewed as criteria for any decision-making.

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 Governing 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 Las Cruces 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 Governing.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify school operation and governance structures that will provide the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A meaningful opportunity for parental input and participation ○ A meaningful opportunity for professional educator input and participation ○ A meaningful opportunity for community input and participation; • Describe how the structures will facilitate parental involvement that will help advance the proposed school’s mission; • Include assurances that the school understands it may not require family or parental support or involvement as grounds for accepting, not accepting, enrolling, dis-enrolling, or otherwise differentiating treatment of a student; and • If the school plans to have a suggested amount of parent service or contribution, explain the process of opting out for parents who are unwilling or unable to meet the proposed school’s suggested service or support commitment.
<p>INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.</p>	

F. (2) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** plan to receive and process concerns and complaints from the community and parents. The plan is transparent, fair, accessible to the community, and ensures a timely and meaningful response from school administration and the governing body.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Grievance Process

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be an organization that is open to feedback and uses feedback to further strengthen the school and community. The school has a process that is thorough and efficient for receiving and handling grievances from students, families, and community members as described below. The process ensures that any student, family, or community member wishing to file a grievance with the Explore Academy Leadership Team or staff has a process that is efficient, transparent, fair, and meaningful. The process for addressing family and community complaints follows NMAC 6.10.3. The process and all steps in the process will further be outlined on the school's website.

Initiation of a grievance against a member of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces team, should begin with the community member first reaching out directly to the specific staff member to express their concerns. Most grievances may be resolved at this level. If the complaint is not resolved by direct communication with the staff member, the community member may wish to file a formal complaint. Formal complaints regarding discrimination or harassment based on race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, health, or age at Explore Academy by a staff member, should be filed as a written complaint to the Assistant Principal.

If the Assistant Principal is the person about whom the complaint is being filed, the complaint may be filed with the Principal.

The written complaint should include the following elements:

- The name of the person filing the complaint. If the person filing the complaint is doing so for a student, both the persona filing the complaint and the student's name should be included.
- Contact information for the person filing the complaint, including address, phone number, and email address
- Name of the person with whom the grievance is being filed
- Detailed description of the alleged discrimination and/or harassment
- Date(s) of the alleged discrimination and/or harassment incident
- Names of any witnesses or individuals who may have additional information about the incident
- Description of how the person filing the complaint, would like the issue to be resolved.

Timeline for Formal Complaint

All complaints filed using this procedure, must be filed within 30 days of the original incident.

Review of the Complaint

Upon receipt of the formal complaint, the Principal/Assistant Principal will conduct a formal review of the complaint, investigate the complaint, and attempt to resolve the complaint. During this time, information gathering, including interviews and the collection of evidence, will be conducted. This step shall be completed within 10 school days.

Resolution of the Complaint

After review of the complaint and collected evidence, the Principal/Assistant Principal will meet with the complainant to present a resolution to the complainant. This may include actions for correcting the situation, and action to prevent further occurrence. This meeting will happen within 15 school days of the complaint being submitted. The complainant will be provided with a written summary of the filed complaint and the resolution within 20 of the original complaint.

Appeal of the Complaint

If the individual or family is not satisfied with the decision made by the Principal or Assistant Principal, the family may appeal to the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council. The Governing Council will review the appeal and provide the family with a written response within 30 days of receiving the grievance appeal.

Transparency and Accessibility of Grievance Process

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will maintain confidentiality of the person filing the grievance, as well as those who participated as witnesses or those who provided information in the investigation, to the greatest extent possible. Retaliation against a family member or staff member filing a complaint is strictly prohibited and can result in disciplinary action.

McKinney Vento and Special Education Grievance Process

Explore Academy - Las Cruces is dedicated to ensuring that special circumstances, including homelessness or special needs do not result in disputes between the school and families. The McKinney Vento act requires that schools develop policies that ensure that students experiencing homelessness are able to access enrollment and attendance of schools without barriers. Per the Act, schools shall regularly review and update their policies to support students experiencing homelessness. Explore Academy - Las Cruces intends to avoid McKinney Vento grievances through reflective review of our policies and practices through the lens of youth homelessness. However, if there is a grievance, we will first attempt to resolve the grievance through our standard process outlined above. If the grievance is not resolved through this process, Explore Academy will follow the protocol outlined in NMAC 6.10.3, New Mexico Public Education Department.

This process entails completion of the NMPED dispute resolution paperwork, and a write-up of the school's response submitted to the NMPED Homeless Liaison within five days of the school's formal decision. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will maintain regular, two-way contact with the families of our students with special needs. We believe the regular contact with families of students with special needs will prevent most grievances.

In the case of a grievance that cannot be resolved through our standard grievance process, our special education grievance process will be based on the NMPED Parent and Child Rights in Special Education: Procedural Safeguards Notice. Families should first follow the school's standard grievance procedure, or the school and the family may elect to seek out mediation from a trained mediator via the NMPED Special Education Bureau. If the conflict is not resolved with either of these means, the family may seek local support organizations or advocacy groups, including a Parent Liaison from the NMPED. Finally, families may elect to file a formal complaint or request a due process hearing with the State. This process will follow the deadlines and requirements outlined in NMAC 6.31.2.13.

Total Points Available	Expectations
8	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a grievance process to receive and process concerns and complaints from the community, parents and families, and students that includes action steps, timelines, and responsible parties; • Include a final step in the process that provides the grievant a meaningful opportunity to be heard by, and receive a response from, the governing body; if they are unable to obtain resolution from the head administrator; • Describe how the process is transparent, fair, accessible to the community, and ensure a timely and meaningful response; and • Provide assurances that the school will additionally meet the specific legal requirements of the McKinney Vento and special education grievance processes.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

G. Student Recruitment and Enrollment.

G.(1) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** outreach and recruitment plan that ensures equal access to the proposed school and is likely to be effective in attracting a representative student body from the targeted community. The recruitment/enrollment timelines presented are **reasonable**.

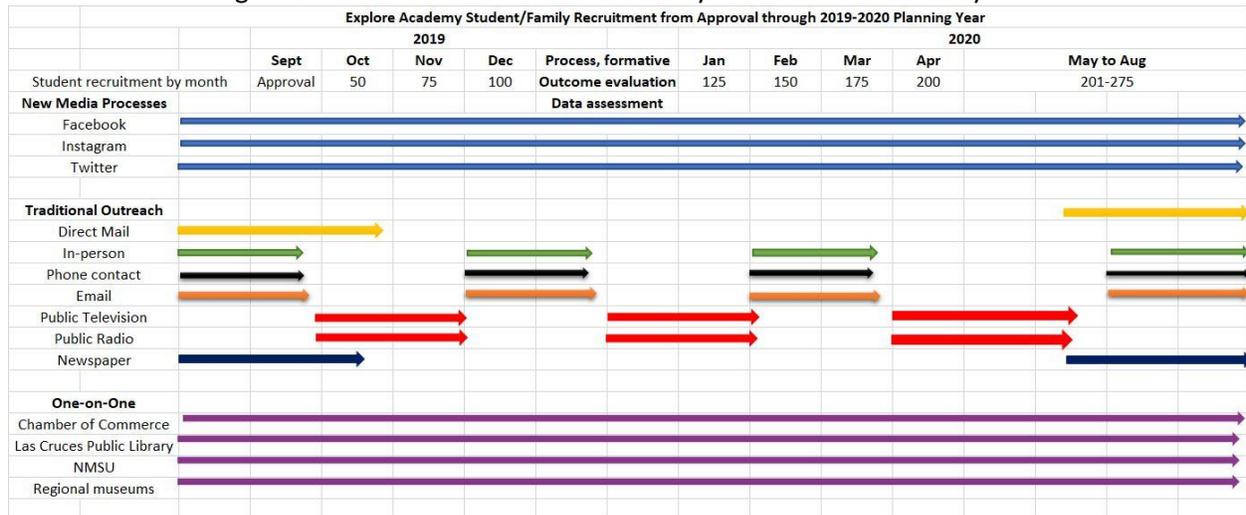
APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Introduction: Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will adhere to all legal and required admission policies, and will be non-dissimilatory in all curricula, academic programs, admissions policies, employment practices, and all operations; will not charge tuition, and will not discriminate in admission or deny participation in any program or activity on the basis of a person’s sex, race, religion, national origin, ancestry, pregnancy, marital or parental status, sexual orientation, physical, mental, emotional, or learning disability.

Student Recruitment and Enrollment

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) has crafted a family and student recruitment process that includes early efforts to increase awareness for EA-LCS ahead of this formal charter school application. These initial efforts have been reviewed, in part, Section IV-Evidence of Support, but more fully described here. The early efforts are a prelude to establishment of the proposed schedule below.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces has viewed the city of Las Cruces and county of Doña Ana as opportunities to perform outreach activities to prospective families, students, and stakeholders as well as potential Governing Council members, staff, and teachers. The targets for these outreach efforts have included the Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce, Thomas Branigan Memorial Library (host of Explore Academy - Las Cruces information nights throughout 2019), New Mexico State University, and the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum in Las Cruces. The objective has been to place Explore Academy - Las Cruces and its founding team in front of the many valued community stakeholders who



are drivers of the area’s economy, business, culture, employment training, and placement. The founding team is confident that the school will find a place amidst the ecology of the Las Cruces and Doña Ana region.

These initial efforts have been keyed to combination of traditional outreach efforts with new, digital media outlets. The traditional outreach efforts listed above are designed to impact one-on-one and group events where Explore Academy leadership describes the curricula, the mission and philosophy

of the school and how it sees itself as a partner in education. These are also “listening” for the leadership, Explore Academy - Las Cruces has and will spend time and energy on data and information gathering from city and county residents to know their needs, desires and wishes for the outcomes of a new a charter school and it will benefit and impact their children and their futures.

Traditional recruitment efforts of families and students will include direct mailing through the US Post Office to targeted zip codes throughout Las Cruces. Explore Academy has made public information requests to the Las Cruces Public Schools for specific grade level lists in the city and county. Direct mailers to these addresses have included descriptive Explore Academy - Las Cruces flyers with guidance on accessing additional information (through the Explore Academy website and social media) and direct points of contact to Explore Academy through text messaging, phone (direct to school administration), email, and web presence (www.explore.academy/lcs). These outreach efforts, braided with traditional processes (above), will be dovetailed with digital, new media efforts including social media such as the school’s Facebook and Instagram pages (@exploreacademylcs).

Both in its Planning Year and in subsequent years of operation, the school is committed to providing equal opportunity awareness campaigns to ensure that its marketing and community outreach are available to all subpopulations within the target area, thus ensuring equal access to the school and a demographic reflective of the local community and school district.

The social media environment is intended to meet the needs and communication patterns of prospective youth and families through common practices. Explore Academy promotes its social media messaging through promotion efforts on all platforms to be efficient and effective in disseminating charter school information (education model, charter school philosophy, mission, myth-busting), application process, awareness, and benefits of the Explore Academy Learning Model in Las Cruces.

New digital media and social media outlets are designed for continuous use with immediate adjustment and tailoring for target audience and message specificity. The no-cost approach to social

Anticipated Five-Year Student to Teacher Ratio for Explore Academy - Las Cruces			
Academic Year	Sudents	Grades	Student:Teacher Ratio
Year 1	240	6-7	18:1
Year 2	350	6-8	15:1
Year 3	400	6-9	16:1
Year 4	550	6-10	16:1
Year 5	630	6-11	16:1

media is a value-added quality of the outlet. Social media are likely to be seen by prospective students and their families within the demographic audience of Explore Academy - Las Cruces and it expands beyond the traditional catchment area of the city and county. New digital media outlets also permit Explore Academy - Las Cruces to be conservative in its cost-based messaging services including Las

Cruces Sun News, local television broadcasting from El Paso (TX), and public broadcasting television (KRWG) and radio (KRWG).

Once attracted to the Explore Academy - Las Cruces charter school messaging, we plan to have an “opt-in” program for direct messaging through SMS or family/student preferred messaging delivery system. This “opt-in” option will be followed with a consistent “opt-out” choice once registered for our direct messaging program. The visualization of the schedule and outlets to be used for student and family recruitment lays out the myriad events and mechanisms to be used. The visualization also outlines the proposed first year (planning year) for Explore Academy - Las Cruces. The depth and breadth of the outlets and mechanisms scheduled out through 12 months, provides a consistent, cohesive and comprehensive messaging for family and student recruitment. Our preliminary data suggest that the early efforts following this philosophy and objective framework have had an effective reach into the population of Las Cruces and Doña Ana county; family contacts with EA-LCS have been recorded through email, text messages, voice messages, Facebook and Instagram messages and comment threads, and website chats

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and messages. These data encourage us to continue and expand the effort as outlined in the above visualization graphic.

It should be noted as well that our early efforts have had the unintentional consequence of attracting prospective staff, leaders, and teachers to the Explore Academy web portal with follow-up contact made.

Students who are interested in attending Explore Academy - Las Cruces may submit an enrollment form, and their name will be added to the waitlist. If there is not a waitlist, the student will be invited to complete the registration immediately.

Anticipated Six-Year Student Enrollment by Grade for Explore Academy - Las Cruces						
Academic Year	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26
Grade						
6	120	120	120	120	120	120
7	120	120	120	120	120	120
8		110	110	110	110	110
9			110	110	110	110
10				90	90	90
11					80	80
12						70
Total	240	350	460	550	630	700

During the third trimester, families will be asked to indicate whether their students are re-enrolling for the following school year. Families who indicate their students are enrolling for the following school year, will complete the required re-enrollment paperwork, including indication if a younger sibling is applying for the following school year. As stated previously, [NMSA 22-8B-4\(K\)](#) gives a sibling preference during the public lottery. For students who indicate that they do not plan on re-enrolling at Explore Academy - Las Cruces, their seat will be up for consideration for the following school year.

Student recruitment and enrollment has been strategized by the founding team in response to the Las Cruces and Doña Ana educational needs, challenges and assets. The city and county present unique opportunities for EA-LCS to reach its first year enrollment and eventual five-year objective. The recruitment process takes advantage of the social media and new media outlets to enroll the first year, and we believe we are well-positioned to meet the target. We are also prepared to adjust to even newer outlets as school opens.

Evaluation of Impact

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces outreach efforts have been designed to maximize the utilization of social media and low and no-cost outlets. The school leadership recognizes the new families and students react to the new media outlets and are less inclined to explore the traditional outlets of newspapers and television. The founding team and the founding Governing Council are committed to a more personal outreach and recruitment program braided with a traditional marketing campaign to reach varying parental support demographics. This has two direct impacts on the responsible parties and the budget. The founding team and Governing Council will commit time and effort in-person, one-on-one meet and greets with parents, students and stakeholders in the Las Cruces area. We have performed these efforts in the spring 2019 with significant success.

Social media and new media permit a more efficient and cost-effective approach to recruitment. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Opt-in(out) SMS text messaging permit EA-LCS to penetrate deeper into the Las Cruces population and reach a broader demographic.

Initial metrics for the impact of this effort have included electronic inquiries through email, SMS messaging, and instant messaging through social media outlets. In addition, one-on-one and in-person group events have been conducted with attendance recorded and qualitative data collected on interest and enthusiasm for the Explore Academy - Las Cruces campus.

These efforts are intended to minimize financial impact on the budget. Use of social media is an investment of time and effort by members of the founding team and Governing Council and agreed by all New Mexico Public Education Commission adopted April 12, 2019.

members. Budgetary impact will be seen through advertising in the Las Cruces Sun News newspaper and local television and radio outlets; however, our success in recent efforts suggest that costly advertising may not be an effective or efficient outreach process.

Ultimately, the success or not of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces recruitment effort will be measured by the recruitment of families, students, and stakeholders through the process described here, specifically in drawing in a student population representative of the local district and larger community as a whole. On an annual basis, demographic data will be compiled for a cross-comparison to the local school district to ascertain the degree to which the school is drawing a representative sample population. This in addition to data collected in the overall evaluation of the outreach and recruitment plan.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data will permit adjustments and release of budget allocations for traditional advertising if the social and new media outlets fail to reach the expected recruitment targets or if the targeted representative demographic is not equally representative in the reach of planned advertising.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a prospective student outreach and recruitment plan, including action steps, timelines, responsible parties, and associated costs; • Describe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ how the plan is tailored to ensure equal access to the school ○ why the plan is likely to attract a student body that is demographically reflective of the local community and school district; • Describe how the school will annually evaluate the effectiveness of the outreach and recruitment efforts in ensuring equal access to the school and attracting a student body that is demographically reflective of the local community and school district and how the school will use that information to make adjustments to the outreach and recruitment plan; and • Explain why the recruitment and enrollment timelines are reasonable.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

G. (2) Provide a **complete, comprehensive, and cohesive** plan to implement a lottery process. Ensure all proposed procedures and policies comply with state statutes and **support equal access** to the proposed school; include how a wait list will be maintained. Please provide tentative timeframes or dates.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Lottery

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will conduct a transparent, open, and public lottery with application forms submitted prior to the second Monday in February. The date, time, and location of the lottery will be advertised on the school's web page, social media outlets, and posted through direct messaging to prospective families and students who have opted-in to our direct messaging service. The school may also announce the lottery through the traditional outlets cited in Section II, G.2 (above). The school will publicize the lottery date at all events we attend or wherever we have a presence for recruitment and outreach. The advertising and announcement of the open enrollment period, lottery, and waitlists is designed to be widespread through various media in order to provide equal access to the school's interest form, application process, lottery enrollment period, lottery process, and enrollment process. The lottery process will be open to the public and transparent for all stakeholders.

- The annual open enrollment period for available positions at Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be from October 1st through the second Monday in February.
- EA-LCS will announce its open enrollment period and provide an Interest Form that can be submitted online through the website or in person at the school site. Submission of the Interest Form officially places a student on the list for a position at Explore Academy. Parents and students should ensure that the information entered on the Interest Form is accurate.
- Parents of current Explore Academy - Las Cruces students have until January 31 annually to notify the school of their intent to return. From these responses, the school determines the number of available seats at grade levels 7-12. Grade 6 will have 120 seats available each year.
- Siblings of current EA-LCS students and children of EA-LCS employees will be accepted for the following school year. Parents of these students will be notified in October and must commit via an Interest Form with "sibling" or "employee" indicated on the submission no later than January 31. Failure to do this will result in the student being added to the general list of student applications which are subject to enrollment lotteries per grade level when necessary.
- Once all lottery-exempt students are accounted for, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will count the number of student seats remaining at all grade levels. This will occur during the first week of February annually and will determine the available seats for each grade level for the following academic year.
- At the close of business day on the second Monday of February annually, the Interest Form open enrollment list for each grade level will be locked and finalized. At this time, should Explore Academy - Las Cruces receive Interest Forms that exceed the available seats in a given grade level, then it must conduct a lottery to assign seats to students.
- If a lottery is necessary at any grade level, EA-LCS will enter all students from that grade level Interest Form list into a random lottery. The lottery will be held annually on the second Tuesday in February. It is conducted in an open forum and is open to the public. This process will be completed separately for any grade level for which Explore Academy - Las Cruces received more Interest Forms than there were available seats. For each grade level lottery, students are assigned a computer-generated, randomized number. This number is their position on the lottery.
- Students whose number corresponds to an available seat will receive an acceptance letter by the end of February annually. All students who are not accepted for enrollment through the lottery are placed

on grade level waiting lists. Any student who submits an Interest Form after the second Monday in February will be added to the grade level waiting lists in the order of Interest Form submission.

- All students accepted in February after the lottery process, both from the lottery process or from sibling and employee priority acceptance, have until April 1 annually to complete the enrollment process. This process requires that each accepted student submit the Enrollment Form, birth certificate, and proof of vaccinations to Explore Academy. If a family requires assistance with this process, they must contact the school immediately. If a student has not completed this enrollment process by April 1, they will forfeit their position immediately.
- If seats become available for any grade level after the initial February lottery and acceptance period, these seats will be given to students assigned to the applicable grade level waiting lists in numerical order. Students have one month to complete the enrollment process from the date of their acceptance letter, or they will forfeit their position.
- For families who did not attend the lottery and did not receive a seat, the Explore Academy - Las Cruces will contact the family by direct messaging, phone, or mail to let them know their rank on the waitlist, as well as the next steps if a seat opens up and their number is next on the list.
- Students on the waitlist who are offered an open seat will follow the same registration process as outlined above, including the two weeks to complete the registration paperwork.
- The process for enrolling students will follow this procedure until all the seats at Explore Academy - Las Cruces are filled and students have completed the registration process.
- If a student does not attend the first three days of school, EA-LCS will make three attempts to reach out to the family to determine if the student expects to attend Explore Academy - Las Cruces. If there is no response after three attempts or the student declines to attend the school, the seat will be offered to the next student on the waitlist.
- If a student leaves at any time during the school year, their seat may be offered to the student at the top of the waitlist. Explore Academy - Las Cruces may choose to continue its enrollment process throughout the school year contingency upon enrollment openings and current staffing.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will ensure all families have access to Explore Academy - Las Cruces through recruitment efforts and throughout the lottery process. Specifically, the school will ensure that our materials are available in the languages in which the families are most comfortable, as well as in the format (digital or hard copy) in which is most accessible. Additionally, the school will make a pointed effort to ensure the inclusion of homeless or transient families, in accordance with the McKinney-Vento Act.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a plan to implement a lottery admission process if necessary, include action steps, timelines, and responsible parties; • Describe each of the steps of the process to include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pre-lottery entry ○ Lottery ○ Post-lottery registration ○ Waitlist maintenance and entry; and • Describe how the lottery process supports equal access to the school.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

H. Legal Compliance.

H. (1) Provide a **current, clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** Conflict of Interest Policy that demonstrates an understanding of, **and capacity** to, meet the requirements of the law (NMSA 1978 § 22-8B-5.2(2011)). Provide a sample disclosure statement of any real or potential conflict of interest.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Conflict of Interest: The Conflict of Interest Policy and Disclosure Statement are included within the Governing Council By-laws, found in Appendix A.

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council Conflict of Interest Policy is in alignment with NMSA 22-8B-5.2 (Governing body conflicts of interest A-C) and meets all statutory requirements as outlined below:

A. A person shall not serve on the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council if the person and/or immediate family member of the person is an owner, agent of, contractor with or otherwise has a financial interest in a for-profit or nonprofit entity with which the charter school contracts directly for professional services, goods, or facilities. If this subsection is knowingly violated through the development of a contract between Explore Academy - Las Cruces and the person or the person's immediate family member, then the contract becomes voidable at the will of the Public Education Commission, the Public Education Department, or the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council. Individuals who knowingly violate the subsection may be liable as an individual by Explore Academy - Las Cruces for any financial damages caused by the conflict.

B. No member of the EA-LCS Governing Council or employee of Explore Academy - Las Cruces shall participate in selecting, awarding, or administering a contract with EA-LCS if a conflict of interest exists. A conflict of interest is present when a member or employee, or an immediate family member of a member of employee has a financial interest in a group with which Explore Academy - Las Cruces is considering contracting. If this conflict of interest is present, any contracts are voidable.

C. Members of the New Mexico Public Education Commission are not eligible for membership on the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council.

Application of Conflict-of-Interest Policy

Members of the Council shall not knowingly engage in any activities or transactions, which are in material conflict with their duties and obligations to Explore Academy - Las Cruces. In addition, Council members shall not conduct private business in a manner which places them at a special advantage because of their position with Explore Academy. The Council and staff of Explore Academy - Las Cruces shall follow the laws of New Mexico, the New Mexico Procurement Act and the New Mexico Governmental Conduct Act, as well as the policies and procedures of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces.

