

**Response to New Mexico Public Education Department, Charter Schools
Division August 2019 POLARIS CHARTER SCHOOL, Recommendation & Final
Analysis to PEC**

The Polaris School team believes our application demonstrates our understanding of state and federal regulations, as well as our leadership and capacity to open a quality school that would benefit the state. While this application has its imperfections and we welcome input, we would like to give more detail to areas we may have neglected to fully answer. Also we would like to highlight areas we feel we did answer, but may have been missed by the reviewing committee.

Our biggest concern are the sections that were marked “fails” in the application which were given zero points. We feel this score should be evaluated again, because we felt most of the questions were clearly answered. Some of the comments did not reflect on our answers and may have missed entirely. Please refer our answers specifically outlined below.

We are concerned with the determination that “overall the application is incomplete or inadequate” and feel it is unjustified. We ask that you please look at the application again. We believe that you will agree that overall it is more than adequate, but is well-thought through and demonstrates a clear capacity to implement the academic, organizational and financial management plans as described.

Also, we do not understand if the other reasons for denial apply to Polaris School:

- (2) the application does not propose to offer an educational program consistent with the requirements and purposes of the Charter Schools Act;
- (3) the proposed head administrator or other administrative or fiscal staff was involved with another charter school whose charter was denied or revoked for fiscal management or the proposed head administrator or other administrative or fiscal staff was discharged from a public school for fiscal mismanagement;
- (4) for a proposed state-chartered charter school, it does not request to have the governing body of the charter school designated as a board of finance or the governing body does not qualify as a board of finance;
- 5) the application is otherwise contrary to the best interests of the charter school’s projected students, the local community or the school district in whose geographic boundaries the charter school applies to operate.

Our highly-qualified team has the expertise and ability to make improvements during the planning year for all specific concerns the CSD or the PEC may have with our application.

II C3 Principal Job Description (Appendix B)

In all three cases above, the response simply recites statute and rule.

Throughout this application, we consistently mention statutes and rules because we understand that we are under obligation to follow these rules. Many of the rules and statutes leave little room for variation, and we intend to follow those rules.

The Applicant Fails to meet the criteria to identify the process the governing body will use for annually conveying and delineating the roles and responsibilities of the head administrator.

The roles and responsibilities of the head administrator are specifically outlined in the next section (C4). Maybe this should have been included in (C3) as well. The timeline states that the Governing Board President will establish a professional plan, with measurable objectives for the coming year. While a professional development plan does not usually have roles and responsibilities, the indicators and objectives in the next chart are very specific and describe the responsibilities of the head administrator.

II D3 Staffing Plan

The Applicant Fails to meet the criteria due to the