The Conflict of Interest Policy defines an immediate family member as one of the following individuals: significant other, mother, father, mother-in-law, father-in-law, daughter, son, daughter-in-law, son-in-law their reading of the Conflict of Interest Policy, as well as an opportunity for the Governing Council Member to identify and report any potential conflict of interest.

Disclosure statement within the Conflict of Interest Policy

"Describe any relationships, circumstances, or positions in which you or any immediate family members have that may be in conflict with the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Charter School Conflict of Interest Policy or result in a conflict of interest, as defined by the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Conflict of Interest Policy, and will ensure that the information stated above is true, to the best of my knowledge, and that I have reviewed and will follow the most current EA-LCS Conflict of Interest Policy."

Violations of the Conflicts of Interest Policy

If a member of the Governing Council or committee has reasonable cause to believe a member has failed to disclose actual or possible conflicts of interest, it shall inform the member of the basis for such belief and afford the member an opportunity to explain the alleged failure to disclose. If, after hearing the member's response and after making further investigation as warranted by the circumstances, the Governing Council or committee determines the member has failed to disclose an actual or possible conflict of interest, it shall take appropriate disciplinary and corrective action, including dismissal from the Council.

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governing Council will review and vote to accept the Conflict of Interest Policy during the first official Governing Council meeting after authorization and will review the policy at the beginning of each fiscal year. At all times, the Governing Council and EA-LCS school representatives, will and must be mindful that we uphold the principles of this Conflict of Interest Policy, conscious that holding a public office is also a public trust.

Nepotism

The Nepotism Policy is included within the Governing Council By-Laws, found in Appendix A.

The Nepotism Policy will be used to ensure that candidates for positions at Explore Academy- Las Cruces are not benefitting from nepotism over other highly qualified candidates. The Nepotism Policy is in alignment with NMSA 22-8B-10 ("Charter Schools; Employees") and meets all statutory requirements. Per statute, the Principal shall not employ immediate family members of the Head Administrator or Governing Council Members. However, the Governing Council may wave this nepotism rule. As a best practice, Explore Academy- Las Cruces is dedicated to employing the strongest candidates for teaching, leadership, and support positions at the school and will avoid hiring immediate family members of the Principal and members of the Governing Council.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	A complete response must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a governing body conflict of interest policy that includes action steps, timelines, and responsible parties; • Describe how the policy meets the requirements of NMSA 1978 § 22-8B-5.2(2011); and • Include all forms the governing body will or may be required to submit pursuant to the policy.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

I. Evidence of Partnership/Contractor relationship. (If Applicable.)

I.(1) If there is /are third party relationship(s) (partner organization, a contractor, etc.) that are essential to the existence of your charter school, governance, key instructional staff, or management functions, identify them (entity, person, contact information etc.). Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** description of all of those third-party relationships that are considered integral to accomplishing the mission of the proposed school. In your description, please demonstrate that you have a **complete understanding** of the legal implication of the relationship to the proposed school.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces does not have any third-party relationships that are essential to the existence of the school, and so for this reason, the founding team does not have evidence of a relationship, partnership, or contract to supply in this section.

Total Points Available	Expectations
8	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify any third-party relationships with specific, identified organizations that control or influence essential elements—including the existence, operation, curriculum, or instruction of the proposed charter school—that are required by a partner organization or any part of the application; • Describe, in detail, the relationships; • Describe why the relationships are essential or required, or how they control essential elements of the proposed charter school; • If any such relationships exist identify the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The specific, identified organizations ○ Contact information for that organization ○ Specific individuals in the organization that will be associated with the proposed school; and • Describe all legal implications of the essential/required relationships, including the legal benefits and responsibilities of each party.
<p>INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.</p>	

I.(2) If applicable, provide and attach as **Appendix D**, a proposed, **signed, clear, formal** agreement between the applicant and each third party relationship **OR** memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the applicant and each prospective third-party, delineating the appropriate responsibilities, activities, and costs of both sides.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces does not have any third-party relationships that are essential to the existence of the school, and so for this reason, we do not have an agreement to submit as evidence of a relationship, partnership, or contract in this section.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A response is only required if relationships were identified in questions I.(1)</p> <p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify all MOUs or formal agreements that are attached in Appendix D; • Include proposed formal agreements or MOUs that are signed in Appendix D; and • Identify the responsibilities, activities, and costs of both sides.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

J. Waivers.

J. (1) Identify all non-discretionary waivers that will be utilized and discretionary waivers that will be requested. For discretionary waivers, specifically identify statutes or state rules for which a waiver is requested. For all, describe how the waiver will support the proposed school’s plan; the description should **clearly demonstrate** how requested waivers **align with the proposed school’s mission and the educational program and curriculum**. For further information please see the following link: <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/information/waivers/>

NMSA 1978 § 22-8B-5(C) Waiver	Utilized	Description of how waiver will support school’s plan.
Individual class load	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Teaching load	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Length of school day	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Staffing pattern	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Subject areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Purchase of instructional materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Evaluation standards for school personnel	<input type="checkbox"/>	
School principal duties	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Drivers education	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Statute for which Waiver Requested under NMSA 1978 § 22-2-2.1	Description of how waiver will support school’s plan.	

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will not seek any waivers at this time, but may in the future depending on student and community need.

Total Points Available	Expectations
3	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify all non-discretionary waivers that will be utilized; • Describe how the non-discretionary waiver will support the school’s plan, including the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a specific description of how the waiver will be used and how the school’s practice will vary from the standard legal requirement ○ a specific explanation of how the waiver aligns to the school’s mission, educational program, and curriculum; • Identify all discretionary waivers that will be requested and the specific statutes or state rules for which the waivers will be requested; and • Describe how the discretionary waivers will support the school’s plan, including the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a specific description of how the waiver will be used and how the school’s practice will vary from the standard legal requirement ○ a specific explanation of how the waiver aligns to the school’s mission, educational program, and curriculum

- how the school will meet the requirements for being granted a discretionary waiver.

INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: [Click here to enter text.](#)

K. Transportation and Food.

K. (1) *If applicable*, state how the proposed school plans to offer transportation to its students. Provide a **clear description** of how student transportation needs will be met that are supported by the proposed budget.

For further information, please see the following link:

<https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/transportation/>.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy plans to utilize transportation services for students to provide as many students within the greater Las Cruces area access to the school’s model. Upon charter approval, the founding team will begin the process of exploring potential transportation service providers. Per state law, the school cannot receive transportation funding in its initial year of operation and must wait until such funding can be provided based on prior-year enrollment data.

For this section, it will be assumed that the school will be approved for transportation funding in its second year and will thus be able to offer transportation to its students beginning in year 2.

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 students in grades 6 to 10, there are two options: parent drop-off and bus transportation.

	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Buses	3	4	5	6
Student Riders	204	272	340	408
Total Enrollment	350	460	550	630
% Student Riders	58%	59%	62%	65%

Explore Academy plans to rent three buses per day beginning in its second year of operation. For subsequent years, the phasing in of additional routes is shown below through year five of the school’s operation. Based on an average capacity of 68 when considering different spacing allowances/constraints for

middle school and high school students, the following chart also shows the number of students that could be transported given the number of buses chartered per year.

	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Buses	3	4	5	6
Total Bus Cost	\$96,000	\$128,000	\$160,000	\$192,000

Based on estimates from local service providers, the cost per bus is approximately \$32,000 per year, resulting in the following cost breakdown for the planned number of buses:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will apply for transportation funding after year one to help cover/supplement the cost for student transportation based on prior-year enrollment.

Based on estimates from the NM Public Education Department’s transportation division, the supplemented amount and difference, to be covered from the operational budget, is shown in the table below. These estimates were derived from projected routes, distances, and ridership for each of the years in question.

As the school is not planning to purchase its own buses, it will contract with transportation service providers for use of buses each school year. The school’s transportation service provider will be selected based on quotes received from local vendors. Quotes will be solicited on an annual basis to ensure that the service provider selected remains competitive and financially viable within the school’s budget and

state transportation allocation. The school's insurance will cover liability for bus transportation. The school will also be responsible for paying for the required annual inspection of the buses in use.

	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Buses	3	4	5	6
Total Bus Cost	\$96,000	\$128,000	\$160,000	\$192,000
NM PED Funding	\$96,000	\$128,000	\$160,000	\$192,000
Difference	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Within the realm of student transportation, the school and its selected service provider will follow all state statutes that pertain to the transportation of students to and from school. The school and its student ridership will abide by any additional policies and procedures as set forth by the transportation service

provider. Students who ride the bus will comply with the school's student handbook as it pertains to student conduct and student discipline. As needed, the school will develop additional policies above and beyond what is described in state statute and within the catalog of policies of the transportation service provider.

To identify student needs, the school will collect transportation data within its enrollment process. In the school's enrollment form, a required question will ask families whether they will require bus transportation. From this filtered list of enrolled students, the school's administration will generate a list of addresses to be plotted on a map from which the routes will be configured based on the number of buses available for the specific year in question.

In its survey of the Las Cruces area, the founding team has identified Las Cruces Public Schools bus service as a potential partner for bus service. This relationship will be explored as EA-LCS moves into operation in year one.

The timeline below shows the steps in implementing the transportation plan:

Description of Step	Timeline
Investigation potential service providers	Fall 2020
Applying for state transportation funding	Fall 2020
Service contract negotiation and approval	Spring 2021 (upon approval of state funding)
Establishment and approval of transportation policies	June 1, 2021
Identification of student transportation needs	June 1, 2021
Establishment of travel routes and pickup/drop-off points	July 1, 2021

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A response is only required if the school plans to offer regular transportation either for daily transportation to/from school OR for transportation to/from school specific activities and events that are a necessary part of the mission. These are awarded as “preference points” if the school plans to provide to and from school transportation to all students. All schools must be prepared to meet IEP transportation requirements.</p> <p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a plan for establishing transportation services at the school including specific action steps, timelines responsible parties, and associated costs that address the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identifying equipment purchase or contracting needs ○ Identifying hiring and or contracting needs ○ Hiring or contracting ○ Establishing training needs and inspection process needs ○ Establishing travel routes and pickup/drop off points ○ Establishing transportation policies and practices ○ Identifying student transportation needs; • Identify how the school will fund the transportation plan costs; and • Identify all, but at least one, specific entities or organizations that have been identified as potential partners or vendors for these services and describe all steps that have been taken to create a relationship, establish a relationship, or develop a partnership to provide these services.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

K.(2) *If applicable*, provide a plan to offer food services to students (e.g., contracting with approved/appropriate food service vendors, providing free and reduced lunch). Provide a **clear description** of how food services will be provided that is supported by the proposed budget.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Food Services

Explore Academy - Las Cruces is committed to establishing a food service program for students to provide them with well-balanced meals that will contribute to their health and well-being. We understand that a nutritious meal is important for the following reasons:

- Promoting student nutrition
- Encouraging healthier food choices
- Increasing the availability of food
- Adhering to science-based nutrition standards
- Ensuring students receive nutritious food
- Hunger cannot be a limiting factor in promoting a quality education

The school's meal program will be managed in accordance with the USDA National School Lunch and Breakfast Program (NSLBP) and The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) After School 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.

In the establishment of its lunch program, the founding team will create a system for student meal accounts. These accounts will track student ordering and meal delivery. At the conclusion of each week, students will be sent the menu for the following week. For a period of three days, prior to the start of the week in question, students will have the opportunity to order for the days of their choosing based on the menu items offered. Meal counts will be tabulated at the start of each week based on student input, and the associated lunch count will be sent to the food service provider for meal planning for the week ahead.

During the lunch period on the day in question, a lunch staff member will check off student names as they receive their meals. The charge for meals will then be tabulated every two weeks with a resulting report sent to both students and parents when student meal accounts are debited. It is through this record that monthly state food service reporting will be efficiently completed in order to ensure that the school receives reimbursement for students who qualify for the NSLP.

The school will not budget for this expenditure, as this service will be funded entirely through student/parent funding, however the school will be required to cover the cost for meal payments until reimbursements for programming from the government are received.

The school's head administrator will manage the food service programs with support from the cafeteria staff (educational assistants) that manage the food service environment for students. The school's flex coordinator will provide additional management and oversight for the school's lunch program given their focus on overseeing student flex periods.

Implementation of the student account program as described above is dependent on student/parent commitment as no student is required to participate. 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.

At the time of this application, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will not incorporate a kitchen into its design master plan but will instead rely on the food service provider to provide the food, serving apparatuses (warmers, coolers, etc.), utensils, and serving dishes. The food service provider will deliver prior to the start of the first lunch period and will pick up the food service containers prior to the end of school each day. The food service provider will maintain temperature records for food temperature at the time the food leaves the kitchen (out for delivery) while the school lunch staff will maintain a separate temperature record for the temperature of food when it arrives at the school site (prior to service). The school staff will be responsible for maintaining a food service environment in accordance with the department of health food service guidelines.

In the area of food service, two options exist depending on the food service provider selected. If the food service provider includes the service of food in its program, the school will utilize the servers provided by the food service provider. In the event that food service provider does not provide service as part of its package, the school will seek out training for its support staff (EAs) in order to provide them the appropriate food service/food handling certification prior to the beginning of their service.

The school will maintain its food service environment and health permit in accordance with city and state law. The school's lunch staff and custodian will work to ensure that the food service environment is more than compliant with state law in maintaining an environment conducive to safe food service and consumption. The school will remain receptive to all food service inspections as required by the food service provider, City of Las Cruces, State of New Mexico, and Public Education Department. In addition, the school's administration will conduct a monthly inspection of the food service environment in accordance with the documented guidelines of the New Mexico Environmental Department.

Upon approval of its charter application, the founding team will begin the application process for new USDA National School Lunch and Breakfast Program (NSLBP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP) After School Lunch Program. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be responsible for all reporting requirements.

Further, after charter application approval, the founding team will begin to establish a relationship with its potential food service provider. At the time of this writing, the founding team has evaluated the potential for food service providers through the Association of Charter School Education Services (ACES), who has established contracts with state-approved vendors, specifically in the Las Cruces area. One such entity approved through ACES is Cravings Catering, a local provider in the Las Cruces area with an existing contract with ACES.

Upon application approval, the founding team will commence further discussion with ACES-approved food service providers. In the event that the above-mentioned food service provider does not meet the needs of the school food service program, the founding team will initiate the Request for Proposal (RFP) process to contract with any PED approved food vendor.

A timeline for the establishment of the school's food service program is shown below:

Event	Timeline
Investigate potential food service providers including ACES-approved providers	Fall 2019
Submit applications for the USDA NSLP and NSLBP	Fall 2019
Survey parents for interest in a food service program (both breakfast and lunch) to ensure its viability in the first year (and the meeting of a minimum meal count as required by the food service provider)	Spring 2020

Hired staff receive food handling service training (as required)	Spring 2020
Food service area is inspected to ensure that it is equipped with all required infrastructure (hand wash station, electrical outlets, etc.)	Spring 2020
Begin RFP process (as required) or finalize contract with ACES for approved food service provider	Spring 2020
With the establishment of the school's student information system, create the school's student account system for tracking student ordering, meal delivery, and student balances	Summer 2020

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A response is only required if the school plans to offer food services at the school. These are awarded as "preference points" if the school plans to participate in free and reduced lunch programs.</p> <p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a plan for establishing food services at the school, including specific action steps, timelines responsible parties, and associated costs that address the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identifying equipment purchase or contracting needs ○ Identifying hiring and/or contracting needs ○ Hiring or contracting ○ Establishing training and inspection process needs ○ Identifying and completing relevant program application and reporting requirements; • Identify all federal and state food service programs the school plans to participate in; • Identify how the school will fund the food service plan costs prior to receiving any applicable reimbursements; and • Identify all, but at least one, specific entities or organizations that have been identified as potential partners or vendors for these services and describe all steps that have been taken to create a relationship, establish a relationship, or develop a partnership to provide these services.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

L. Facilities/ School Environment.

Applicants must complete the required Facilities Master Plan Ed. Spec. Checklist form, referenced below as III M. (1), and submit it to the Public Schools Facilities Authority no later than **the published deadline in the month of April**. The Facilities Master Plan/Ed. Spec. Checklist form can be accessed on the PSFA website at: http://www.nmpsfa.org/legacy/pdf/planning/Con2_PSFA_Ed_Specs-FMP_Contract%20Rev_03-05-15.pdf

L.(1) **Complete, submit, and attach as Appendix E**, the Public Schools Facilities Authority (PSFA) approval of the proposed school's Facilities Master Plan Ed / Spec Checklist.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces' Public Schools Facilities Authorization (PSFA) approval of the Master Plan is attached in Appendix E.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	A complete response must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate the applicant submitted a Facilities Master Plan to PSFA by the deadline; and • Demonstrate the PSFA has approved the applicant's Facilities Master Plan.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

L. (2) Provide evidence that you have researched potential facilities/properties and **identified at least one appropriate, viable facility/property in the targeted geographic location**. Include evidence of a **clear plan** to prepare the facility/property in time for the proposed school's opening, including a reasonable estimate and description of capital outlay needs and how the project will be funded.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

The founding team for Explore Academy - Las Cruces has conducted an extensive survey of the greater Las Cruces area in order to find a facility with the potential to both successfully promote its academic model and to grow with the school as it expands its enrollment over the initial years of its charter. As facility requirements are one of the most pressing concerns for the successful launch of a new charter school, the founding team has devoted considerable attention in ensuring that a potential Explore Academy - Las Cruces will have a multitude of options for its facility needs upon charter approval.

In the time leading up to the submission of this application, the founding team has worked extensively with local real estate experts to research, locate, and evaluate both existing structures as well as parcels of land on which a potential campus could be constructed. From this research, a number of potential buildings and parcels have been identified.

In addition, upon approval, the founding team will engage with the Las Cruces Public School district to evaluate its willingness to engage in a partnership over any potential existing educational facilities. These potential options will be included in the evaluation of potential facility solutions.

Upon charter application approval, the founding team will move to re-evaluate and re-compile the final list of facility options in order to provide the governing council with all viable facility options so that the council may act decisively and in the interest of time in order to have a facility ready for the start of school the following year.

Within the timeframe of the planning year prior to charter application approval and the start of school the following year, the founding team and governing council will work to meet the following objectives in order to ensure that a facility is available prior to the intended start of school:

- October 1st: selection of facility (existing structure) or facility site (for construction)
- January 1st: approval of all entitlements including design, zoning, permits, etc.
- February 1st: begin renovations (existing structure) or construction (new construction)
- July 15th: completing of phase I of renovations or construction necessary to achieve E-Occupancy certification for school use for the year one of school operation

A date of July 15th allows three weeks for staff to set up the school (including classrooms) to be ready for the start of school in early August. In the event that the above timeline is delayed, the founding has already explored options for temporary educational spaces (portables/modulars) utilizing local modular companies and/or the New Mexico Public Schools Facility Authority and their availability of temporary school facility solutions. Such options would be temporary in nature and utilized only as long as absolutely required until the school's permanent site is ready for student occupancy.

In the area of facility development (and the funding of said development), the founding team has anticipated three primary pathways through which a viable and appropriate facility would be ready for student occupancy prior to the predicted school start date:

- Utilization of an existing school with E-Occupancy status: the school could potentially utilize an existing school facility which possesses the required administrative and educational subdivisions and E-Occupancy certification
 - Timeline: The EA-LCS founding team has conducted much of the preliminary ahead of this application. The expectation is that identification and securing of the final site will occur in the summer 2019.

- Owner investment in facility in order to achieve E-Occupancy: the school could potentially enter into a rental agreement with an existing building owner with the owner investing his/her own capital in improving the building in order to provide the school a facility with the required educational and administrative spaces along with the required E-Occupancy certification
 - Timeline: The EA-LCS founding team has secured a relationship with an investment group to fund the selected site. The expectation is that this process will be completed in the summer 2019 as the site agreements are finalized.
- Investor acquisition of an existing facility or land in order to renovate or construct a facility to achieve E-Occupancy status: the school could enter into a rental agreement with an investor who would purchase a building/land in order to renovate/construct a school facility and rent the resulting school facility to the school
 - Timeline: The EA-LCS founding team is working to identify a final, appropriate locating and facility with summer 2019 as the target for completion of this and all processes and agreements on the school's home.

While the three scenarios above vary in their level of complexity, all three are viable options that have been explored by the founding team at the time of the submission of this application, and will be further explored by the founding team, school administration, and governing council upon charter application approval. In the case of the third scenario, the founding team has established documented support from EPR as a potential investor to renovate or construct a school facility. The governing council will ultimately select the scenario that is best for successful launch of the school as well as the long-term financial viability of the school's program.

The founding team and governing council will follow all state regulations in the establishment of a rental/purchase agreement with a building in order to satisfy the requirements as set forth in NMSA 1978 § 22-8B-4.2 including but not limited to the facility meeting all state adequacy requirements and the rental agreement requiring the building owner/landlord to maintain state adequacy standards at no cost to the school.

As the school readies itself for its initial launch, and in all subsequent years, the founding team and school administration will apply to the Public Schools Capital Outlay Council for lease assistance funding in order to provide supplemental financial assistance to the school in paying its annual lease.

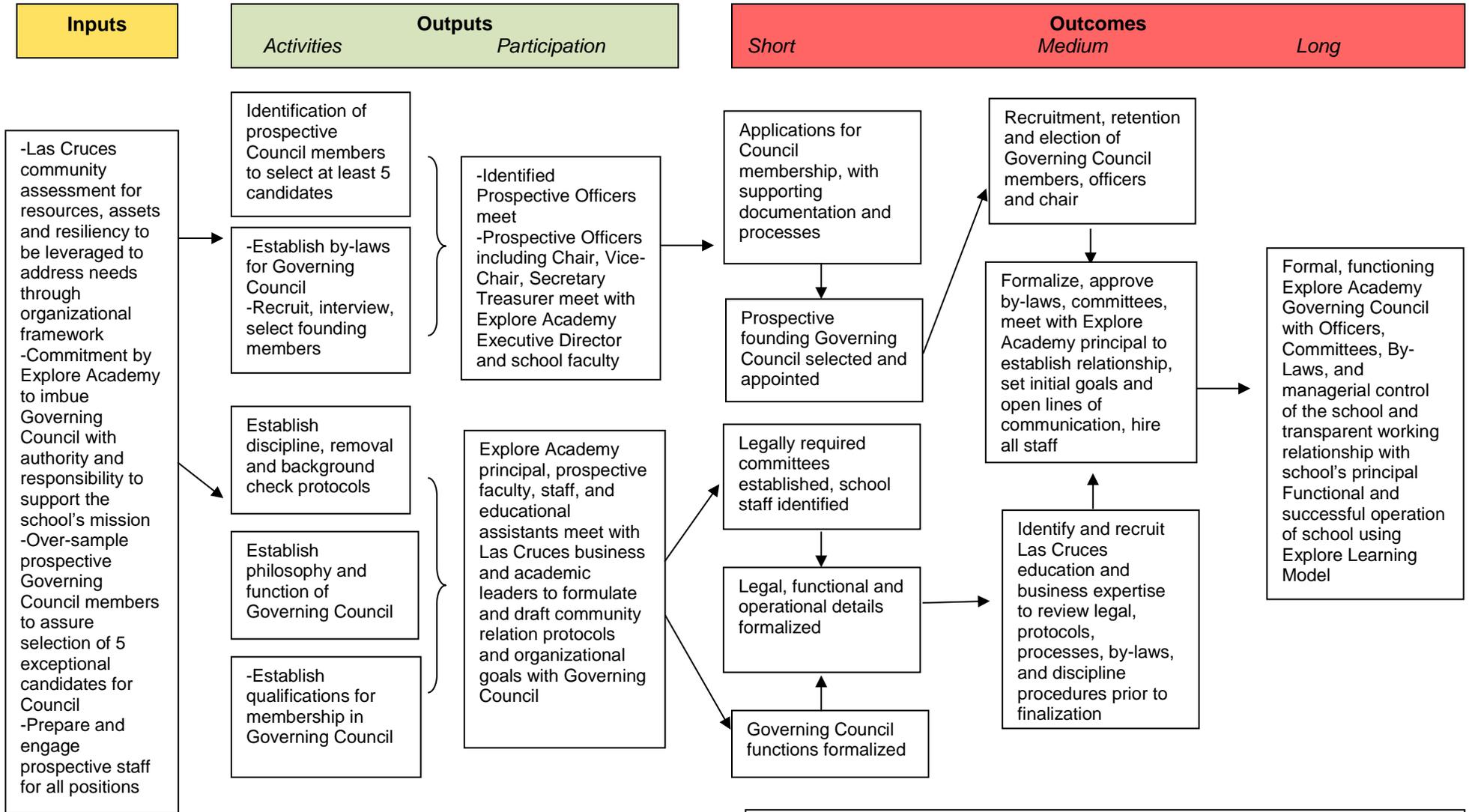
As an example of a property identified at the time of the submission of this application, the founding team has evaluated the following properties as potential sites in which the school may ultimately reside:

- 1655 W Amador Ave, Las Cruces, NM 88005
- 106 Miranda St, Las Cruces, NM 88001

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate the applicant has done the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conducted outreach and research to understand if there are public facilities that are available, appropriate, and viable ○ Researched multiple facilities or properties in the targeted geographic location to identify all facilities or properties that are available, appropriate, and viable ○ Identified whether or not each potential property will meet the requirements of NMSA 1978 § 22-8B-4.2, including occupancy, adequacy, and ownership; • Identify at least one potential facility or property that is appropriate, viable, and located in the targeted geographic location; • Identify a plan that would enable the applicant to prepare the facility/property to meet the facility needs of the proposed school in time for the proposed school's opening date, include specific action steps, timelines, responsible parties, and capital outlay needs; and • Identify how the project to prepare the facility will be funded.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

Program: Organizational Framework - Logic Model

Situation: Explore Academy seeks a new Charter School entity in Las Cruces, NM with proven organizational framework



Assumptions: Explore Academy has identified as a series of unique, non-traditional approaches to creating a community-responsive, stakeholder-based Governing Council and school staff. Membership will reflect the wide-ranging diversity of Las Cruces and its assets and needs.

External Factors: Unexpected critical needs arise; assets and resources impacted by economy and politics, business leadership relocation, stakeholders and volunteers overwhelmed by personal and business workload and responsibilities. Explore Academy response is a wide catchment area and process to anticipate challenges.

III. Financial Framework

A. School size.

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

A.(1) Academic Year	Number of Students	Grade Levels	Student/Teacher Ratio
Year 1	240	6-7	18:1
Year 2	350	6-8	15:1
Year 3	460	6-9	16:1
Year 4	550	6-10	16:1
Year 5	630	6-11	16:1
At Capacity (Enrollment Cap)	700	6-12	16:1

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the anticipated number of students for each of the first five years and “at capacity”, based on the long-term strategic plan; Identify the grade levels requested to be served in each of the first five years (phase in plan) and “at capacity”, based on the long term strategic plan; and Identify the student/teacher ratio (not student/staff ratio) that aligns with the number of students served, grade levels, and staffing plan for each of the first five years and “at capacity”, based on the long term strategic plan.
<p>INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.</p>	

B. Budgets.

Please note that the PEC will ask the applicants to respond to questions on the budget during the Community Input Hearing. The applicants may have the personnel with the technical expertise with them at the table (and *should* have these people with them if these people were primarily responsible for drafting a section). However, the applicants themselves should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of all areas of the budget.

B.(1) Provide, and attach as **Appendix F**, a completed 910B5 State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) Computation Revenue Estimate Worksheet, using appropriate values and computations for each year of the five-year budget plan (use projected unit value and for special education, please budget the local district’s percentage of special education unless the school has a sufficient justification for why it will have a larger population). Ensure that your worksheet **clearly demonstrates your understanding of, and your capacity to implement**, New Mexico public school funding.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy-Las Cruces has completed the required 910B5 State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) Computation Revenue Estimate Worksheet, and it is attached in Appendix F.

Total Points Available	Expectations
8	A complete response must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a complete 910B5 Worksheet in Appendix F; • Use appropriate values and computations in each year; • Use projected unit value; and • Budget the correct special education percentage based on the local special education population, unless the school has a sufficient justification for why it will have a larger population (provide justification, if applicable).
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

B.(2) Provide, and attach as **Appendix G**, a proposed five-year budget plan, based on the 910B5 SEG Revenue Worksheet that clearly supports the proposed school’s mission and aligns with the proposed school’s five-year growth plan, including staffing, facilities, educational program, and services. Ensure that your draft budget clearly demonstrates the financial capacity and long-term sustainability of the proposed school (consider your growth plan, including staffing, facilities, educational program, mission etc.).

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy-Las Cruces five-year budget plan (910B5 SEG Revenue Worksheet) has been attached to Appendix G.

Total Points Available	Expectations
12	A complete response must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a five-year budget plan in Appendix G that is based on the 910B5 SEG Revenue Worksheet from Appendix F; • Support the proposed school’s mission and all elements of the proposed program laid out in the application; and • Align with the proposed school’s five-year growth plan.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

B.(3) Provide a clear, comprehensive, cohesive, and reasonable budget narrative that explains basic assumptions, how those were determined based on reliable sources, and identifies all priorities that are consistent with the proposed school's mission, educational program, staffing, and facility. The budget narrative demonstrates the proposed school's thorough understanding of the budget and of budgeting.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

In projecting a five-year budget, the founding team utilized specific local district (Las Cruces Public Schools) financial adjustments, including T&E, TCI, and At-Risk Index, to provide annual operating budget estimates as accurate as possible.

The 910b5 worksheets align with the school's proposed student enrollment plan as described within this application, with the appropriate growth measures put in for each year's increase in enrollment as well as the prior-year funding in the Basic Program calculation based on the previous year's enrollment projections. For both the first and second year, the 910b5 uses the projected enrollment of 240 students as the predicted enrollment (first year) and prior-year enrollment (second year).

Each of the resulting five-year budgets has been populated according to the amount calculated in the operational budget according to the 910b5 spreadsheet. From there, the staffing is entered according to the school's staffing plan (section D.(3)). In addition to this, the specific rationale for each section is provided below.

Staffing - Teachers

The focus of Explore Academy-Las Cruces' (EA-LCS) budget is on the staffing of teachers to allow for both the level of diversity required for the implementation of the school's mission and vision in establishing an innovative curriculum based on student choice and maintaining class sizes appropriate for the Explore Learning model's seminar focus.

As described in the staffing plan (section D.(3)), the number of teachers per content area increases each year as new grade levels are phased in. Within this projection, the table below displays the total budgeted for teachers based on an average salary of \$53,000 per teacher (function 1000). Also displaying enrollment, the table includes the enrollment projection based on the phasing in of new grades over the first five years, and thus calculates the pupil-teacher ratio. As a goal within its seminar structure, EA-LCS will seek to limit class sizes to twenty (20) students at a maximum.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Teachers	13	23	28	34	40
Teacher Salaries	\$689,000	\$1,219,000	\$1,484,000	\$1,802,000	\$2,120,000
Students	240	350	460	550	630
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	18.5	15.2	16.4	16.2	15.75

Staffing - Academic Support

Within its budget projections, the school intends to staff the school with appropriate support personnel to best implement the establishment of the Explore Learning model. Within this, educational assistants function as tutors to help provide supplemental instructional support when students are outside of class

(during flex periods). Starting with one educational assistant in its first year, the school expands by adding one educational assistant each year across the five years projected (function 1000).

EA-LCS will seek to add additional tutoring staff through the use of Title I funds, however, the estimate shown does not include any predicted Title I funding to remain conservative in its estimates. In the event that the school receives Title I-funding, this funding will be devoted to the staffing of additional tutors each year to help assist with student support outside of the classroom.

Staffing - Special Education

Based on its budget calculation, the school is estimating a 10% special education population. Based on this estimate, the following table shows estimates for special education enrollment and staffing for the first five years. Staffing estimates are based on teacher salaries averaging \$53,000 (parallel to teacher salary estimates described above). Further, the amount of ancillary services is provided as an estimate based on the number of students (shown under function 2100 as "Specialists - Contracted"). Prior to its opening year, the school will apply for funding through IDEA-B and as such it is anticipated that at least a percentage of ancillary services will be covered by IDEA-B funding.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Students	240	350	460	550	630
Sp Ed Students	24	35	46	55	63
Spec Ed Staff	1	2	2	2	3
Ancillary	\$20,000	\$30,000	\$40,000	\$50,000	\$60,000

Staffing - Administration

Explore Academy-Las Cruces' tutoring system for students outside of class will be managed by two staff members over the course of the five years projected. It will start as a dual role for the school activities director in the first two years of the school, with a separate staffing position created for this role beginning in the third year of operation.

For the first two years, the school will employ one counselor for social/emotional and academic support. This position is set at \$53,000 to begin (aligned with the teacher average). In subsequent years, additional counseling staff will be hired on as enrollment increases. As seen in the staffing plan, the school has anticipated the staffing of a third counselor/registrar.

For management of the school's information technology, including data reporting, the school has created a staff position for IT director. This position is shown in all five years of the budget plan.

For management of student and campus safety, beginning in the third year, the budget shows the addition of a security official.

For the management of the school's front office and clerical functions for the school as a whole, an administrative assistant is inserted into the budget for all five projected school years.

In the area of school administration, the school will employ a head administrator as the sole administrative official for the first two years of the school's operation. The salary for this individual is set at \$84,000, meeting the minimum requirement for a head administrator at the middle school level. As the school incorporates high school grades, beginning in the third year, the head administrator salary increases to \$96,000 to align it with the position of a head administrator at the high school level. At this time, an assistant principal is shown in the budget. In the fifth year, the school adds a second assistant principal into the budget.

Employee Benefits

As a whole, the following supplemental deductions are included in employee benefits. Within the budget projections, it is assumed that all employees elect to receive full benefit packages and thus the resulting estimate is an over projection.

From the list of benefits paid, the following table show the estimate percentages, based on total income, which are used within the calculations provided for each area of staffing (instructional, administrative, support, etc.). When combining these percentages, the total benefits estimation is roughly 40% based on total salary, and as such, the 40% calculation for benefits calculations for all staffing categories as show in the budget. These estimates have been verified by a licensed school business manager with whom the founding team has worked to project budget estimates most accurately.

Benefit Category	Percentage of Total Salary
Educational Retirement	14.2%
ERA - Retiree Health	2.1%
FICA	6.2%
Medicare	1.45%
Health and Medical Premiums	13.2%
Life	0.1%
Dental	1%
Vision	0.1%
Disability	0.1%
Unemployment Compensation	2%
Workers Compensation	0.02%
Total Percentage Based on Income	40%

Professional Development

Included in the budget is professional development to account for the teacher mentoring program and the stipends for the school's mentor teachers. As the school grows, more money is allocated to this funding area with the anticipation that the school will apply for and receive Title II funding to further supplement its efforts in this area.

Facility

The lease assistance estimate per MEM is calculated at the current rate at the time of the writing of this application (\$736), with the remaining amount for the annual lease debt service to be paid from the general operations fund (shown within function 2600).

As the school phases in its enrollment, the prospective facility will be developed in phases to align with the school's enrollment growth, thus allowing the school to take on a higher lease payment as new phases of the facility are developed and more square feet can be utilized.

Within this pattern, the prediction as shown in the five-year budget outlook shows the following for lease payment, lease assistance, and the amount needed to supplement from operational:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Total Lease Payment	\$240,000	\$348,000	\$456,000	\$540,000	\$600,000
Lease Assistance	\$176,640	\$176,640	\$257,600	\$338,560	\$404,800
Amount Supplemented from Operational	\$63,360	\$171,360	\$198,400	\$201,440	\$195,200

In terms of property/liability insurance (also within function 2600), based on conventions used by school business officials, the range of \$90 to \$120 per student is used as an estimate. For the budget projections, a rate of \$110 per student is utilized for each year to calculate insurance costs to the school.

In regard to facility maintenance (also within function 2600), the budget shows an increasing amount allocated for general maintenance (plumbing, HVAC, etc.). It is assumed, as the school facility will be a renovation or new construction, that there will not be a strong need for facility maintenance over the course of the first five years, however this fund does include landscaping services as well, which is an expected expense in maintaining the school grounds through a contracted vendor.

Utilities

As an estimate, the budget utilizes estimates based on comparable facility sizes (aligned with the facility phase-in plan) and average usage based on total square footage. Based on this calculation, the following averages (per year) are utilized throughout the five-year budget plan. These estimates (function 2600) have been verified by a licensed school business manager with whom the founding team has worked to project budget estimates most accurately.

	Electrical	Natural Gas	Water/Sewage
Price per Sq Ft	\$1/sq ft	\$0.25/sq ft	\$0.25/sq ft

For communication services (phone and internet), the estimate is per users rather than per square footage. In this way, as the school expands to incorporate a higher bandwidth to support additional users, the total cost for communication increases. Within the budget projections, the calculation assumes a cost of \$50 per (student) user per year.

Supplies/Software

The budget plan shows an increasing need for various supplies to support the school's instructional and administrative operations as the school's enrollment is projected to grow over the course of five years. Each area is described below:

- **Function 1000 (Instruction):** the budget has projected an increasing amount of supplies needed to support instruction across an increasing student population size. While it is expected that the school will receive state funding for instructional materials, the budgets assumes no additional funding in this area outside of what is shown in the operational budget.

In support of the school's curriculum (through its mission), the budget sets aside a considerable amount to provide teachers with funding to create the diversity of flavors that will help promote and support teacher creativity in engaging students with the school's choice-based curriculum. As a curriculum that is constructed around teacher creativity and strong student engagement through themed-based teaching, teachers require funding to bring the Explore Learning model to reality

- Function 2200 (Instructional Support Services): the budget shows an increasing allocation to cover costs associated with required state testing
- Function 2400 (General Administration Support Services): the budget shows an increasing allocation to cover costs associated with administrative resources
- Function 2500 (Central Services): the annual fee of the school's student information system is included
- Function 2600 (Operation and Management of Plant): the budget shows an increasing amount dedicated to facility-related supplies (custodial supplies, etc.) to accommodate the increasing size of the campus as more square footage is utilized

Other Services

Aside from the ancillary services described above for special education, there are three main service categories included in the budget:

- Function 2300 (General Administration): this area delegates money to fund the annual audit purchases to analyze the school's financial operations. No amount is budgeted for this service in the school's first year.
- Function 2400 (Support Services - School Administration): services utilized within this area are shown for the potential contract with the Association of Charter School Education Services (ACES), through which the school is presumed to maintain its relationship in maintaining the Explore Learning academic model. The services within this category would include data analysis and reporting (academic, enrollment, teacher evaluation, at-risk, special education/SAT/504, etc.), new teacher training, maintenance of the school's curricular resources (exit exams, curriculum maps, etc.), new student registration, scheduling and student registration, etc. Within this area, professional development will be offered to EA-LCS teaching staff members. It is for this reason that there is less professional development budgeted under Function 1000 for the initial years of the school's operation.
- Function 2500 (Central Services): this category includes services related to business management services through the school's contracted business management office as well as data reporting services to assist the school in its state (STARS) reporting and ensure compliance in this area

Transportation

The school will to apply to transportation funding prior to the start of its second year of operation. Transportation estimates as received by the state (based on estimated student riders, routes, and distances) are assumed to cover the cost of transportation services, and as such there is a net zero budget allocation. As a result, no transportation expenditures are shown.

Food Service

As stated in the Food Service narrative, it is assumed that interest will exist for the school to offer food services. The cost of this program will be covered by student payments (students who pay for lunch) and

the reimbursement rates for the National School Lunch Program. As such, there is a net zero budget allocation and no food service expenditures are shown.

Grant Funding

After approval of its charter application, the founding team will immediately start seeking out grant funding sources to help supplement startup expenses and provide overall programmatic support for the school based on the successful track record of its academic model. One such grant will be the federal Charter School Program grant, which could include an award amount over \$800,000 spread across the first three years of the school's planning and operational phases. No grant funding is shown in the budget projection as this source of funding is not an assured source of revenue, however, in the event that the charter application is approved, the founding team will seek out CSP monies (as well as other grant funding) for basic startup expenses to include student and administrative furniture, technology startup (loaner Chromebook devices for students while at school), professional development and training for staff, and programmatic funds for the school's educational programs, specifically those that require heavier spending such as science, physical education, and fine arts.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain basic assumptions; • Identify reliable sources for each assumption; • Include priorities consistent with the proposed school's mission; • Include priorities consistent with the proposed school's educational program; • Include priorities consistent with the proposed school's staffing; and • Include priorities consistent with the proposed school's facility.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

B. (4) Provide a **clear and meaningful** description of what budget adjustments will be made to meet financial budget and cash-flow challenges, or to address the failure to receive any anticipated funding sources. Ensure that your explanations provide **clear evidence** that the adjustments are viable and realistic. The suggested budget control strategies demonstrate **capacity** to manage the budget successfully.

Provide a narrative description of how the proposed school will modify the budget when there are students with special education needs currently attending the proposed school, but under the funding formula, the proposed school will only receive additional funding during the next school year.

Provide a narrative description of how the proposed school will address the budget in the event that the proposed school has budgeted for more students, based on early enrollment, than actually enroll in the proposed school at the beginning of the proposed school year.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will operate with a budget which will allow for flexibility in the event that unforeseen expenses come to exist or in the event that enrollment is below the expected level.

There are two components to this level of capability: adequate planning and operational flexibility.

Component One: Adequate Planning

There is no better substitute than effective and proactive planning. As such, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be able to meet unforeseen financial challenges through its budget planning process via a multi-faceted approach:

- Development and implementation of a conservative, yet strategic annual budget
- Establishment of systems for utilizing school information in real-time
- Utilizing the financial expertise of members of the school community
- Responding to challenges with adjustments in policy and/or procedure to better streamline and improve the school's financial operations.

Developing the Annual Budget

Each spring semester, school leadership will supply information to the school's business manager on any staffing changes that are predicted for the upcoming school year. The school business manager will use this information, combined with the lease payment projection for the upcoming year, predicted salary schedule, anticipated changes to employee benefit cost, predicted utilities expenses (based on modeling of the previous year's expenses), predicted contracts that are to be added or renewed, predicted award amounts for state and federal programs (Title I, IDEA-B, etc.), and other school-related expenses to develop a budget draft for review by school leadership for any revision or discussion prior to its presentation to the Governing Council.

Budget estimates at this point will be conservative and over-estimating costs that may increase due to inflation or, as new costs arise, assuming these costs to be 10% higher than expected (as in the case of new employees, assume that new employees elect to subscribe to all available benefits available to them).

This draft budget will be presented to the Governing Council at its next scheduled meeting with all assumptions and notes properly documented as justification for the expenses shown. Within the review process, proper diligence will be exercised around any spending compliance requirements for federal and state revenues, and as such, the budget will be otherwise developed with a broad

commitment to using public funds in the most prudent manner possible to remain in alignment with the school's mission and vision. After review, discussion, and edits as necessary, the draft budget will be approved by the Council. This approval must take place prior to June 1 so as to allow the school's business manager to submit the budget to the state within an appropriate timeframe so as to meet guidelines set forth by the New Mexico Public Education Department. As a public entity, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will treat documents such as the approved budget as public record, and such documents will be made available upon request in line with any other standard public records request.

Establishment of Efficient Systems

In working with an annual budget and making adjustments as needed within the school year it is essential that the leadership for EA-LCS have information that is accurate and updated in real-time. Leading up to the 40-Day Count, where funding changes are adjusted based on student enrollment, it is essential that the school's administration work to maintain the school's enrollment so as to commit to, at a minimum, the projected enrollment for the 40th day of school.

In addition, as the school year proceeds and funding has been set (after the 40-Day Count), the school's business manager will deliver reports twice per month to the principal to maintain oversight on a fluid budget. These reports will include cash flow, bank balance, and budget spending progress based on the recent data available. While a similar monthly report will be provided to the Governing Council at each monthly Council meeting, the biweekly report described above is intended to provide the principal with an updated assessment of the school's current financial standing. It is from these analyses that spending adjustments, if any, will be considered.

In addition to above, as the school spends money for programs for which it will receive reimbursement, it is essential the school's administration and business manager work together seamlessly in cooperation to ensure that data is provided to state and federal agencies as efficiently as possible to ensure the timely reimbursement of funds.

Utilizing Financial Expertise

As a school with a wealth of community resources at its disposal, it will be essential for the school's administration to utilize members of its school community to aid during challenging financial periods. This starts with the school's business manager, with whom the principal will work closely. In addition to that, the school's Governing Council, which will have members with financial experience, can and will be utilized as needed.

As the founding team has extensive experience in starting and operating a charter school, EA-LCS leadership may use their experience as needed.

Pursuing Flexible Relationships in Financing

As a school who is just starting operations, in the event that financial challenges present themselves, EA-LCS would look to defer certain costs to future years when enrollment or finances were more stable, re-negotiating with vendors contracts to delay or otherwise push out expenses to a later time when the school may otherwise be able to afford the services. The school will also seek out opportunities to partner with other charters schools and potentially share costs for services that lend themselves to being coordinated across multiple charters.

Component Two: Operational Flexibility

In the event that financial challenges present themselves within the school year, the school will have 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.

The budget for EA-LCS demonstrates increased flexibility in funding with each successive year, thus providing the school more room for adjustment as needed. The first year, however, becomes the most difficult and would also be the year in which the school's anticipated enrollment projection would not be met.

Teaching Staff Flexibility

For the first year, the school's budget is projecting:

- 3 teachers for each of the following content areas: math, English/language arts, and science
- 3 teachers for social studies
- 1 teacher for physical education

As depicted in the chart below, the following describes the number of sections per teacher per grade level:

	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4	Period 5	Period 6	Period 7
Math 1	Elective	6th Gr	6th Gr	PREP	7th Gr	PREP	7th Gr
Math 2	6th Gr	6th Gr	6th Gr	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr	PREP
Math 3	PREP	7th Gr	PREP	7th Gr	7th Gr	7th Gr	7th Gr
ELA 1	6th Gr	PREP	PREP	6th Gr	6th Gr	7th Gr	7th Gr
ELA 2	6th Gr	Elective	6th Gr	6th Gr	PREP	7th Gr	PREP
ELA 3	PREP	7th Gr	PREP	7th Gr	7th Gr	7th Gr	7th Gr
Science 1	6th Gr	6th Gr	Elective	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr	PREP
Science 2	6th Gr	6th Gr	6th Gr	PREP	7th Gr	PREP	7th Gr
Science 3	PREP	7th Gr	PREP	7th Gr	7th Gr	7th Gr	7th Gr
Soc St 1	6th Gr	6th Gr	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr
Soc St 2	7th Gr	7th Gr	7th Gr	7th Gr	PREP	7th Gr	PREP
Soc St 3	6th Gr	6th Gr	PREP	7th Gr	7th Gr	PREP	Elective
Phys Ed	6th Gr	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr	7th Gr

Summary

	# 6th Graders	# 7th Graders	# 6th Gr Sect.	PTR	# 7th Gr Sect.	PTR
Math	120	120	7	17:1	7	17:1

ELA	120	120	7	17:1	7	17:1
Science	120	120	7	17:1	7	17:1
Soc St	120	120	7	17:1	7	17:1
Phys Ed	120	30	4	30:1	1	30:1
Elective	0	90	0	N/A	4	23:1

For grades 6 and 7, there will exist seven sections of each core content per grade level, resulting in class sizes of 17 students per teacher. For 6th graders, the fifth class scheduled for them will be physical education. For 7th graders, there will exist an elective class for students to choose from each of the core content areas (elective for English, elective for math, etc.), plus physical education. With five total elective sections, class sizes are slightly larger at 23:1 (with 30:1 for PE).

The Explore Learning system allows the school flexibility in the event that enrollment does not meet projection. Leading into the start of school, the administration will closely monitor enrollment data to ensure that projected enrollment numbers are accurate. The accuracy of this process is paramount to the overall success of the launch of a new school, and with the assistance of the founding team, extensive communication lines will be developed between the school and families to maintain an accurate measure on students who will officially attend on day one. Within this process, there are several checkpoints that the administration can monitor, including a measure of families who have/have not purchased school uniforms or families who have/have not attended orientation.

As the school year approaches, if enrollment falls below its projected value, the flexibility of the plan above allows the school to still offer its students the same choice-based system.

An example will best illustrate this, using an enrollment of 180 students, or 90 per grade level (75% of its projected number). In this event, as the school budgets for its first year of operation, staffing can be reduced by four FTEs, one per core content area, resulting in a chart as shown below:

	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4	Period 5	Period 6	Period 7
Math 1	7th Gr	7th Gr	7th Gr	PREP	7th Gr	PREP	7th Gr
Math 2	6th Gr	6th Gr	6th Gr	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr	PREP
ELA 1	6th Gr	PREP	PREP	6th Gr	6th Gr	6th Gr	6th Gr
ELA 2	7th Gr	Elective	7th Gr	7th Gr	PREP	7th Gr	PREP
Science 1	7th Gr	7th Gr	Elective	7th Gr	PREP	7th Gr	PREP
Science 2	6th Gr	6th Gr	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr
Soc St 1	6th Gr	6th Gr	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr
Soc St 2	7th Gr	7th Gr	7th Gr	7th Gr	PREP	Elective	PREP
Phys Ed	6th Gr	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr	PREP	6th Gr	7th Gr

Summary

	# 6th Graders	# 7th Graders	# 6th Gr Sect	PTR	# 7th Gr Sect	PTR
Math	90	90	5	18:1	5	18:1
ELA	90	90	5	18:1	4	23:1
Science	90	90	5	18:1	4	23:1
Soc St	90	90	5	18:1	4	23:1
Phys Ed	90	30	4	30:1	1	30:1
Elective	0	60	0	N/A	3	20:1

As shown above, the reduction by one content teacher per core content area allows for class sizes to remain relatively small based on a 25% overall reduction in enrollment.

Support Staff Flexibility

While it is ideal, in supporting the school's mission and vision, to maintain the administrative and support staff projected, there are avenues through which the school could consolidate positions in order to maintain the same operational effectiveness. One such consideration would include postponing the hiring of the academic director/flex coordinator to manage the flex spaces. In this arrangement, the educational assistant(s) (assuming additional are hired via Title I funding), counselor, and teachers (on their prep periods in a rotating arrangement) would be able to effectively manage student support during flex periods.

Budget Adjustments

Upon approval, the founding team will seek to secure additional funding through grants in order to supplement some of the initial costs associated with the initial operational startup of a new school.

To maintain a reliable cash flow on a monthly basis, teacher spending will be closely monitored to ensure that they are spending for instructional materials for the month in question. As a result, teachers will be required to plan effectively in their spending, purchasing materials as they require as the year progresses.

Cash Flow and Special Education Funding

The school's projected budget shows what is predicted as an overestimate for ancillary professional services for special education when considering the inclusion of IDEA-B funding. While anticipating a 10% special education student population, the budget anticipates a \$20,000 allocation for ancillary services outside of any supplemental support. In managing cash flow in this regard, a first-year school has the advantage of establishing a small cash reserve prior to the first pay period for teachers, which is anticipated to be the second pay period in the month of August. As such, the school will have had two SEG payments (July and August) from which to draw some cash build-up prior to the start of operations and salary obligations to staff members. This cash flow analysis below shows the overview of the anticipated cash balance at the conclusion of each month. In addition, as ancillary service providers log

time with students, the billing for said services would not take place until the end of September, with payment due for such services due near the end of October.

In the analysis below, taken from the budget projections, varying expenses begin in July (lease, principal salary/benefits), August (half-month of teacher salary), etc. The calculation at the bottom of the chart shows the cash flow for the first three months of school based on the proposed budget, showing the first quarter up until the school's first reimbursement (for lease assistance and special education).

	TOTAL	PER MONTH	JULY	AUG	SEPT
INSTRUCTION					
TEACHERS (GEN ED)	-\$636,000.00	-\$53,000.00	\$0	-\$26,500.00	-\$53,000.00
TEACHER (SP ED)	-\$53,000.00	-\$4,416.67	\$0	-\$2,208.33	-\$4,416.67
BENEFITS	-\$282,800.00	-\$23,566.67	\$0	-\$11,783.33	-\$23,566.67
PROF DEVELOPMENT	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
SUPPLIES/MATERIALS	-\$15,000.00	-\$1,250.00	-\$1,250.00	-\$1,250.00	-\$1,250.00
EDUC ASSTS / TUTORS	-\$18,000.00	-\$1,500.00	\$0	-\$750.00	-\$1,500.00
SUPPORT - STUDENTS					
ACTIVITIES DIRECTOR	-\$40,000.00	-\$3,333.33	\$0	-\$1,666.67	-\$3,333.33
FLEX COORDINATOR	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
COUNSELORS	-\$50,000.00	-\$4,166.67	\$0	-\$2,083.33	\$0
BENEFITS	-\$36,000.00	-\$3,000.00	\$0	-\$1,500.00	\$0
SPECIALISTS - CONTRACTED	-\$20,000.00	-\$1,666.67	\$0	-\$833.33	-\$1,666.67
GENERAL ADMIN					
ADMIN	-\$84,000.00	-\$7,000.00	-\$7,000.00	-\$7,000.00	-\$7,000.00
ASST ADMIN	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
BENEFITS	-\$33,600.00	-\$2,800.00	-\$2,800.00	-\$2,800.00	-\$2,800.00
AUDIT	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
LEGAL	-\$5,000.00	-\$416.67	-\$416.67	-\$416.67	-\$416.67
ADVERTISING	-\$5,000.00	-\$416.67	-\$416.67	-\$416.67	-\$416.67
BOARD TRAINING	-\$1,000.00	-\$83.33	\$0	\$0	\$0
SCHOOL ADMIN					
ADMIN ASSISTANT	-\$35,000.00	-\$2,916.67	\$0	-\$2,916.67	-\$2,916.67
BENEFITS	-\$14,000.00	-\$1,166.67	\$0	-\$1,166.67	-\$1,166.67

CONTRACTED SERVICES	-\$50,000.00	-\$4,166.67	-\$2,083.33	-\$4,166.67	-\$4,166.67
SUPPLIES/MATERIALS	-\$4,000.00	-\$333.33	\$0	-\$166.67	-\$333.33
CENTRAL SERVICES					
IT DIRECTOR	-\$40,000.00	-\$3,333.33	\$0	-\$3,333.33	-\$3,333.33
SOFTWARE	-\$15,000.00	-\$1,250.00	-\$1,250.00	-\$1,250.00	-\$1,250.00
BENEFITS	-\$16,000.00	-\$1,333.33	\$0	-\$1,333.33	-\$1,333.33
SERVICES	-\$65,000.00	-\$5,416.67	\$0	-\$2,708.33	-\$5,416.67
OPERATIONS					
SECURITY	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
BENEFITS	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
MAINT/REPAIR	-\$3,000.00	-\$250.00	\$0	-\$250.00	-\$250.00
ELECTRICITY	-\$20,000.00	-\$1,666.67	\$0	-\$1,666.67	-\$1,666.67
NATURAL GAS	-\$5,000.00	-\$33,790.00	\$0	\$0	-\$33,790.00
WATER/SEWAGE	-\$5,000.00	-\$416.67	\$0	-\$416.67	-\$416.67
COMMUNICATIONS	-\$12,000.00	-\$1,000.00	\$0	-\$1,000.00	-\$1,000.00
LEASE SUPPLEMENT	\$0	\$0	-\$20,000.00	-\$20,000.00	-\$20,000.00
CUSTODIAL	-\$12,500.00	-\$1,041.67	\$0	-\$1,041.67	-\$1,041.67
PROP/LIAB INSURANCE	-\$26,400.00	-\$2,200.00	-\$2,200.00	-\$2,200.00	-\$2,200.00
OTHER CONTRACTED SERV	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1.00	\$2.00
SUPPLIES/MATERIALS	-\$3,000.00	-\$250.00	-\$250.00	-\$250.00	-\$250.00
		EXPENSES (TOTAL)	-\$37,666.67	-\$103,074.00	-\$179,896.33
		MONTHLY REVENUE	\$148,378.33	\$148,378.33	\$148,378.33
		QUARTERLY REVENUE	\$0	\$0	\$54,160.00
		DIFFER/CASH-FLOW	\$110,711.66	\$156,015.99	\$178,657.99
STATE ALLOCATION					
\$148,378.33	PER MONTH				

QUARTERLY REVENUE					
\$54,160.00	EVERY 3 MO				

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe budget control strategies as well as budget adjustments that will be made to meet financial budget and cash-flow challenges; Describe budget control strategies as well as budget adjustments that will be made to address the failure to receive any anticipated funding sources; Include explanations that are viable and realistic, based on the professional judgment of experienced, licensed, school business officials; Address how special education students will receive services before special education funding is provided, based on accurate 40-day counts; and Address how gaps between budgeted students and actual enrollment will be addressed.
<p>INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.</p>	

C. Financial Policies, Oversight, Compliance, and Sustainability

C.(1) Provide a description of the internal control procedures the proposed school will utilize to safeguard assets, segregate its payroll and other check disbursement duties, provide reliable financial information, promote operational efficiency, and ensure compliance with all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations, and rules relative to the proposed school's procedures.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

As part of Appendix H, Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) has provided its draft financial policies and procedures, which are intended to provide the school and its Governing Council with a plan of action that will certify that public funds are utilized responsibly including safeguarding assets, ensuring payroll activity is properly posted and reconciled, segregating disbursement responsibilities from reconciliation responsibilities, ensuring a high level of fidelity and reliability in financial information, and ensuring more broadly compliance with federal and state statutes, rules, and regulations.

No less than annually, the Governing Council, with the consultation of the school's business manager, will review and evaluate the adequateness of its financial policies and procedures. Specifically, EA-LCS will conduct an internal audit to evaluate such things as adequate documentation and approvals on file. This will be done independently by the board as its own evaluation but will be done as a secondary measure after the release of the school's audit in the (predicted) spring semester of each school year.

Additionally, the Governing Council through its Audit Committee will also solicit feedback from its audit firm, and the Governing Board will utilize any findings, auditor concerns, or lack thereof as evidence of the adequacy of its internal controls.

These policies and procedures were drafted in close consultation with the Vigil Group, an experienced school business management service provider with the state of New Mexico.

As part of working with an off-site school business manager, which is the arrangement included in this proposal, EA-LCS will utilize a segregation of duties between its administration and school business manager, including the functions of cash disbursement, payroll, and cash reconciliation. As opposed to a school model where several individuals each have access to the above functions, the model described in this application, through the experience of the founding team, best utilizes fewer responsible parties and thus reduces the scope of potential liability.

Cash Disbursements - Non-Payroll

The school's principal will manage and approve the purchase order and invoice approval process, as well as facilitate all direct communication with vendors. The principal will solicit bids when applicable and bring contracts in front of the governing board for approval. Approved invoices, based on the adopted budgeted and approved quality of the goods or services received, will be signed off by the principal prior to being sent to the business manager for accounts payable processing. The school's business manager will code each invoice based on the adopted budget and the implemented chart of accounts that conforms to state coding standards.

The school business manager will provide the principal with a list of all outstanding invoices from which the principal will make the final decision on which checks to generate. Sending that list back to the business manager, the appropriate checks will be generated, which will be returned, via courier, for the principal to sign. Either the principal, via the administrative executive/office manager, or the business manager, will set up the mailed delivery of each signed check.

On a monthly basis, the business manager will prepare a combined check register for all payments made on behalf of the school for review by the board as part of an additional layer of financial oversight.

The school and the business manager will both retain a separate set of copies of all purchase and invoice documentation, filed by vendor, for each fiscal year. For payment to independent contractors, the principal will collect and pass to the school business manager W-9s from all eligible vendors.

Cash Disbursements - Payroll

The principal will maintain all employee files, including but not limited to, employment agreements, certifications, credentials, W-3s, I-9s, and other payroll information like salaries, wages, deductions, garnishments, and direct deposit information.

The school business management will process all payroll the information, ensuring there are no inconsistencies, potential errors, or missing documentation, and generate a payroll preview which will be provided to the principal a few days prior to each payroll. Prior to this preview report, and on an as-needed basis, the principal will provide any change to payroll information to the business manager

After the approval, the business manager will process the payroll and coordinates delivery to the school and employees. On a quarterly basis, the business manager will complete all the required tax reporting to IRS and any state agencies. In addition to the standard payroll processing, the business manager will manage reporting related to retirement and plan administration as needed.

Cash Reconciliation

The school principal, or his or her proxy (such as the administrative executive/officer manager) will submit bank statements and deposit logs to the business manager on the same day as the transaction in question. Based on the adopted budget and the state chart of accounts, the business manager will enter and code all revenues in an accounting system.

The business manager will complete weekly cash reconciliations to clear checks issued through accounts payable processing and temporarily recognize banking activity until documentation is supplied. Further, the business manager will maintain a fixed asset schedule and ensure all expenses are capitalized and depreciated as appropriate. The business manager will further ensure that transactions that should be applied to the balance sheet are correctly recognized. Monthly, the general ledger will undergo routine maintenance to ensure that items are properly coded.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify all the internal control procedures that have been attached in Appendix H; • Attach in Appendix H internal control procedures the proposed school will utilize to assure the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ safeguard assets ○ segregate its payroll ○ segregate cash and check disbursement duties ○ provide reliable financial information and promote operational efficiency ○ ensure compliance with all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations, and rules; • Attach procedures that—based on the professional judgment of experienced, licensed, school business officials—successfully ensure appropriate segregation of duties; and • Provide a process the school will use to regularly evaluate compliance with the internal control procedures that have been attached in Appendix H and other internal control procedures that will be developed and implemented by the school.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

C. (2) Identify the appropriate staff to perform financial tasks and ensure that the staff positions are **completely supported** in the organizational structure/chart and in the budget. Clearly provide the qualifications and responsibilities for those positions. Include evidence of a clear plan (e.g., job search process, timelines) to hire and evaluate highly qualified staff no later than two weeks prior to the start of the proposed school year.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

The Governing Council for Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will ultimately select the contracted business manager service provider. However, for the purposes of this application, the founding team has utilized the expertise of the Vigil Group to support its budget planning, preparation of 910b5 worksheets, as well as its preparation of the narratives for subsections throughout this section of the application.

In considering the services offered and the relationship between the school and its contracted business manager, the founding team has utilized a framework similar to the what the Vigil Group offers within its scope of services.

The cost of using a contracted school business manager has been estimated at \$59,000 each year. Within the predicted services contract for this position, the school will receive the services of a business manager, an accountant, a payroll specialist, and an accounts payable specialist to meet the functional responsibilities outlined in the previous section.

Since the contracted business manager will function as a third-party service provider, the business manager will be responsible for establishing the qualifications and responsibilities for the staff member(s) that perform the functions necessary to support the school in its business management services. The principal and Governing Council will both independently ensure that the contracted business manager will be licensed in the state of New Mexico at least two weeks prior to the start of the proposed school year.

The school's principal will serve a critical role in the financial management and operational functions for EA-LCS and will service as the liaison between the school, its board, and the business manager, ensuring that all parties are provided information in a timely manner as needed to support the financial viability of the school.

As the hire principal will have familiarity and experience financial and operational management within the education setting, he or she will be qualified to function as both the key day-to-day financial manager school and liaison between all parties involved.

Further, the principal will be responsible in ensuring that operational functions of the school occur in accordance with required policies including but not limited to:

- Facilities maintenance and operation, payroll, food service, and transportation
- Management of all day-to-day operations for the school, staff and substitutes
- Be a visible presence in all areas of school operations and work toward a resolution of these problems both routine and unique- as they arise; always keeping the Governing Council informed of the general programs, activities, and challenges the school may be facing
- Supervision of the enrollment, transfer, discharge, and re-enrollment process for students and the preparation of related records and files, including assessment results, test scores, discipline referrals, medical reports and records, and other student documents
- Preparation and updating (as needed) of the staff handbook and maintain appropriate personnel records
- Preparation and updating (as needed) of the student handbook
- Management of the school's disciplinary policy and the fairness in which that policy is applied to student discipline
- Supervision of student medication dispensation log and injury reports

- Supervision of requisitions, shipments (receiving and distribution), storage room, classrooms, school offices, workroom materials and supplies.
- Supervision in maintaining ongoing inventory; processing packing slips
- Preparation and maintenance of all purchase orders and other expense records; approve, log, and monitor all expenditures; reconcile site records with monthly reports required by the PED; resolve discrepancies; ensure expenditures are within budget allowances for the fiscal year
- Preparation and oversight of payroll processes bi-weekly or semi-monthly
- Preparation of breakfast, lunch, recess, and before- and after-school supervision schedules
- Ensure compliance with legal requirements of government regulations and agencies; maintain educational standards established by the State of New Mexico and by any other agencies that evaluate the school in any aspect of its operational performance

The principal must have an in-depth, working understanding of school finance, budgeting, instruction, special education services and related costs, as well as certain required qualifications and licenses:

- New Mexico Education Administration License (PreK-12) or an Education Administration License from another state with eligibility to receive a NM Education Administrative License within six months of his or her beginning of employment
- Minimum of one-year experience as a school leader in a high performing school or school with demonstrated growth over time
- Demonstrated ability to manage, monitor, and report school finances and related activities to ensure that the school remains fiscally viable
- Experience in leadership and management of both adults and students

The school's contracted licensed school business manager will also play a critical role in ensuring that EA-LCS appropriately executes the financial tasks required of the school.

As stated above, and the school plans to contract with a third-party licensed school business management entity to provide business manager services which will include but are not limited to the following:

- Serve as a point of contact for schools with client-facing responsibilities
- Preparation of monthly financials statements, including YTD income statements, cash flow statements, and variance analysis for clients
- Create monthly presentations to Governing Council, analyzing the key issues in the financial statements and offering recommendations for changes in the school operations
- Complete grant reports, State interim reports, and other compliance-related reports and maintain Charts of Accounts, multi-year budgets, and other financial documentation for school clients
- Ensure that all school reports and disclosures comply with applicable governmental regulations, professional standards, and organizational policies
- Analyze, model, and solve problems for clients on a wide range of business issues
- Manage the ongoing forecast for the school, and support the annual budget development process
- Maintain current knowledge of relevant financial management procedures and practices
- Develop a functional expertise in one or more areas of school business operations

School business management service providers will be considered when the individual or entity (with its associated business managers) has the following qualifications:

- Licensed Level II Business Manager and all associated competencies as described in NMAC 6.63.12.9
- 1-5 years of work experience in a related field (i.e., education or finance)
- Strong communication and analytical skills

- Experience in client services or similar responsibilities internal to company
- Significant experience with spreadsheet software, financial modeling, and/or forecasting
- Ability to travel to school sites and work non-standard hours to attend board meetings
- Strong commitment to education

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will begin its search for its principal/head administrator upon approval of its charter application. The administrator is planned to be hired by January of the Planning Year so as to ensure that the school’s systems and processes are set up in accordance with state and federal requirements and to ensure that the school begins the first year of operation with sound practices related to finances and operations.

The school has worked with the support from the Vigil Group in preparation of this application, and the founding will recommend the Vigil Group as a candidate in consideration for its business management service provider as the school plans to commence operations during the Planning Year. The process of selecting this provider will take in the spring of the Planning Year, no later than April 1st. If the contracted individual or entity must pursue a business license in the state of New Mexico, the founding team and principal will ensure that the license is secured at least two weeks prior to the start of the school year.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the appropriate staff to perform each financial task identified in the response to B(1) and all other required financial tasks; • Align completely with the organizational chart from response to D(1) in the Organizational Framework; • Align completely with the budget in A(1) and A(2) responses in Financial Framework; • Describe appropriate qualifications and responsibilities for each of the identified positions; and • Include a plan that will result in the recruitment, identification, the evaluation of candidates, and the hiring of highly qualified staff for each of the identified positions, no later than two weeks prior to the start of the proposed school year.
<p>INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.</p>	

C.(3) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive plan for** how the Governing Body will provide proper legal and fiscal oversight, include the responsibilities of the state-required audit and finance committees, and explain how these committees will operate in the proposed school's overall governance and management.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will form a standing Finance Committee to be composed of Council members with relevant financial management and charter school finance experience and expertise. This committee will meet monthly to review the finances of the school as evidenced by its financial statements and other financial analysis produced by the school's business manager.

Note: Based on the size of the Governing Council, the Council members may elect for the entire Governing Council assembly to meet as a whole to represent the Finance Committee. In this sense, the Finance Committee would exist as a "committee of the whole".

As necessary, this Finance Committee will request any supplemental information, either or both from the school's business manager or school administration to otherwise facilitate its analysis and decision-making. The Finance Committee will also be responsible for assessing the continued adequacy and appropriateness of its standing financial policies and procedures, making financial recommendations to the Council, and developing and recommending the annual budget for approval each year.

The Governing Council will make all formal decisions, including but not limited to formal annual budget adoption and contract approvals. The Finance Committee will ensure that EA-LCS is meeting compliance with financial requirements associated with funding sources through its work with the school's business manager and school administration. Lastly, the Finance Committee will ensure that the Governing Council takes action that is free from conflict of interest or that said conflicts are adequately and appropriately disclosed.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will annually form an Audit Committee with the expressed purpose of facilitating and overseeing the audit process. The Audit Committee will be comprised of a subset of Council members (at least two (2)) with relevant audit expertise and experience, with a majority of the Audit Committee members not otherwise on the standing Finance Committee to avoid any conflicts of interest. The Audit Committee will also include, in alignment with state statute requirements, one volunteer member who also has experience in accounting or financial matters, and one volunteer member who is a parent of student of EA-LCS. To the extent necessary, the Audit Committee will look outside of its Council to utilize volunteers and advisors to provide requisite expertise and need in the absence of Council members with the required expertise.

The projected budget for EA-LCS allocates \$13,000 to contract with the state-selected audit firm, beginning in its second year of operation. The Audit Committee will meet with the audit firm prior to the start of the audit (entrance conference) to get an overview of the audit process, as well as the respective roles and responsibilities of all involved parties. From there, the Audit Committee will report back to the Governing Council what to expect on an as needed basis. When the audit process commences, the school administration and school business manager will ensure the audit firm has all necessary financial information and records as well as non-financial records and documents maintained by the school in advance of actual audit field work. During the audit field work, any documents requested will be provided in a timely manner. The Audit Committee will oversee that the audit firm has the information it needs and is otherwise receiving materials in a timely manner.

Once the audit is complete, the Audit Committee, along with the school administration and business manager, will review the audit report and management letter. If the audit report or management letter include any findings, including but not limited to material weakness or significant

deficiencies, the Audit Committee will oversee the process of developing a formal plan, with the school’s administration, to address those findings in future audits and to avoid repeat findings.

To the extent that it requires additional input, the Audit Committee will work with the Finance Committee to implement any policy or procedural changes or corrective action under the Finance Committee’s jurisdiction. In addition, the Audit firm will be asked to present the findings to the Council, and the Audit Committee will share its recommendations in a manner that is transparent and free from conflict of interest.

Copies of the final audit report will be sent to the state and authorizer, as well as any other required agencies. The annual audit will be done in accordance with all federal, state, and local auditing requirements and standards, including those required of public charter schools in New Mexico, as well as in addition to any other conditions or criteria required the authorizer. EA-LCS will also retain the same audit firm for any other required reporting, including but not limited to the filing of its annual 990 return with IRS, and other tax matters.

The committees, whether the standing Finance Committee or the Audit Committee, will interact with school’s administration in a manner that preserves and is deferential to the broader Governing Council prerogative. Specifically, the said committees will work closely and collaboratively with school’s administration to meet their responsibilities, but these committees will not unilaterally take action or otherwise engage in decision-making that is typically reserved for the Governing Council. The committees will look to facilitate and enhance decision making by sharing of their expertise and providing oversight over their respective subject matter competencies for the Governing Council to then leverage. Ultimately, the principal/head administrator will report to the Governing Council, not individual committees, but the committees may otherwise be allowed to request information from the principal otherwise relevant to carrying out its respective areas of oversight.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how the Governing Body audit and finance committees will be formed and how they will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Function generally ○ Ensure proper legal oversight ○ Ensure proper financial oversight; • Describe how the proposed school’s audit and finance committees will interact with the school’s management; and • Describe how the audit and finance committees will interact with the full Governing Body.
<p>INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.</p>	

IV. Evidence of Support

A. Outreach Activities.

A.(1) Provide **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** evidence that you have developed an effective and thoughtful outreach program. Provide **sound** evidence that you have addressed a broad audience to develop community support for the proposed school. Provide clear descriptions of outreach activities, demonstrating that the applicant is attempting to reach a broad audience and understand the community's needs.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) is founded on the experience and success of Explore Academy - Albuquerque (EA-ABQ). Chartered in 2014, Explore Academy - Albuquerque (EA-ABQ) has successfully implemented and managed its educational and supportive mission and mentored students through graduation from high school. More importantly, Explore Academy-Albuquerque reached its mission, goals, and objectives through reasoned approaches to building community support, interest, and commitment including the creation of a strong, supportive and guiding Governing Council. The lessons learned from these early efforts in Albuquerque will be applied in Las Cruces to craft an equally effective Governing Council for families, students and community stakeholders in Doña Ana County.

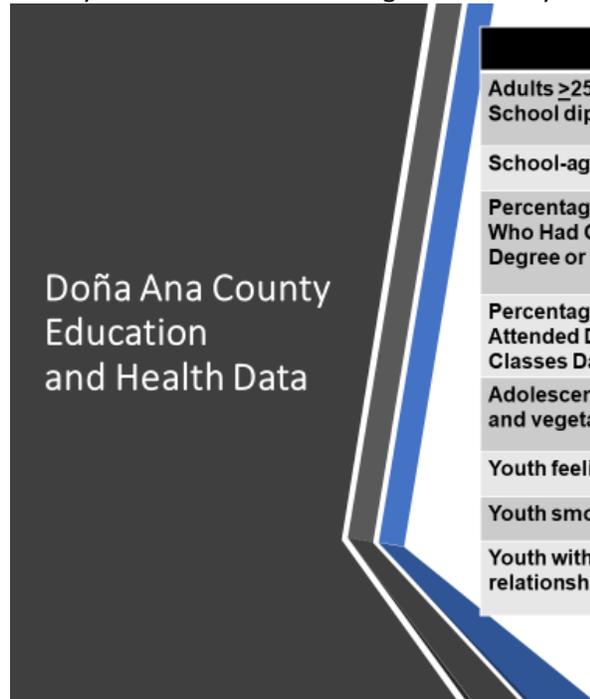
Briefly, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will use, as a foundation, its experience in Albuquerque and braid a broad, community-engaging, inclusive approach to crafting the Governing Council. We have developed processes and relationships with the Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce to begin partnerships with community leaders and business leaders of Las Cruces and the county. The president of the Chamber of Commerce is formerly from Sandoval County, a member of the CNM Governing Board and a colleague of one of our team members. This relationship will provide access and introduction to the drivers of the city's and county's economic development and sustainability, an important entre for graduates of our Las Cruces charter school family. These newly formed relationships will also provide a foundation for additional support for the school and its mission as sources of external funding beyond district and state support. Explore Academy - Las Cruces is also reaching out to the local community and leaders through New Mexico State University (NMSU) for guiding education and academic expertise as well as academic career advancement for students and professional development for school faculty and staff. The NMSU environment is an ideal opportunity from which to recruit prospective Governing Council members.

In addition, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will work with the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library. We already developed this relationship with the library hosting an outreach program in early May 2019 with stakeholders, families, and students. Continuing this effort, we are working to weave the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum of Las Cruces into our local support network. Support for Explore Academy - Las Cruces will not be limited to outside influencers. We plan to recruit Governing Council representation from stakeholders and families of students registering with the charter school.

Within this section we have drafted a program evaluation Logic Model that maps our philosophy of Support for Explore Academy - Las Cruces. Importantly, we recognize that Las Cruces and Doña Ana County represent varied resources, assets, and protective factors that are equivalent but different from Albuquerque and Bernalillo County. We have developed a description of the school's catchment area and present this in the application's overall Introduction. Understanding a region's and population's strengths will permit Explore Academy-Las Cruces to leverage these assets and resources into addressing the particular needs, risk factors, and educational desires of the charter school's families, students, and stakeholders.

As outlined here and in the Logic Model above and below, Explore Academy-Las Cruces is taking a broader and deeper approach to engaging families, students, stakeholders, and community leaders in crafting the Governing Council, mission, goals, and objectives of EA-LCS in an effort to build on the local strengths as well as address the gaps in service and education to provide a learning environment that extends success.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces is committed to working within the city of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County environments to leverage community assets, strengths and resources to address the needs and



The graphic features a dark grey background with a blue and white diagonal line. The text 'Doña Ana County Education and Health Data' is written in white. To the right of this graphic is a table with three columns: Data Set, Result, and Source.

Data Set	Result	Source
Adults ≥25 years and older o High School diploma	21%	NM Dept of Health - 2016
School-aged children living in poverty	35.5%	NM Dept of Health - 2016
Percentage of Live Births to Women Who Had Completed a High School Degree or Higher	76.4%	NM Dept of Health - 2017
Percentage of Students Who Attended Daily Physical Education Classes Daily	22.9%	NM Dept of Health - 2017
Adolescent Nutrition – Daily fruits and vegetables	20.2%	NM Dept of Health – 2017
Youth feeling sad/hopeless	36.1%	NM Dept of Health – 2017
Youth smoking prevalence	11.5%	NM Dept of Health – 2017
Youth with caring, supportive family relationships	86.6%	NM Dept of Health - 2017

educational desires of the families, students and stakeholders in the area. We have conducted research within in the area through New Mexico Public Education Department and New Mexico Department of Health. Our efforts have highlighted the strengths of city and county as well as pointed to the areas of need and the influencing issues on families, students and stakeholders. Explore Academy-Las Cruces will better serve its population when it has a firm understanding of a strengths-based approach to addressing the educational needs of its students. No one list is ever exhaustive, but our efforts will be broad and extensive to meet with and gain information from as many community members and leaders and stakeholders as possible. Our expectations include meeting with representatives of Las Cruces non-governmental organizations (including nonprofits), community-based activists, Chamber of Commerce-based local businesses, city and county charter schools, district schools in Las Cruces, city and county faith-based organizations, NMSU faculty and staff.

Our plan is to braid quantitative and qualitative data from these meetings, discussions, and knowledge-sharing events with information and guiding principles from national charter school advocates and organizations. Critically, we will take these discoveries and work with families, students, and stakeholders and build upon preliminary focus groups to guide EA-LCS in making the best decisions possible.

All of the activities to be conducted by Explore Academy-Las Cruces must be managed within the knowledge base of the needs of the overall community. It should be about more than the educational inputs of a logic model or the academic outcomes presupposed by any applicant. The inputs and outcomes

must be considered within the context of the local environment and Explore Academy–Las Cruces founding team is working to refine its interpretation of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County. In this effort, we have collected data from the New Mexico Department of Health detailing a selected list of health-related indicators for the county. These data indicate several issues that EA-LCS has internalized for its mission and curriculum including risk behavior (smoking, sedentary lifestyles, poor nutrition) and limited educational successes.

The data also point to a significant protective factor and one that Explore Academy - Las Cruces can leverage into long-term success in Las Cruces and Doña Ana county. In the most recent Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (YRRS), the Department of Health reported that 86.6% of youth in Doña Ana County had at least one family member or caregiver with whom they shared a loving, caring, and supportive relationship. Epidemiologists specializing in prevention and intervention services have described this data point as one of the most significant outcomes of the YRRS where success is more likely.

It is these data on which EA-LCS will capitalize to achieve success in recruiting families and students, stakeholders and faculty and staff, business leaders and academicians from NMSU, thought leaders and knowledge leaders from the public library and local museums, and municipal and county governments. These same data will be leveraged to improve retention and limit attrition, ensure enrollment targets, formulate a locally driven curriculum, reverse health-related risk factors, and build on current protective factors.

Activities

Current Activities

February 2019

Explore Academy - Las Cruces leadership was introduced to Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce president, Debbi Moore, via electronic communication. The objective of this introduction, and meeting, was the exposure of Explore Academy leadership to a business leader in Las Cruces. Ms. Moore has a connection to members of the Explore Academy - Albuquerque team members through business networking in Sandoval County; Ms. Moore is also an important member of the support network for Las Cruces because she has a commitment to education and was an elected member of the CNM governing board. We believe her addition to the support network will provide a central point of context between the business community and the educational objectives of Explore Academy - Las Cruces and the entire educational community in Las Cruces.

Outcome: The Chamber president in a meeting held on May 7, 2019 indicated that she supports the public schools in Las Cruces, so she cannot be on the board of EA-LCS. The team was able to discuss the educational climate with her and learn more about the school options that exist, who they are serving, and where they are located. Ms Moore did mention that she does have many connections to businesses and owners, and she is more than willing to make introductions between EA-LCS and local businesses and organizations.

February 2019

Explore Academy leadership launched the EA-LCS website at www.explore.academy/lcs to introduce the charter application and proposed school, inform families about upcoming events, and post information for the public about the school and its application progress. There are two messaging options included on

the website for families, students, and community members to contact the EA-LCS team: a “Contact Us” fillable form and a “Chat With Us” hovering box.

Outcome: The website has been an important part of the outreach efforts. Posting information on the website for viewing on computers as well as smart phones and tablets has allowed parents to access information about the school, the founding team, the events, and the application process. There have been over 30 messages sent to the founding team through the website’s two messaging services. Through these messages, the team has been able to answer questions, direct families to the interest form, take suggestions, and compile email addresses for the distribution list.

March - May 2019

The Explore Academy - Las Cruces founding team met with school leaders and teachers from various schools in Las Cruces, both district and charter, to discuss local educational needs and how Explore Academy might add value to the Las Cruces and Doña Ana County learning environment. A secondary intent of the meetings was the identification of candidates for the head administrator position for the Explore Academy - Las Cruces charter school.

Outcome: The need for a middle and high school option that serves both on track and at-risk students was apparent. The leaders and teachers all mentioned how the graduation rate is very high in Las Cruces overall, but the proficiency levels in math and English are very low. It was mentioned that the early college high schools perform well, but the overall concern was that they are not serving the average student, especially those who are at-risk or otherwise struggle with education due to their background, location, circumstances, etc.

March - April 2019

Explore Academy leadership launched EA-LCS social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram. The accounts serve as a way to facilitate two-way communication with families about the school, its model, the application process, and the needs of the Las Cruces community and its students and parents.

Outcome: As described in the next section IV.B(1), The social media accounts have been very successful and have allowed communication with many families and community members. As a charter applicant with no official location or contract, the social media activity this far demonstrates a level of support for the school and its mission. The social media accounts also provide families, students, and community members constant access to the EA-LCS team for questions, suggestions, and dialogue about the community and the school.

April 2019

Explore Academy leadership corresponded with Claren Wilson, a business owner in Las Cruces, about joining the Governance Council for EA-LCS. She is a former student of the Explore Academy founder, Justin Baiardo, and was an outstanding student throughout high school and college. After earning her degree from NMSU, she followed her passion and entrepreneurial prowess and opened a successful dog training business, Cloud K-9 Dog Training Services, that serves the Las Cruces community and surrounding area. Her business, education, and service experience and knowledge will add vital components to the school’s governing board.

Outcome: Ms. Wilson agreed to join the Explore Academy - Las Cruces Governance Council and the founding team is very excited to have such a bright and connected business owner as a member of the governance team.

April 2019

Explore Academy leadership corresponded DeAnna Jaramillo, LMSW, a social worker and psychotherapist in Las Cruces with years of experience serving the community as a mental health provider. She is from Las Cruces and earned her degree from NMSU. She has since dedicated her life to serving the community. She is currently employed at La Clinica de Familia. She expressed interest in joining the governing board of Explore Academy - Las Cruces.

Outcome: Ms. Jaramillo will join the Governance Council and bring with her a wealth of knowledge about mental health, social and emotional needs, family dynamics, and mental health trends in Las Cruces and the surrounding area, along with her commitment to helping students and families be healthy and happy at home and at school.

May 6, 2019

Explore Academy leadership met with Las Cruces families, students, and stakeholders at the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library community room. As a prospective partner, the Library was seen as a known community asset that is safe, comfortable, and an engaging location for the meeting and knowledge gathering effort.

Outcome: Over thirty families and interested parties were in attendance at the information night. The presentation was very well received and all students in attendance filled out interest forms to show their support and interest in attending the school in August 2020. The meeting lasted well over the designated hour and parents stayed to talk and ask questions. There was also a chance to take parent and community input regarding start and end times, best locations within the city, and specific community and student needs. There were also three teachers in attendance who expressed interest in teaching at EA-LCS when it opens. Additionally, a member of the Engineering Department at NMSU attended and spoke with us after to offer a partnership between their department and the school to enhance the Engineering major and other seminars at the school.

May 2019

Explore Academy leadership corresponded with Clara Graham from New Mexico State University. She is the Engineering department's STEM program manager for NMSU and has expressed interest in partnering with EA-LCS, especially regarding the Engineering Department, in order to enrich the academic offerings for Explore Academy students as well as form a pipeline for NMSU admission after graduation.

Outcome: Over the course of the next few months, the founding team will work more with Clara and several of her colleagues to plan out the partnership options between NMSU and Explore Academy-Las Cruces. The options are endless for partnering with various majors and academic departments as well as for dual credit options for upperclassmen at EA-LCS.

May 2019

Explore Academy leadership corresponded with Clara Graham from New Mexico State University. She is a writer for NMSU and expressed interest in joining the Governance Council for EA-LCS.

Outcome: Ms. Graham accepted the invitation to join the Governance Council for EA-LCS and has notified her supervisors as well, so they are aware of the partnership in the future.

May 2019

Explore Academy leadership corresponded with seven teachers from Las Cruces. Some are employed in charter schools and others are employed through Las Cruces Public Schools. The correspondence, achieved in person, through email, and through phone calls, was centered around the educational landscape of the city and surrounding areas. The EA-LCS team asked questions regarding options, school perception, community perception, school programs, and other aspects of the academic characteristics from the viewpoint of teachers on the ground.

Outcome: Six of the seven teachers felt that Las Cruces does not have nearly enough options for parents and students who are seeking different ways of learning, and the seventh asserted that there are many options but that they are not really appealing to many of the students in Las Cruces. All teachers commented on the perception that charter schools are often seen as “alternative” schools for students with behavior or academic issues. This perception is a fact that EA-LCS will have to confront in order to operate a successful college-preparatory model that is rigorous and challenging for students. The last overarching idea that came out of the correspondence with teachers was that they, and many of their colleagues, would love a chance to create curriculum and teach in a standards-based model that allowed them to be creative with the class content and teach to less than 20 students at a time. The idea of 16 students in a classroom seemed to truly delight the teachers we spoke to, and it helped the team realize how rare it is for a teacher to have less than 150 students in a given day.

May 2019

Explore Academy leadership worked with Dave Hill, broker with Maestas and Ward in Albuquerque, and Bill Shattuck, broker with NA 1st Valley in Las Cruces, to investigate the facility landscape and identify potential sites. This included two building tours as well as online correspondence regarding sites as they came available.

Outcome: The team was able to find several potential plots of land and buildings that could work for either as the permanent school facility or incubation sites while a permanent site is built. The team is confident that there are options with feasible timelines for a permanent site to open, in phases, starting in August 2020.

*Planned Activities***Spring 2019**

Further communication with members of the Las Cruces community, including new and potential board members, parents, teachers, administrators, business owners, real estate developers, and organization leaders. The founding team will continue the communication surrounding Explore Academy - Las Cruces and the educational needs and concerns of Las Cruces. This process will be ongoing throughout the spring and summer in order to best prepare for the planning year if/when the application is approved.

Anticipated outcome: The team hopes to find more potential board members, community partners, school advocates, and potential school facilities. Additionally, spreading the word about the Explore Learning Model and what the school will offer to the Las Cruces community is very important to the founding team and these efforts will allow us to introduce the school and its mission to more stakeholders from the target area.

Summer 2019

Explore Academy-Las Cruces will meet with the director of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum in Las Cruces. The objective of this meeting is the introduction of Explore Academy-Las Cruces to the museum community and discuss potential shared activities for families and students as well as charter school faculty and staff to engage in the local and state agricultural heritage and future.

Anticipated outcome: The Museum provides an exceptional opportunity to develop experiential learning for Explore Academy - Las Cruces students and families.

Overall Outcome

Explore Academy - Las Cruces is now well-positioned to enter the Las Cruces and Doña Ana County environment as a charter school prepared to share its Albuquerque school success. Understanding the strengths of the community through researching of health and educational qualities, braided with exposure to the influencers, knowledge leaders, families and students, stakeholders, and partners provides Explore Academy-Las Cruces with the opportunity to come to Las Cruces not as an outsider but as a member of the community before the curriculum is officially presented to the first class. Identifying the community's strengths and protective factors permits Explore Academy to adjust its curriculum to build on those resources and address the specific and critical educational and community needs, in an effective academic process.

As we have discussed in this section, Explore Academy has a portfolio of success in Albuquerque that we believe will be successful in Las Cruces. Many of the outreach and partnership activities we have described have been adjusted and practiced over the last six years for the Explore Academy founding campus. Lessons learned from Albuquerque through challenges and successes will inform how we approach the city and county in southern New Mexico. Our plan of reaching out to the leaders of business, thought leaders, knowledge leaders, and stakeholders, families and students is the ideal process to engage all of these individuals, groups and organizations with whom Explore Academy-Las Cruces will partner to benefit Las Cruces and Doña Ana County.

The long-term outcome is the benefit to the families and students who are reached by Explore Academy-Las Cruces. The city and county are thriving entities that depend on new members to the entire enterprise. Explore Academy sees itself as a feeder for this pipeline of future community success through graduation of educated, informed, energized, and driven community members.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe an outreach program to develop community support for the proposed school that has been implemented during the application process; • Describe specific activities that have been implemented, include evidence of implementation; • Include evidence that demonstrates the activities reached a broad audience that is representative of the whole community; and • Describe how this outreach has enabled the applicant team to understand community needs.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

B. Community Support.

B. (1) Provide **sufficient measurable**, quantifiable, and **qualitative** data-based evidence of abundant, broad-based support for the proposed school among residents in the targeted community. (For instance, 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 support earlier descriptions of the anticipated demographics of the students who will be served by the proposed school, disaggregate the number of prospective students by zip code, school of attendance (current), gender, type of current school (home, private, public), or other pertinent data.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Introduction

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) will rely upon the strength of its community in order to continually adjust school curriculum, instructional practices, and operations to best meet the needs of its students, families, and community. This process has been a driving force behind the success of the founding campus Explore Academy - Albuquerque. The integration of stakeholder input into school policies and procedures as well as curriculum and scheduling will allow EA-LCS to be both reflective and responsive to stakeholder input and needs. The founding team will continue the efforts, described below, throughout the summer months in order to provide more information to the Las Cruces target community as well as to elicit a range of feedback and suggestions which will enrich the development and launch of the school upon approval.

To introduce the proposed school and its Explore Learning Model and mission to the Las Cruces community, the founding team engaged target population stakeholders in a variety of ways, across various platforms and in person. As mentioned in detail in Section I.F(3), the major demographic and academic performance breakdown of the target population of Las Cruces students is in the table below. The target population data was referenced throughout the community engagement efforts in order to ensure that the support from the community was representative of the entire community as a whole.

Student Subgroup	Percent of population	ELA proficiency	Math proficiency
All Students	100	28	17
Female	48.7	34.6	18
Male	51.3	23.9	17.6
Caucasian	19.5	45.7	29.8
Hispanic	75.7	23.1	13.5
Economically disadvantaged / Free and Reduced Lunch (ED/FRL)	74.5	22.9	13
Students with disabilities / Individual education plans (SWD/IEP)	15.3	9.2	8
English language learners (ELL)	12.5	8.5	5.5

Quantitative Support Data

Information Night Attendance

At the information night held on Monday May 6 at the Branigan Library, there were almost 50 people in attendance. The stakeholder breakdown at the information night is represented in the table below. The majority of attendees were parents and students, but other stakeholders also attended the meeting for various reasons.

Stakeholder Type	Number in attendance
Prospective administrators, teachers, and staff	7
Parents	29
Students	15
Community members	4
Homeschool parent group representative	1
Higher education	2

Interest Form Submissions

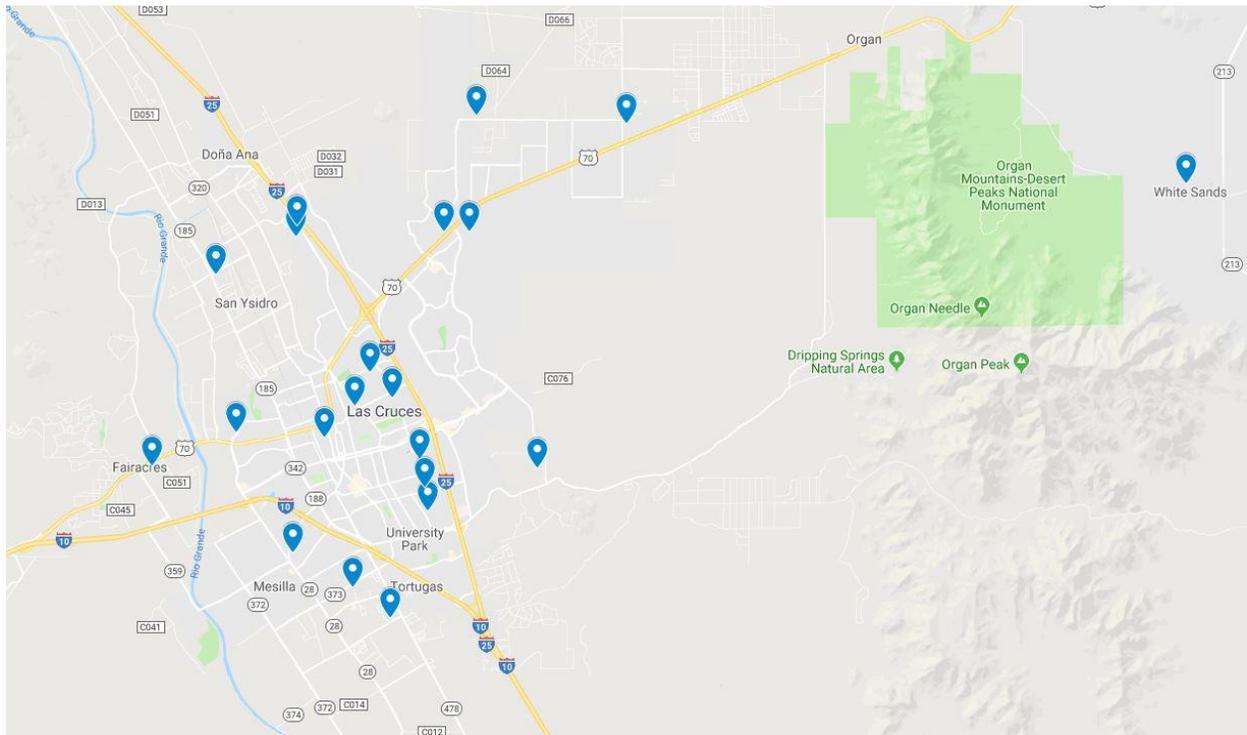
At the time of this application, there have been 73 official interest forms submitted for students considering enrollment in August 2020. The students and families indicated their current grade level, anticipated grade level for the 2020-2021 school year, and the school they currently attend.

Grade	Interest forms
6	34
7	23
8	6
9	10

Geographic Representation

The current schools attended by students who have submitted interest forms are listed in the table below. Additionally, there is a map showing the distribution of the school sites across the city of Las Cruces. The list and map show that there are families from all areas of the city showing interest in enrolling at Explore Academy - Las Cruces.

Current School	Type
Acton Academy	Private
Booker T Washington Elementary School	Public
Columbia Elementary School	Public
Conlee Elementary School	Public
East Picacho Elementary School	Public
Fairacres Elementary School	Public
Highland Elementary School	Public
Homeschool	Home
J Paul Taylor Academy	Public charter
Loma Heights Elementary School	Public
Mesilla Park Elementary School	Public
Mesilla Valley Leadership Academy	Public
Monte Vista Elementary School	Public
Picacho Middle School	Public
Sierra Middle School	Public
Sonoma Elementary School	Public
Sunrise Elementary School	Public
Tombaugh Elementary School	Public
University Hills Elementary School	Public
Vista Middle School	Public
White Sands Elementary School	Public
White Sands Middle School	Public



As evidenced in the map and school list, the students showing interest in and support for EA-LCS come from all areas of Las Cruces and attend a variety of different schools including charter, private, and homeschool settings. The grade level breakdown also indicates strong support for the middle school grades, 6-7, as well as support for grades leading into high school, 8-9. At this time in the spring, the number of interest forms is quite astounding and shows that families are willing to support and intend to apply to Explore Academy - Las Cruces if/when it opens in August 2020 as proposed in this application.

*Social Media Activity**

The Facebook page has been very successful and has allowed communication with many families and community members. The table below shows the Facebook statistics as of the date of this application. There has been a lot of traffic on the page, much of it from interested families with questions, suggestions, and the desire to enroll their children at Explore Academy-Las Cruces in for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Page Likes- people who follow the page and see all posts and updates	56
Post Reach- the number of people who have viewed the EA-LCS posts	23,672
Post Engagements- the number of clicks, likes, shares, and replays that the posts have had	1,832
Post Comments- comments from page visitors on the posts	9
Direct Messages- the messages sent in Facebook Messenger to the EA-LCS page in support of the school	14
Post Likes- the positive reactions (loves, likes, shocked-faces) on the posts	131
Post Shares- instances when page visitors share a post to their personal wall, allowing their contacts to see the post and EA-LCS page	28
Link Clicks- people who have clicked the link in a post to visit the website	356

**all social media data values are as of May 25, 2019*

Instagram has also had a lot of success, with posts getting consistent likes. The account now has 18 followers, all from organic sharing of information without any marketing or advertising funds.

Post Likes- people who give a post a "heart"	17
Website Visit- visits to the EA-LCS website from a post	68
Profile Visit- visits to the Instagram profile from a post	31
Post Reach- number of people who have viewed the posts	8,451
Post Impressions- total number of times the post was seen, including people who revisit or review it	11,876
Post Bookmarks- when a user bookmarks the post to return to it repeatedly	27

With over a year until the proposed start date, the amount of interest shows a high beginning level of support for the school and its mission. The social media accounts also allow the founding team to maintain in constant contact with the target community and all Las Cruces stakeholders, fostering the positive and successful relationship between Explore Academy - Las Cruces and the community it will serve.

Qualitative Support Data

Public Comments

Comments from interested families have been overwhelmingly positive. There have been dozens of families who have reached out through the website, social media, email, and at the information night to express their interest and support for Explore Academy - Las Cruces. In the table below, some of the most representative comments and quotes have been compiled, with all personally identifying features redacted, to demonstrate the community opinion of EA-LCS and its potential for success in Las Cruces. The support ranges from parents to community members and it shows the broad positive reception of the Explore Learning model in Las Cruces

Comment	Source	Stakeholder
"This is <<name>> and I was calling because I missed the parent night for the Las Cruces school at the library and I really want to know more for my daughter. I want her to attend the school and need to know how to enroll her in 6th grade.... "	Voicemail	Parent
"Will you be teaching 6th grade in Las Cruces next year? I really want my son to attend your school. I think you guys are able to make a real difference here."	Text message	Parent
"I am so sorry that I had to miss the parent night on Monday. I really want my children to attend and would like to know when you will have another open house for us? We read your whole website and we like the way you approach school. Let us know when you will be having another event. Thank you so much!"	Email	Parent
"Just went to the first information meeting for LC and the concept is amazing. I just hope the locals here can and will get behind this school and welcome them to our community."	Facebook comment via recommendation	Parent
"<<Two people tagged>> 7th grade for <<student name>>. I'm going to look into this for Vince for 6th grade in 2020."	Facebook comment via post	Parent(s)
"Good Morning! I was not able to make it last night to the informational meeting in Las Cruces, but I am excited to learn more as I will have a 6th grader in the fall of	Facebook via Messenger	Parent

2020. I am also a middle school teacher/administrator who would like to know more about the school and what you have to offer. Thanks.”		Teacher/Admin interested in applying for employment
“Where are you located? I can’t (sic) wait for my son to attend your school!!”	Facebook via Messenger	Parent
“Hi. I'm interested in learning more about teaching at Explore Academy. I'm not sure if you are already fully staffed. I have taught 6th grade for 16 years with LCPS, and although I'm happy with my current position I am interested in learning more about your program. I know of many families who need a program just like the one you are offering. It is very exciting to hear about for Las Cruces.”	Facebook via Messenger	Teacher interested in employment opportunities Teacher expressing interest for students of Las Cruces
“Good morning, I missed yesterday's info night at Branigan Memorial Library because of family matter out of town, will you be having a second one anytime soon? Thank you”	Website via Contact Form	Parent
“My grandson is a very intelligent young man. Would love for him to have the opportunity to advance his education with you. He will be going into the 6th grade 2019/2020.”	Website via Contact Form	Grandparent
“I’m interested in the Las Cruces academy. My son will be entering 6th grade in the fall.”	Website via Chat Form	Parent
“Hi! We are interested in enrolling in the Las Cruces campus in the fall of 2020...We are going to the informational meeting... Thank you!”	Website via Contact Form	Parent
“Fantastic! I’m glad this is coming to Las Cruces! ... I will watch as this progress. Thank you and good luck!”	Website via Contact Form	Parent Teacher
“I am interested in learning more about the school and it's programs for the Las Cruces, NM location.”	Website via Contact Form	Parent
I have worked in Cruces for my whole teaching career and this is the most excited I have been. I sure hope you’re hiring.	In person at the information night	Teacher
I am really happy you’re coming to Las Cruces and you really need to call me. The university needs partners like this with programs that are really preparing students to	In person at the information night	Community partner - NMSU

enroll and succeed in their degree programs. Please contact me soon, my email is on the sign in sheet, so we can talk.		
“Why can’t you guys open this August? I think people would be lining up at the door to get in here next year.”	In person at the information night	Parent
“It has been a long time since I was so excited about something related to school.”	In person at information night	Parent
“This is exactly what the students here need. I am really happy you all decided to come down here.”	In person at information night	Parent
“It’s exciting to see a school like yours open up here. I can’t wait to help you find your facility and open your doors for Cruces kids.”	In person while touring facility options	Broker

The comments above, which are a mere sampling of the feedback and encouragement the founding team has received throughout the winter and spring, help illustrate the Las Cruces community’s support for Explore Academy - Las Cruces and its innovative model of choice and academic success. Parents, students, guardians, community members, and educators currently working in Las Cruces schools have all expressed support for the school to open in 2020.

As the social media interactions, information night attendance, and stakeholder communication clearly indicate, there is community support for partnerships, interest from potential administrators, teachers, and staff, and many parents and students expressing overwhelming interest in enrollment. The evidence of support in this section, in addition to the partnerships described in the previous section Outreach II.A(1), demonstrate a supportive and engaged presence in support of Explore Academy - Las Cruces and its proposed opening in 2020. We are excited and engaged by this abundant support and feel Explore Academy - Las Cruces will be well positioned for success with the support of a partnership with the Las Cruces community.

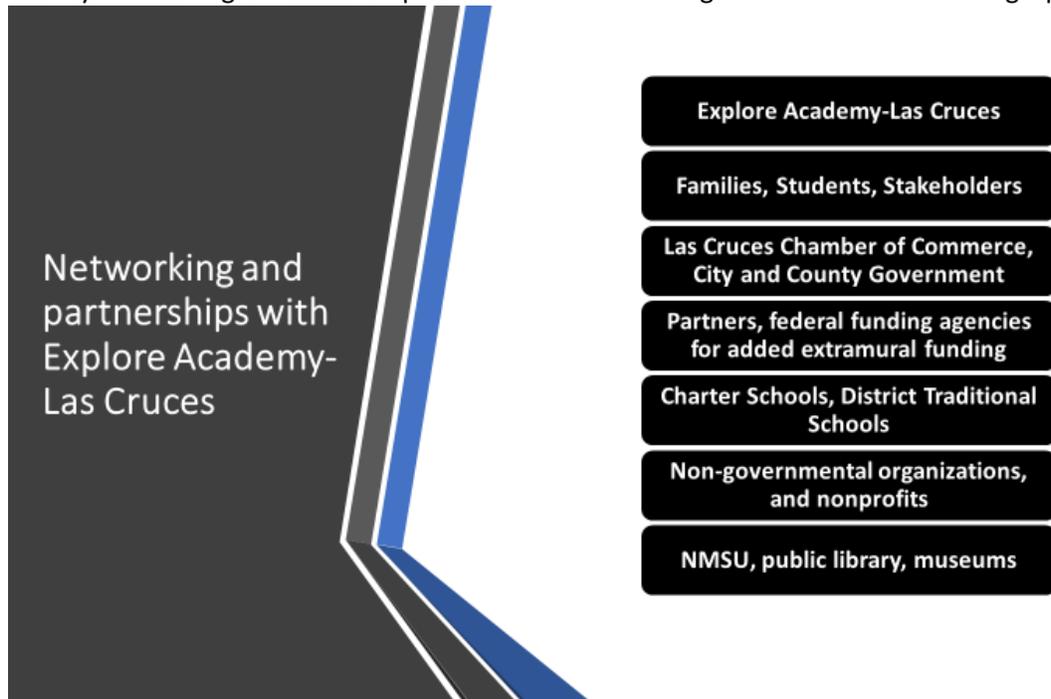
Total Points Available	Expectations
8	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include quantitative data that demonstrates community support from a broad audience for this proposed school; • Include qualitative data that demonstrates community support from a broad audience for this proposed school; • Ensure the demonstrated support includes support within the community of the specific targeted geographic location; and • Describe why the applicant team believes the evidence demonstrates the school will be embraced and supported as the community’s school and that there is abundant support for this school as a part of the community.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

C. Community Relationships

C. (1) Clearly demonstrate that you have developed **meaningful and strategic** networking relationships or resource agreements with local community agencies, groups, or individuals. (This differs from the formal partnership agreements that are integral to the proposed school’s operations, as described in Section II. I (1) of this application.)

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) has been engaged in networking efforts and leveraged its current relationships in Albuquerque to expand the networking efforts in Las Cruces and Doña Ana County. Meaningful relationships are established through the several networking opportunities that



have presented themselves. The President of the Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce, Debbi Moore, is a former board member of CNM in the Albuquerque metropolitan area. This relationship along with the other connections that have been made open Explore Academy - Las Cruces to the myriad business leaders in Las Cruces and the county.

The founding team believes that networking with businesses is an important part of school operations, especially in a school whose goal is to prepare students to enter college and careers having been exposed to the majors and career options that are available to them in post-secondary pathways. Networking with local businesses will be important as Explore Academy - Las Cruces begins graduating students into the community; employment, career guidance, and community activism will flourish as our graduates leave EA-LCS and contribute to the greater population. Student mentorship by local business leaders will be a result of business partnerships with Explore Academy - Las Cruces and not just an informal relationship. The founding team has already spoken with a printing business, the library, two restaurants, a dog-training service, a real estate group, and a graphic designer to begin the process of forming connections between EA-LCS and local business leaders.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces must also be an integral component of the local environment. The networking and relationship building must be a benefit for both sides of the equation. By understanding

the city of Las Cruces and county of Doña Ana, Explore Academy - Las Cruces is better positioned to adjust its curriculum and how it addresses specific local needs for families, student and stakeholders to provide the best education, high graduation rates, and a supportive safety net for graduates who wish to pursue a business career, an educational career or direct employment. The community at-large benefits and EA-LCS sees its successful curriculum as a recruitment tool to mentor the next class of students.

Several departments of NMSU have expressed interest in partnering with EA-LCS, particularly through collaborations surrounding the majors offered at the school that mirror the majors offered at the university level. This partnership has the potential to enrich both institutions by allowed students from various levels to interact in an academic setting. The potential benefits for this partnership also extend to students at Explore Academy who are taking dual enrollment courses at NMHU.

Beyond the local collaborations and partnerships, Explore Academy - Las Cruces will join the New Mexico Coalition of Charter Schools (NMCCS) and the Association of Charter School Education Services (ACES) to weave our local networking with the statewide reach of these two organizations. In addition, NMCCS and ACES will open opportunities for us to expand supportive services to families and students in Las Cruces.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces will not lose sight of the true targets of its curriculum, the students and families as well as stakeholders in our program and success. Experiential learning and the Explore Academy - Las Cruces curriculum partnered with the agencies, individuals, and organizations will be a focus of the school, especially for high school students, and will be monitored by our program evaluation and the qualitative input of all of our stakeholders through survey instruments and, more importantly, through group and one-on-one meetings with thought leaders, business leaders, families, students and partners in the community. The founding team has already spoken with New Mexico State University's Engineering department and arranged future meetings with several other departments. Partnering with NMHU and local businesses and agencies will allow students the opportunity to engage with both academic content and their community through their Explore Academy - Las Cruces coursework.

At the time of this application, early local collaborations with several departments of NMSU, the Branigan Library, several local businesses, and La Clinica de Familia are a good start for Explore Academy - Las Cruces in terms of strategic resources. Additionally, teachers and staff are embracing the Explore Learning model as evidenced in Section IV, B (1) and have engaged with the founding team to help launch the school. These interested stakeholders bring with them a wealth of experience and community connections from which the community networking system for EA-LCS will continue to flourish. Explore Academy - Las Cruces is confident that these strategic partnerships as well as the community support will continue to grow as we move toward an opening of school date of August 2020.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces and its partners will support and build on the relationships students have with their families and caregivers and engage new family members and new relationships that support, engage, and encourage students. To that end, we will plan and conduct quarterly mini symposia for all stakeholders where families and students will be offered training, education, awareness, and emotional support in developing home study environments and processes, student/child advocacy and career development. In addition, as collected data have indicated, specific areas of need within the community are focused on health-related topics in coordination with the school's health committee (SHAC) and in alignment with the school's Wellness Policy. These quarterly programs will feature awareness and education on the need for strong nutrition, health care and physical activity.

Total Points Available	Expectations
4	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and describe specific meaningful and strategic networking relationships with local community agencies, groups, or individuals that will support the school. Include evidence of these relationships; • Identify and describe specific meaningful and strategic resource agreements with local community agencies, groups, or individuals that will support the school. Include evidence of these relationships; and • Describe why the applicant team believes the identified relationships demonstrate the school will be embraced and supported as the community's school and that there is abundant support for this school as a part of the community.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

D. Uniqueness and Innovation.

D.(1) Provide **clear evidence** demonstrating the **uniqueness, innovation**, and significant contribution of your educational program to public education through meaningful comparisons and contrasts with the educational programs of other public schools that serve the same grade levels in the geographic area in which you plan to locate. Ensure that the evidence establishes a compelling demand for the proposed school’s educational program and that it is based on reliable research, effective practices, or replicated successfully in schools with diverse characteristics.

APPLICANT RESPONSE:

Explore Academy - Las Cruces (EA-LCS) commissioned an assessment of its ability to establish a second site using its unique and innovative curriculum and educational philosophy elsewhere in New Mexico, including Las Cruces, through the educational group Bellwether. The capacity study was a lengthy process, compiling months of data and organizational analysis about Explore Academy, its founding team, and the state of New Mexico’s educational landscape. The Bellwether report (Attachment 1) suggested that Las Cruces was an important location for Explore Academy to consider for a new campus. The report found that Las Cruces was the optimum location in New Mexico for an Explore Academy campus to have a successful launch and thrive long term. Explore Academy - Las Cruces’ small size and unique academic model may bring a new, desirable offering to Las Cruces and Doña Ana County. The community need is significant with free and reduced lunch programs reaching 67%, a higher rate than many other areas of the state. Bellwether also reported that many district and charter schools have not performed well academically in the Las Cruces area, but that Explore Academy - Las Cruces’ unique curriculum was well-positioned to erase that challenge. Bellwether cited that the southern New Mexico environment is quite different from the Albuquerque location, but this issue has been long recognized by the school’s leadership resulting in a comprehensive approach to support and networking described in this section.

The Explore Academy Difference

In comparing the traditional education model utilized in the middle and high schools within the Las Cruces Public Schools district to the Explore Learning Model, the contrast becomes apparent. This contrast signifies the Explore Academy difference, a comparison tool to denote the dimensions across which the Explore Learning Model aims to change the structure of a public-school education to better meet the learning needs of its students. The chart below provides the dimensional analysis across which the differences can be measured:

	Explore Academy	Traditional Education Model
Course Structure	Shorter learning modules, called seminars, spanning four weeks. Seminars are proficiency-based (80% and above) and focus on fewer content areas with more specific accountability in student comprehension. Students are provided with time during the day for tutoring, homework, study time, and other remediation as needed.	Semester-based classes, spanning eighteen weeks. Courses are based on the mathematical average of scores taken throughout the semester with no focus on actual learning. Tutoring programs are usually offered intermittently after school or at lunch, both of which conflict with student transportation and extra-curricular activities.

Student Choice	<p>Semester-based classes, spanning eighteen weeks. Courses are based on the mathematical average of scores taken throughout the semester with no focus on actual learning.</p> <p>Tutoring programs are usually offered intermittently after school or at lunch, both of which conflict with student transportation and extra-curricular activities.</p>	<p>Semester-based classes, spanning eighteen weeks. Courses are based on the mathematical average of scores taken throughout the semester with no focus on actual learning.</p> <p>Tutoring programs are usually offered intermittently after school or at lunch, both of which conflict with student transportation and extra-curricular activities.</p>
Class Structure	<p>Class sizes are small (17-20 students) and can remain small due to a fixed enrollment.</p> <p>Courses are designed to bring together teachers and students who share the same interests, often times mixing multiple age groups.</p>	<p>Class sizes are small (17-20 students) and can remain small due to a fixed enrollment.</p> <p>Courses are designed to bring together teachers and students who share the same interests, often times mixing multiple age groups.</p>
Curricular Structure	<p>By offering multiple versions of each course (seminar), students have a choice in how they fulfill their requirements, allowing them to explore a variety of different topic areas.</p>	<p>Utilizes an inflexible, structured curriculum with students collectively following a sequence of specific courses year after year with little to no allowance for student choice.</p>
Content Coverage	<p>Shorter learning modules (four weeks) allow students to focus on fewer content areas at a time. Coverage of content promotes a much deeper understanding.</p>	<p>Semester-based courses are less focused as more content areas are covered within the scope a course; students must be more general in their studies.</p>
Student Assessment	<p>Students are specifically assessed over recent content from no more than one month prior to the assessment date.</p> <p>Because content can be covered at a greater depth, assessments can use multiple demonstrations of competency to assess student comprehension.</p> <p>Students must show proficiency in each academic standard covered within each</p>	<p>Students are assessed over content from months prior to the date of the assessment and must often re-learn information from that time.</p> <p>Because content is covered at minimal depth, assessments do not measure depth of understanding in any area.</p>

	<p>seminar as covered on the seminar's exit exam.</p> <p>Scores on exit exams specifically certify a student's knowledge in the content, pinpointing in what area(s) the student shows proficiency.</p>	<p>Students can fail exams and entire units within a given course yet still obtain credit for the course and all the included academic standards.</p> <p>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.</p>
Student Accountability	<p>Students are held accountable for every academic standard, and upon earning credit, are deemed proficient in each one of the included academic standards within the seminar.</p> <p>Students are not allowed to be less than proficient in even one academic standard before earning course credit.</p>	<p>Because students do not receive certification of proficiency for each academic standard, it is impossible to know what students know.</p> <p>Students are permitted to show gaps in understanding over the collection of standards as long as their average proficiency is measured above 60%.</p>
Student Support	<p>With codified support systems such as the at-risk list, cuspie identification and support, and comprehensive communication methods such as email, Google Classroom, social media, and Remind, students are monitored regularly and provided with customized support to keep them on track. This includes on site tutoring available all day at school, weekly progress reports, and assigned academic support times for at-risk and struggling students.</p>	<p>Often, students are addressed at parent-teacher conference time if they are failing their classes, but without system-wide supports, there are few interventions that catch at-risk students, and even fewer that help intervene regularly and early to get students back on track.</p>
Advancement and Remediation	<p>Students must demonstrate proficiency in each specific academic standard within the scope of a given course. Students do not move on when they are deemed non-proficient.</p> <p>As a result of the shorter learning modules and given the flex periods provided to students each day, students who fail a 4-week seminar can quickly make up the lost credit without significant setback. This aligns with a growth model in which students are encouraged to do their best and make</p>	<p>Students do not demonstrate comprehensive proficiency but rather are deemed proficient in all academic standards if their average proficiency is greater than 60%. As a result, students may move on to higher levels of study with gaps in comprehension from previous courses.</p> <p>When students fail an 18-week semester, credit recovery is much more difficult and requires</p>

	mistakes without the fear of permanent failure.	significantly more time. Students are often stigmatized for failing and are unable to recover once on a downward spiral in a class.
College Preparation	<p>Students begin the college preparation process in 10th grade, gradually building the skills they need to be successful in their transition to college.</p> <p>Because learning objectives are based on proficiency/mastery, students who graduate will be guaranteed eligible for the NM Lottery Scholarship based on the minimum required grade-point average.</p>	<p>May offer college preparatory classes that are advanced, but only sparingly, and usually only for 12th grade students.</p> <p>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.</p>
Career Pathways	<p>Students can specialize their studies beginning in 11th grade by choosing an academic focus which will provide them insight into career pathways of interest.</p> <p>An unparalleled offering of over thirty academic majors is provided to students, representing all of the most popular majors chosen by college students. These programs are not single courses, but two-year tracks for students to begin exploring their future.</p>	<p>Students choose from a sparse set of elective offerings which provide them basic experience in non-core academic areas.</p> <p>Schools may offer some classes which provide students insight into careers pathways, however, there usually exist no more than one or two in a given area with many areas unrepresented or absent.</p>
Instructional Practices	<p>Seminar style instruction allows teachers and students to be equal participants in the learning process.</p> <p>Differentiated curriculum</p> <p>Students are guided through inquiry-based instruction in which they are engaged and responsible for their learning while teachers facilitate and monitor their progress.</p> <p>Frontloading is used rather than homework for meaningful feedback and engagement</p>	<p>Classes, often containing over 40 students at a time, rely heavily on cumulative letter grades and direct instruction methods.</p> <p>Attempts are made at differentiated instruction when teachers are able to.</p> <p>Teachers do most of the active talking and engaging while students are passive and listening.</p> <p>Homework is given and graded after the fact in an attempt to show proficiency.</p>
Technology Integration	<p>Technology is integrated into all aspects of life, including college and career pathways. Students are prepared for a technological world and are able to use their resources,</p>	<p>Many schools, especially larger traditional sites, rely on a few computer labs, through which students are rotated if their</p>

	<p>such as Google, chromebooks, email, and information systems, to complete required tasks in an efficient and thorough way. Appropriate use of technology such as social media to present themselves in a professional manner.</p>	<p>teacher takes the initiative to request lab time. Students are often not taught explicitly how to present themselves online, interact with others professionally, submit work, type assignment using academic formatting, or self-advocate. Many students only enter a computer lab to type an English paper or take a state exam.</p>
Special Populations Support	<p>A comprehensive, proactive approach to special population support is woven into the Explore Learning Model. Frequent monitoring of Progress Toward Goals, ELL academic performance, flexible scheduling, and school-wide attention to accommodations and modifications. Case management and ancillary services are done in student flex times, ensuring students miss little class time. Flex time also allows for medicine dispensing, tutoring, conferences, IEPs and SAT meetings, and other activities that assist special populations.</p>	<p>Traditional settings allow for extra support for students from certain subgroups, but the progress monitoring and customized interventions are standard for all students and often do little more than what is legally required. Data collection is not frequent, and issues are often noticed only at grading periods and conference time, leading to a reactive atmosphere rather than one that is proactive. Case management and ancillary services often pull students from their classes, leading to missed instruction and teacher facetime</p>
Communication Practices	<p>Communication is widespread on multiple platforms. Teachers communicate through student email regularly and with parents through email or phone. Administration actively communicates with all stakeholders across several platforms. Technology is optimized to work well on mobile devices and tablets. The campus is more paper-less than traditional sites, allowing students, families, and the community to access more information instantly. Grades, class progress, and student achievement is communicated frequently.</p>	<p>Grades are posted in a student information system. Some teachers and most schools maintain websites, but they are often not up to date. Many websites are not accessible to those who can only access them on mobile phones. Classroom activities are not accessible outside of class other than grades that are posted. General information is disseminated at times, often through papers sent home with students, but not across multiple platforms or to a widespread audience.</p>

As shown in the comparative table above, the Explore Learning Model is very different than the traditional educational model in almost every way. The innovative approach to teaching and learning at Explore Academy - Las Cruces significantly alters the educational experience for students, teachers, and stakeholders alike. The differences between the Explore Learning Model and traditional models of teaching and learning are explained in greater detail below.

Course and Class Structure

Explore Academy - Las Cruces utilizes a school calendar that breaks the year into eight 22-day terms, four in the fall and four in the spring. During these shorter periods of instruction, students take five classes, called seminars. Over the course of the year students take 40 seminars, rather than the same seven or eight classes they would be forced to take at a traditional school. Choosing from a variety of options for each of their seminars, students are tasked with learning a manageable number of course standards in each seminar. The ability to focus on five seminars over a one-month period allows students to reach deeper levels of understanding in all standards than is possible in the traditional educational structure.

Along with the five seminars each term, students also take two periods, called flex periods, that are devoted to eating, studying, tutoring, remediation, meetings, services, etc. These periods are built into the schedule to promote student time management and prioritization of activities to ensure both academic stability and success. In the earlier middle school grades, all students are scheduled into a structured flex period and a lunch flex period, allowing them time to mature and learn to use their time wisely. As students move into grade 8 and beyond, they have the ability to have their flex period completely free as long as they remain in good academic standing and are not at-risk (explained more below) in any seminar at any time. This level of student freedom framed with comprehensive progress monitoring and support is unheard of in the traditional educational model. In traditional schools, students are often granted only a lunch period as free time during which they must eat and attempt to squeeze in any clubs or tutoring they may need. This schedule does not allow them to learn and develop time management skills, self-advocacy strategies, or independent study habits.

Within each seminar, class sizes average 17-20 students, ensuring that each student has individualized attention from the teacher. The shorter learning modules and the small class sizes help drive the Explore Learning Model and contribute to student success. This is in stark contrast to traditional models where it is not uncommon to see class sizes reach into the 40s, even in schools with high numbers of at-risk students who desperately need more individualized attention to make academic progress and work to eliminate learning gaps from previous years of school.

Content Coverage and Student Accountability

Traditionally, students are given instruction accompanied with assignments that are meant to show their practice and understanding of the required standards and skills. Once an assignment or assessment is handed in, it is graded at the discretion of the teacher and a grade, usually a percentage of points earned out of 100, for example, is issued to the assignment and entered into the gradebook. Sometimes the work is handed back promptly, sometimes it is returned weeks later. It is common for a student to see the grade and then toss the assignment in the trash or shove it in the bottom of their backpack as they exit the classroom that day. All of these assignments and assessments are then averaged, and sometimes given weights depending on their content, which results in a final grade at the end of the semester. This makes it impossible to know what was actually learned by each student since students do not need to complete all assignments, much less demonstrate comprehensive proficiency, to earn credit for a class with a cumulative 60% or higher as a final grade.

Explore Academy - Las Cruces requires much more complete content coverage and higher student accountability at all levels. At the end of each term, students are responsible for demonstrating their

proficiency (at 80% or higher) in each of the standards within the seminars for that term. This structure allows the shorter learning modules to cover content at a deep level, ensuring that students are proficient in the required standards of each seminar at the end of the term. All required standards are covered in the carefully mapped out scope and sequence of each content area across grades 6-12, allowing each content to spiral their instruction to cover important concepts multiple times at progressively more challenging levels. The result is a deeper understanding of the required curriculum than what can be achieved in a traditional system where classes span a school year and grades are cumulative in nature.

Student Choice and Curricular Structure

Overview

Explore Academy's core academic philosophy is student choice with a strong focus on student engagement. Traditional models schedule students into classes based on their age - freshmen take freshmen classes, for example. The only aspect of choice afforded to students in this model, if any, is the choice of electives and possibly world languages. Students are not placed in classes together because they have the same interests or level of proficiency, but rather simply because they were born in the same 12-month period as their classmates. In contrast, at Explore Academy - Las Cruces, the entire curriculum is formed around seminars that are constructed around a "flavor" through which all material and instruction is presented and experienced by the students. Each teacher is given the creative freedom to form their seminars with flavors that are engaging and interesting for both them and the students alike, creating a learning environment that is dynamic and fun while also achieving rigorous academic progress. Students in turn choose their seminars based on the flavors that appeal to them. Through these flavored seminars, academic content and required graduation standards are taught and mastered. The Explore Learning Model turns all classes, including core content classes, into electives!

Grades 8-12

In the upper grades, every seminar is based on its flavor with teachers using a "flavor first" approach to teaching in which the seminar's flavor is a vehicle through which the material is taught. *The standards should be interwoven into the flavor, so that as students learn about the flavor, they come to understand the required standards.* Once a seminar is given its flavor, the teacher then develops the course materials in a way that carries the flavor throughout the seminar. The content standards and skills that are assigned to the seminar are learned and mastered *through* the flavor and corresponding materials, always keeping the thematic integrity of the seminar's flavor at the forefront of classroom instruction, activities, and assessments. The use of the flavor throughout the seminar is crucial and all seminars should be designed to dive deeply into the flavored material, allowing the students to reach proficiency in the content skills and standards in a way that promotes high levels of engagement and involvement in all aspects of their learning.

Example Flavor: "A Bunch of Hot Air"

Standards Covered: physical science standards and earth science standards

Approach: Students will learn the specifics of hot air ballooning (the design of the balloons, construction, flight, weather conditions, etc.) while also learning about the nature of gases, temperature, and the atmosphere.

Grades 6-7

In the lower grades, students are building the capacity to make purposeful and intentional educational choices for themselves as they learn more about themselves and develop their own personal and educational preferences and interests. Keeping this in mind, all seminars for grades 6-7 are taught with specific content skills and standards as the foundation of the 44-day term. Rather than the flavor-first approach described above, *the flavor represents a supplemental enrichment pathway to extend on the* New Mexico Public Education Commission adopted April 12, 2019.

material learned within the class (similar to a differentiated instructional approach). Students will stay in the same class but will embark on one particular enrichment pathway to extend their learning through a particular theme. In 6th grade, students will be given two flavor pathways from which to choose; in 7th grade, students will be provided three flavor pathways. These pathways are designed with creative freedom by the teacher.

Standards Covered (Grade 6): Research standards and speaking and listening standards

Example Flavor 1: “Wild Kingdom”

Approach: Students research and present information to their peers in a project-based flavor that focuses on the animal kingdom, allowing them to research independently and prepare an informative slide presentation about a species that interests them.

Example Flavor 2: “Go for the Gold”

Approach: Students research and present information in a cooperative-based flavor that promotes teamwork as they research Olympic sports history and prepare an informative demonstration of several sports from an Olympic era that interests them.

Flavor Structure

Grades 6-7	Grades 8-12
Students have choice <i>within</i> the class	Students have choice <i>within</i> the class
The flavor extends on and enriches the basic content covered in the class	It is through the flavor that content is covered within the class
The flavor begins in the third week. Students must commit to the flavor for the remainder of the term	The flavor begins right away. Students must commit to the flavor once the class begins
Students stay in the same classroom, but split up into subgroups when working on a different flavor	Students are in separate classes from one another when exploring different flavors
The flavor extends on the content	The content extends from the flavor
The work specific to the flavor is an extension of what’s learned in class	The content and flavor are interwoven throughout the class

Course Descriptions

In order to convey the uniqueness and creativity of each seminar, teachers design course descriptions and a course catalog is compiled to highlight each flavor that will be offered for the academic year. In traditional settings, it is common to see whole districts use the same course descriptions for a class. For example, English I at Las Cruces High School has the following course options and descriptions:

English / Language Arts 1- Honors: This is the first in the sequence of courses leading to Advanced Placement (AP) English III and IV and is recommended for students reading and writing significantly above grade level. Students will learn in-depth analysis and evaluation, critical reading of both informational and literary texts. Rigorous writing, vocabulary and research are the focus.

English / Language Arts 1: This course builds upon the students' prior knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, word usage and mechanics of writing. The skills of reading, research, and writing, speaking and listening will be developed. Students will engage in various genres of literature such as novels, short stories, dramas, and poetry and respond through writing.

Students entering grade 9 are able to choose from honors or regular English I and are scheduled accordingly. There is no other choice offered in regard to the English course that students will take, and they will be in the same class, for the same period, all year.

In contrast, Explore Academy - Las Cruces provides students with detailed descriptions of each seminar's content and instructional methods so they can make the best choice for themselves as individuals. Each flavor is described in a way that is exciting and attention-getting while also concise and clear. Students choose their schedules based on what they read in the course catalog, so teachers are expected to "pitch" students their course descriptions to highlight what the diverse manner in which they are approaching the teaching of the content.

An example of one (of the six total) English I seminars is as follows:

ENG 303 - DISNEY VILLAIN SPEECHES

Students will watch and read a variety of speeches from Disney villains in order to outline their arguments, understand the evidence, and appraise use of fallacies. Students will also write arguments to explain which Disney villain is the worst.
(WRIT, ANA)

← CONTENT (SEMINAR #) - TITLE

← Catchy course description that explains the flavor and piques student interest. This is where teacher creativity and unique flavors can shine

← Categories that describe the seminar's style

Note: ENG 201, 202, 203, ... 209 are all flavors of the same seminar, ENG 200. The last digit of each course number indicates a different flavor (ENG 201, ENG 202, etc.). The first two digits indicate the seminar (ENG 201). All flavors from the same seminar address the same standards and have shared exit exam components. This is true in all content areas, with the exception of the majors.

Categories

The flavor is not the only characteristic of the seminar that is provided to students. Each flavor in the course catalog also includes indicators to show students the instructional strategies used within the flavor. When designing flavors, teachers are cognizant of the nature of the flavor and which methods of instruction, classwork, assessment, etc. lend themselves best to a particular flavor. Since Las Cruces teacher creativity drives the diversity of the curriculum, examining the instructional methods that will make the flavor the most successful is a crucial step in the seminar-development process. This level of student choice, teacher creativity, and thoughtful course planning is not possible in traditional, semester-based courses.

The categories used for specific seminars within the course catalog are:

- Cooperative group-based
- Inquiry-based
- Lab-based
- Analytical focus
- Writing-intensive
- Reading-intensive
- Technology-intensive
- Problem-based learning

- Project-based learning
- Mature content
- Self-paced
- Math-intensive
- Hands-on learning

Student Assessment

Overview

Continuous assessment and feedback are the driving force behind Explore Academy's instructional methodology. The process of instruction should always include periods where students are required to reflect on their own learning based on the feedback they receive from their teachers. In traditional models, assessments are most often summative and are meant to assign grades rather than to facilitate student learning. Standards-based assessments are usually official, short cycle varieties whose results are often lost and not used for progress monitoring or classroom intervention and planning. The Explore Learning Model removes the reliance on summative assessments that are not facilitating growth. Rather, the single summative component to each of our seminars is the exit exam. In other words, all of the work students perform throughout the seminar is formative and is designed to help them build their skills and comprehension. Grades are not assigned to assessment nor assignments, but extensive feedback is provided for every single thing a student completes.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Teachers use assessments to guide students to proficiency in each seminar standard. In order to do this, both formative and summative assessments use Bloom's Taxonomy, allowing teachers to assess students at various levels of cognition, thus gaining a more complete understanding of student proficiency levels. Bloom's is broken into six levels of questions. Levels 1-2 focus on questions that target lower level thinking skills such as recall, recognition, and description. Levels 3-6 focus on questions that address increasingly higher-level thinking skills such as application, investigation, development, and synthesis. Depending on the level of the seminar, students will be working at different levels within Bloom's Taxonomy. It is important that students are asked to demonstrate their proficiency in various levels of Bloom's, as appropriate, throughout the course of the seminar as this allows teachers to uncover areas of both strength and weakness in student understanding and performance. Exit exams are divided into two separate tests based on the level of understanding: basic comprehension (Bloom's levels 1-3) and higher-level understanding (Bloom's levels 3+).

In traditional models, teachers often use tests from textbooks or write their own as they go, resulting in assessments that vary widely in quality and content. There is no guarantee that students in every Biology class, for example, are being assessed in the same way over the same required standards. Some students may earn an A in one class with one teacher while their same level of performance and proficiency may have earned a C in another teacher's class. Explore Academy - Las Cruces assessments are aligned to the standards, utilize Bloom's Taxonomy, and have common components across seminars to allow for greater test validity and reliability.

Formative Assessment

Throughout the duration of a seminar, Explore Academy - Las Cruces teachers will continually assess student progress in each of the content or skills standards that are covered in the seminar. To do this, every assignment, project, quiz, etc. is broken down by standard so that every grade that is earned is a reflection of the students' current level of proficiency in each standard individually. Unlike the traditional method, there is no average or combined grade; each standard has a stand-alone grade that represents the students' current level of proficiency.

As feedback and student reflection on their own learning is a vital part of the learning process, teachers use all classwork as checkpoints, allowing them to provide students with specific and targeted feedback in order to guide the learning process as students improve their work and make progress toward their academic goals. In contrast to traditional models where classwork and test grades are compiled and averaged over time and reflect a nonstandard-specific grade, EA-LCS students know exactly what level of performance they are achieving in each standard.

The Gradebook

Gradebooks at EA-LCS will be set up with the standards residing where assignments would typically be entered. In other words, daily work or assignments are not entered in the gradebook as is seen in traditional models. Where most middle and high schools have dozens, if not hundreds, of assignments over the course of a semester, each with a slot in the gradebook and an impact on the final, cumulative grade, EA-LCS teachers enter only the name and description of each seminar's standards into the gradebook. Teachers will, as often as they can, update standards grades with the most recent measure of comprehension for students within that standard. What this provides both students and parents is the most recent snapshot of student understanding up to the point in time. This also eliminates all meaningless extra credit, worksheets, busy work, and "fluff" grades that often have a large impact on a student's final grade for a semester- or year-long course.

Summative Assessment

Students earn final grades through summative assessments. Traditional models use final exams and End of Course exams as summative assessments, but these are awarded a percentage of the final course grade, meaning students *do not have to be proficient* on the summative assessment to pass the course. If a student has earned a 96% over the course of a semester by simply completing work, including extra credit and assignments not related to any standards, they could earn 0% on the final exam, showing literally no proficiency, and leave the course with a grade of 77% if the final exam is worth the common value of 20%.

All Explore Academy - Las Cruces seminars also culminate in a final summative assessment, called the exit exam. Unlike a final exam in a traditional model, the goal of the exit exams is to allow students to demonstrate their proficiency in each of the seminar's standards/skills by completing an assessment that is standards-based and contains common questions among all flavors of any particular seminar. The exam tests the students on the standards they have learned and practiced throughout the term. All exit exams are aligned vertically and horizontally, standards-based, based on Bloom's Taxonomy, peer-reviewed, quality-controlled, digitally secure, and common in structure and form. These summative assessment characteristics are critical since many final exams in other schools are written by individual teachers with no accountability or review process in place to verify the validity and reliability of the assessments.

The basic Explore Learning Model exit exam structure is:

Part 1 – Basic Comprehension

- Objective-type questions (multiple choice, etc.)
- Common among all flavors of the seminar
- Bloom's levels 1-2 (and perhaps 3) (requiring a basic knowledge and comprehension level of the seminar material)
- Questions for each content standard/skill of the seminar
- Not based on the flavor of any particular seminar

Part 2 – Higher Level Comprehension

- Subjective-type questions (essay, short answer, etc.)

- Unique to each flavor, incorporating the seminar's individual content into the exit exam questions and tasks
- Bloom's levels 3-6 (requiring a deeper understanding of the seminar material) (the upper level will depend on the seminar level; e.g. 100-level may only extend up to level 3)
- Questions require more in depth understanding of the standards as well as the flavor of the seminar.

Advancement and Remediation

As mentioned above, students must demonstrate proficiency in all required seminar standards on the exit exam in order to earn credit. Students are not allowed to move on when they are deemed to be non-proficient in any standard. This allows Explore Academy - Las Cruces teachers to know with precision the proficiency level of all students in every standard. A traditional model is built on assignment and assessment grades that are averaged to achieve a final grade for each student. In this model, it is near impossible to ensure that students have been taught all standards, much less know with any confidence the degree of proficiency for any one specific standard. Students are able to earn low scores in weak standards and allow better scores in other standards to pull the average grade up to a passable level. This system has perpetuated learning gaps and below-grade level performance in students, even as they are promoted year after year.

In the traditional model, if a student fails a semester or year-long course, they end up behind .5 or 1.0 credits in that content area, potentially delaying their ability to graduate. It is much harder to course correct when a student is identified as struggling in the middle of a longer course and has already accumulated many low grades on assignments and assessments. At EA-LCS, in contrast, students are monitored throughout the seminar to intervene and provide support when needed. However, in keeping with the growth mindset that is a core value of the Explore Learning Model, students are not stigmatized for failing a seminar in which they worked very hard but did not reach proficiency. Instead, the model has built in a buffer so that students are able to fail a few seminars over the course of their middle and high school years and retake those seminars, with a new flavor and possibly a new teacher, at another time to make up the credit that was not earned the first time around. This ability to remediate and course correct while still being held to the rigorous 80% proficiency level allows students to reach proficiency, even if it takes a little longer for some concepts and continue without the devastating learning gaps that are ubiquitous in the traditional school model.

Instructional Practices

Seminar Style Instruction

Direct instruction is the most common method of instruction in most classrooms. Although many initiatives have pushed educators to expand their instructional methods to be more inclusive and student-driven, the overwhelming class sizes, accountability demands, and lack of resources make this research-proven push for more engaging instruction very difficult to embody in the average middle and high school classroom. Explore Academy - Las Cruces keeps class sizes small and provides needed materials so that teachers can utilize a seminar-based approach to teaching, one which is focused on a student-driven form of education. The seminar structure differs from a traditional style of teaching in that the learning is directed by students, not the teacher.

Within a seminar-based design, the teacher's role shifts from instructor and the source of information to a guide and facilitator of learning and understanding. Explore Academy - Las Cruces seminars do not utilize lecture as the primary manner of instruction. Information that students are expected to learn should be largely collected by the students themselves (using resources provided by the teacher), with the teacher's facilitation functioning to provide examples, provide pointed questioning, clarify, fill gaps in understanding, apply, and extend on the information being covered.

The seminar represents a two-way discourse, where students are communicating in class as much, if not more, than the teacher. This can come in the form of student-to-student communication or student-to-teacher communication and may be nested in a variety of instructional formats (discussion based, inquiry, Socratic method, etc.). There is no one instructional format that must be utilized to allow for a student-driven seminar. The manner in which the seminar is conducted is up to the teacher's discretion. What makes it so unique and innovative is the way the seminar approach actively engages students to be owners of class content and progress as much as, if not more than, the teacher.

Seminar	Traditional Class
Average 10-12 students	Average 30 students
Students choose the seminar that they are taking by picking the flavor that matches their learning style and interests	Students are scheduled into a class based on their age/cohort/grad requirements/convenience
Students do most of the work/talking	Teacher does most of the work/talking
Students actively seeking out information	Teacher actively distributing information
Students engage with the course content and with each other to learn	Students listen to teacher to learn and complete work
Students come to class prepared to learn/engage by having completed their frontloading beforehand	Students come to class as blank slates that need to be filled and are sent home with homework for that day
Students practice and improve their skills and content knowledge in class with teacher guidance and support	Students practice their skills at home on their own and turn in homework on its due date for a grade
Students complete work and are given continual formative feedback to correct and improve work	Students complete and turn in work and it is returned with a grade
Students receive formative grades continually to measure learning in each standard over time	Students earn summative, cumulative grades and a final average at the end of the semester
Students pass a seminar by showing proficiency of 80% or higher in every standard/skill of the seminar individually on an exit exam	Students pass a course, even with learning gaps, as long as their class average is over 60%, with the final exam only worth between 10-20% of the final grade

Inquiry-based Instruction

EA-LCS teachers will incorporate inquiry-based instruction throughout the offered seminars. In line with the seminar approach, students are encouraged to take risks and examine complex topics to reach conclusions on their own with the teacher serving as a guide and facilitator rather than a concrete authority over the content. Where traditional class structure would dictate that the teacher has the information and the students are there to learn and remember what is taught, the Explore Learning Model's inquiry focus dictates that students are in the driver's seat of their own learning vessel and they are to navigate the content and reach proficiency through trial and error, relying on their teacher to provide the feedback and course corrections when needed.

This also creates an environment that is customized to each learner through small class sizes and one-on-one attention throughout the learning process. This is not possible in traditional models with large classes in which students are rarely given the latitude, much less encouraged, to fail and learn from the failure. The spirit of inquiry-based instruction is for students to learn to think for themselves, and be able to defend their learning, rather than depending on a teacher to provide all academic information to them.

Frontloading

One of the most fundamental instructional methods that makes Explore Academy - Las Cruces unique and different from traditional models is frontloading. Frontloading is the practice of assigning students a pre-learning task to complete *prior* to arriving in class that will allow them to be fully engaged *during class*. It functions as an anticipatory set to be done outside of class prior to the day's lesson, allowing for more quality learning time while in class. As an example, instead of students watching a video in class, they watch the clip ahead of time (on their own) and are ready to discuss it during class.

Frontloading replaces traditional homework, utilizing an approach where students perform individual work prior to the class lesson instead of after. Teachers still have the flexibility to assign additional work outside of class (reading, projects, etc.), but these are secondary to frontloading.

The use of frontloading represents a paradigm shift from the traditional model in that students are not taught a lesson then asked to practice it at home, alone, for homework; instead, they are given introductory material of some sort (notes, pre-reads, slide presentations, multimedia clips, etc.) to complete/read/review before the next class period to *prepare them for their class session*. Thus, when arriving in class, they are able to use the material they reviewed to clarify concepts, solidify content knowledge, ask questions, and practice skills, all while being guided by the teacher in person as well as working alongside their peers.

Frontloading can take many forms, allowing teachers creativity in how they structure their work for students outside of class. Some examples of common frontloading assignments are:

- Pre-reads (articles, sections of books, lyrics, formulas, etc.)
- Problem completion (calculations, exercises, translations, etc.)
- Notes (reading slides or outlines, reading sections of instruction, listening to video tutorials, etc.)
- Completion of project phases (students demonstrate that they have finished a portion of a larger project by submitting said portion at the required checkpoint)
- Media (watching clips, movies, interviews, podcasts, etc.)
- Material review (from classwork, source documents, returned quizzes, lab safety procedures, create summary of info prior to a quiz, etc.)
- Learning of simple facts (memorize a small set of vocab words, etc.)
- Brainstorming/Pre-Thinking (thinking of questions/ideas/examples, find a quote, etc.)

Frontloading Expectations

Frontloading is successful because it *leads into the lesson for that day*. Students are able to see how frontloading ties into what they are learning for that day; this helps them see the benefit in the work they

perform. Frontloading is checked each day in some form or another; some teachers may utilize a simple check while others may prefer to look closer at the frontloading for a given day. In addition, some may prefer a quick quiz to check for understanding. Using student frontloading as an example for the class is also done at times so that students can peer review one another's work and learn to absorb and provide constructive peer feedback.

Students have their flex periods daily to complete their frontloading. In traditional models, students usually have lunch as their only free time, so working on homework for their classes is often done, as the name suggests, at home. At EA-LCS, we want students to be able to practice concepts at school, so they are able to seek help when they need it. Thus, frontloading is most often completed during flex on campus, allowing students, especially at-risk students, to use tutoring and peer study buddies for assistance as needed. Based on the grade level, frontloading becomes progressively more difficult to challenge students as they take seminars in the higher tier levels.

Frontloading vs. Homework

Frontloading	Homework
Completed before arriving in class so that students can use and refer to the material when class begins	Assigned at the end of a class period to be turned in at a future time (next day, next week, etc.)
Preview of material to prepare for class	Review of what was taught in class
Standardized format for all content areas that is short and purposeful	No set requirement or standardization across classes or content areas
10-30 minutes to complete frontloading depending on the nature of the material and level of the seminar	Various time needed to complete homework depending on a wide variety of factors
Frontloading is used immediately in class and any learning gaps and areas of confusion is addressed by the teacher and peers immediately	Homework is turned in and sometimes never seen or reviewed again, while other times it is graded and handed back without being used or integrated into class
Formative in nature and meant <i>for students</i> to enhance learning and deepen understanding	Usually summative in nature and meant <i>for teacher</i> to see student progress after a lesson or unit

College Preparation and Career Pathways

Rather than limit students to elective offerings which are often taught at less rigorous levels than content coursework and do little to prepare students for college, the Explore Learning Model provides students with the ability to take college-level coursework, in high school, through academic "majors" offered to upperclassmen. Each student at Explore Academy - Las Cruces will choose at least one area of focus to

better prepare for the rigors of college-level academics and gain valuable experience in the fields that interest them.

As students enter their 10th grade year, they will be eligible to enter into one (or more!) of several academic major programs. Much as a student declares a major at the university level, EA-LCS students will choose from an extensive set of areas to explore their interests before entering college. This type of extension will serve to develop students in their college readiness and career selection by providing them not only a taste of college-level academic rigor, but essential insight into the reality of the careers in which they potentially see themselves. Students will receive guidance from teachers and counselors in choosing their academic major.

Current research suggest that today's college students spend, on average, six years completing their degrees. This trend is due in large part to time spent in courses as students abandon their initial paths to explore news areas of interest, changing majors, on average, two to three times in the process. While this extra time is necessary for student exploration, it has been shown to be detrimental to overall academic success as research suggests that extended time in college leads to greater risk of dropout, increased financial burden, and decreased competitiveness in the job market after graduating. In contrast to the traditional model where many seniors are winding down toward graduation, sometimes taking only two or three classes, EA-LCS students will be immersed in their major programs, providing the ideal bridge from high school to college and career pathways.

At Explore Academy - Las Cruces, we will not only provide each student with critical insight into their field(s) of interest, but a level of valuable experience to put them ahead of their peers as they enter college. For students that just want to explore to those that have already chosen a field of focus, the major pathways serve to not only expose students to advanced levels of coursework in order to develop their skills in preparation for college, but provide them valuable insight into the realities and demands within a given career or among several different careers.

The list of academic majors Explore Academy plans to offer is shown below. Be aware that these are not single courses, but distinct two-year course pathways.

SCIENCE

- Medicine (includes Nursing, Molecular Biology)
- Forensic Science
- Environmental Science (includes Conservation Bio)
- Animal Science (includes Zoology, Wildlife Biology)
- Physical Science (includes Astronomy, Physics)
- Nutrition
- Sports Medicine
- Veterinary Medicine
- Forensic Psychology

SOCIAL STUDIES

- Political Science and Government
- Psychology
- Law
- Sociology (includes Criminology)
- Criminal Justice

MATHEMATICS

- Engineering (includes AE, ME, EE, CivE)
- Business (includes Finance, Accounting)

- Computer Science
- Computer and Information Systems
- Environmental Engineering
- Chemical Engineering

ENGLISH

- Journalism
- Creative Writing
- Advertising and Public Relations
- Communications
- Literature
- Marketing

MISC

- Art
- Graphic Design
- Culinary Arts
- Education (emphasis in Primary or Secondary)
- Physical Fitness, Parks and Recreation
- Explorer (multiple major pathways taken)

Student Support**At-Risk List**

In traditional models, student progress is addressed at grading periods and conference times, often every 9 or 18 weeks. If a student has struggled for 9 weeks of a semester, it is very difficult to address the specific issues in time to recover a earn credit. Explore Academy - Las Cruces knows that more frequent feedback and support is crucial to student accountability and success. Each week, teachers will provide feedback regarding students who are struggling or demonstrating learning gaps in any given seminar to identify students who need to be on the At-Risk list. There are specific indicators that are assigned so that students, parents, and other teachers are aware of the specific areas of concern for each student. This will allow administration to generate the At-Risk list report and assign the identified students to a structured flex / study group to provide focused interventions for their academic needs. This is done weekly for the entire school year. This frequent feedback and immediate intervention and support system is unheard of in traditional models, and it allows for unprecedented progress monitoring for all students enrolled, not just those who are at-risk or in a school-monitored subgroup.

Cuspies

To take the monitoring process a step further, EA-LCS staff and administration analyze student data and performance at a deeper level in order to identify students who are on the cusp of success, sometimes referred to as “bubble” students. At the completion of term 4, all staff collaborate to separate students based on their achievement level and success in their first four terms. The resulting ranking system and student data provides a list of “cuspies” who are students who are on cusp of success but require more support to get them there. From this list, each staff member is then paired with a cuspie and provides that student with monitoring, guidance, and support for the last four terms. This mentoring is meant to push cuspies into success, and the progress and data related to cuspies is analyzed and discussed during staff meetings as well as term break days to ensure that all cuspies are receiving the support they need. Teachers stay in contact with and monitor their cuspies to provide consistent support. This level of

schoolwide intervention and support is not possible in traditional systems where students are in the same classes all year and are not familiar with the majority of the teaching staff.

Tutoring

Although many traditional schools offer tutoring, it is often for a short period during lunch or outside of school hours. We believe that tutoring should be available at all times, to all students. Every period of the day, EA-LCS will have academic tutors available to students for their flex periods, allowing students to seek help when needed. These tutors will also be assigned to students when they are on the at-risk list or otherwise identified as needing more academic support in order to succeed. Tutoring should not be something that students have to pay for outside of school, nor should it be hard to attend due to scheduling.

Technology Integration

Google Apps such as Classroom

Parents and students often have limited access to classroom materials, plans, and progress in traditional models. Explore Academy - Las Cruces will promote parent and student involvement in the classroom every term. Google apps are utilized throughout the Explore Learning curriculum. In seminars for instruction, teachers use Google Classroom as the online platform that is used in conjunction with their classroom instruction. All teachers keep their Classroom pages up to date for each seminar so that information is accurate for parents and students as well as for administration. This allows parents and students to see assignments, resources, frontloading, syllabi, formative grades, and other course materials at all times. It is also ideal for use on phones and tablets, so the traditional barriers between the classroom and the home are not an issue for EA-LCS.

Chromebooks

All students at Explore Academy - Las Cruces use a chromebook as their main school supply. This allows seamless use of Google for Education applications as well as explicit instruction related to technology use in formal settings. Students in traditional schools are often limited to desktop computers in a few computer labs located around the school. Many teachers never use technology in their classrooms either because it is not available or because they are not trained to use it. Students often spend their whole year seeing a computer only a handful of times, often to write an English paper and take the state-mandated standardized tests. Explore Academy - Las Cruces recognizes, however, that the world students will enter after high school is highly dependent on technology proficiency and familiarity. All students at EA-LCS will register for seminars online, complete work and submit digitally, interact with and use media and graphics for academic purposes, communicate online through email and Classroom discussions, and present themselves in a professional manner digitally. These skills are taught explicitly to students starting in grade 6, along with keyboarding and cyber safety, to create a population of tech-savvy students who are able to combine their comprehensive content proficiency with technology proficiency.

Student Information System

The student information system used at EA-LCS allows teachers and students to monitor progress in each seminar's required standards without the addition of cumulative grades for assignments or assessments. Unlike traditional models where the gradebooks are organized by assignment in a variety of ways and include many entries from throughout the course, the gradebooks at EA-LCS are organized by standard/skill. Each seminar's gradebook consists of each standard for that particular seminar. The grades are meant to show a current snapshot of each student's current level of performance in each standard and are updated at least weekly.

Email

Email is a great way to provide parents and students feedback and grade updates in addition to class feedback, Classroom, and the gradebook. Email is not used nearly enough in traditional models and in most schools, students are not assigned email accounts officially through the school. All students at EA-LCS receive Google email accounts that allow them to fully interact with the school for all academic and social purposes. The more that is communicated regarding student progress to parents and students, the more success students have.

Social Media and Website

The staff and teachers of EA-LCS maintain the school's social media, website, and other technology platforms such as Remind in order to keep open communication with students, parents, and the community about school events, classroom progress, activities, fundraisers, initiatives, etc. Although these platforms are becoming more common in all schools, EA-LCS integrates information across all platforms so that parents, students, and the community as a whole can not only access information about the school, but also interact *authentically* with school personnel in order to foster collaboration and teamwork for the success of all EA-LCS students and teachers.

Special Populations Support

Explore Academy - Las Cruces has comprehensive support systems in place for all students, as described above, but also has systems in place specifically for students with special needs such as disabilities (SWD), students with 504 plans and other medical conditions, and English language learners (ELs). The systems for special populations are particularly proactive to enable staff to support the students in a timely and effective manner. Rather than wait for reporting periods like 9-week grades or annual progress toward goal data collection, EA-LCS analyzes student data weekly and performs progress toward goal surveys monthly so that all support is tailored to specific student needs at the time when they need it. The systems in place avoid a reactive approach to student issues and goes well beyond the legal requirements to which all schools are required to adhere.

Another key difference in our model is that students all have the benefit of flex time, allowing them to receive many support services without missing class time. The time that students spend in class with their teachers is truly sacred, so allowing time for comprehensive support systems that does not interfere with this is a foundation of the Explore Learning Model structure. Students who are ELS developing language skills are able to receive English language development instruction and students with IEPs are able to meet with ancillary service providers as well as special education directors. Students with testing accommodations are able to sit one-on-one with a teacher to better create an equitable testing environment. This individual attention really makes the Explore Learning Model unique and innovative in its treatment of student support services. The effective use of student flex time, combined with the frequent progress monitoring, on site tutoring and mentoring, and individualized interventions, create an environment in which special populations receive ample, applicable support.

Communication Practices**With Students**

Explore Academy - Las Cruces teachers will maintain contact with students about their current level of performance in the seminar's standards at all times. Aside from updating the gradebook and Google Classroom, teachers will communicate with students, particularly when they are demonstrating learning gaps or a lack of progress/growth, throughout the term. The feedback given by teachers is the key to student growth and learning. This will be done in person in class or during flex, via email, or through

Google comments in Classroom, Docs, Sheets, etc. The constant communication between students and teachers is relatively unheard of in most school settings. Teachers are charged with the instruction of up to 240 students a day in some schools, creating an insurmountable communication barrier that prevents the time-consuming, one-on-one communication required for the Explore Learning Model.

With Parents

It is vital to keep parents in the loop regarding their child's academic and behavioral growth often. When a student is struggling or doing very well, EA-LCS teachers will reach out via email or phone and update the student's parents. Keeping documentation of parent contact can assist when there are questions about a student's grades or behavior. Parents truly are Explore Academy - Las Cruces' partner in educating our students. With the smaller class sizes and overall more manageable class loads, teachers are able to make these connections more frequently and with more substance. Explore Academy - Las Cruces does not believe that conferences twice a year are nearly enough to keep parents engaged and informed about the school and their child's progress. The more information that is given, the more parents can become partners. Unlike traditional settings, EA-LCS distributes information through a variety of platforms to assist parents in their communication process. This includes email reports and newsletters, phone application messages, robocalls, website posts, and posts to Google apps such as Classroom and Calendar. This is in addition to paper notices that can also be sent home with students when need arises.

With Administration and Staff

In many traditional settings, email is increasingly common as a form of communication, but is often not up to date or checked regularly. Gmail is the most common method of communication for EA-LCS staff and students alike. Email correspondence from staff and administration will be frequent, therefore email is checked often, and responses are prompt. Email is the vehicle for announcements, meeting details, events, etc., so all staff will have it kept up to date at all times.

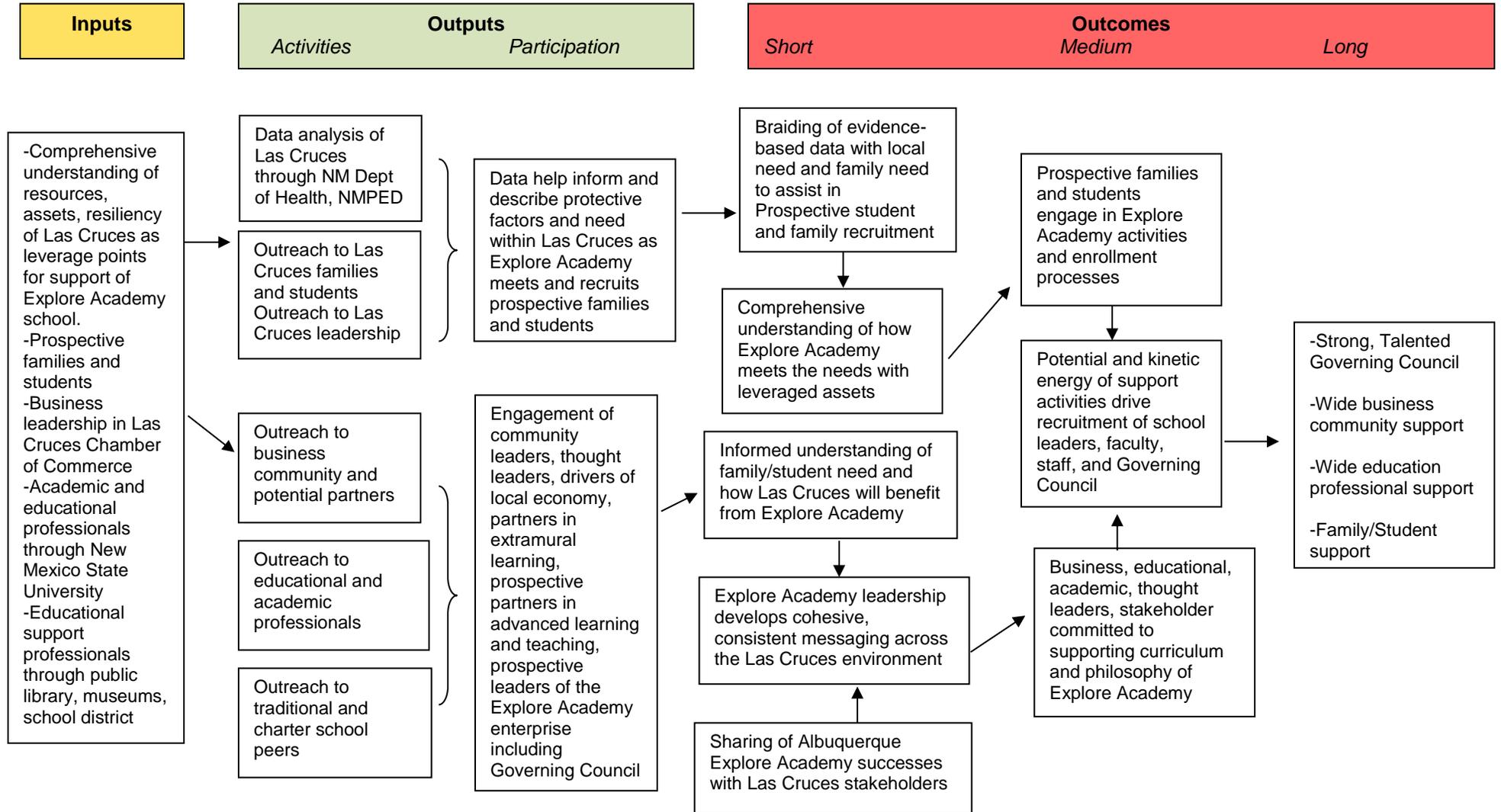
Staff and administration at EA-LCS also use Google as an innovative platform for communication in a way that sets the model apart from many other staff communication models. The Google Drive is one way that administration and staff communicate through in-depth collaboration and teamwork. Collaborating using Forms, Sheets, Docs, etc. is common and required of all staff. Additionally, all staff will keep their Drive organized and up to date in order to access materials and interact regarding school tasks throughout the year. This includes submission of documents such as PDPs and reflections as well as student feedback and curriculum items. The possibilities for collaboration, data collection and analysis, best practice showcasing, material sharing, and other curricular, instructional, and operational activities are limitless with the technology that will be used at EA-LCS as a means of communication for staff.

With the Las Cruces Community

All stakeholders in the community are valued members of the Explore Academy - Las Cruces family. In order to engage the community, EA-LCS will use the many platforms mentioned to keep the community up to date on school activities and success. In a world where it is common to see school websites that are either half built or out of date, EA-LCS will maintain the website and social media platforms up to date and current at all times, allowing for information dissemination as well as interaction between the community and the school staff. This includes ensuring that access to school information is available on mobile devices and tablets as well as in paper form on campus. We recognize that simply sending a letter home with students is not sufficient in the current cultural landscape. It is necessary to provide as many options for communication as possible to really involve the community in the school and its mission to best serve Las Cruces students and families.

Total Points Available	Expectations
8	<p>A complete response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the uniqueness, innovation, and significant contribution of your educational program to the broader or the local NM public education environment; • Include meaningful comparisons and contrasts with the educational programs of other public schools that serve the same grade levels in the geographic area in which you plan to locate; and • Describe how the applicant team knows there is a compelling demand for the proposed school's educational program in the geographic area in which the school plans to locate.
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER EVALUATION: Click here to enter text.	

Program: Evidence of Support Logic Model for Current and Continuing Supportive Activities by Explore Academy
Situation: Explore Academy seeks a new Charter School entity in Las Cruces (NM) with support of community and stakeholders



Assumptions: The resources, assets and protective factors inherent in Las Cruces help to identify need that can be addressed through the Explore Academy curriculum and academic philosophy of student and family achievement. Over-sampling of local community will relieve concern for challenges

External Factors: Unexpected critical needs arise; assets and resources impacted by economy and politics, business leadership relocation, stakeholders and volunteers overwhelmed by personal and business workload and responsibilities. Explore Academy response is a wide catchment area and process to anticipate challenges

Appendices and Attachments

Appendix Number	Appendix Description	Attached (Check if Yes)
A	Governing Body Bylaws	X
B	Head Administrator Job Description	X
C	Job Descriptions for Certified, Licensed, and Other Key Staff	X
D	Proposed Agreements Governing Third Party Relationships and Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs) (*Required if applicable*)	X
E	PSFA-Approved Projected Facility Plan Documentation	X
F	Five Years of 910B5 State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) Computation Revenue Estimate Worksheets	X
G	Five-year Budget Plan	X
H	Internal Control Procedures	X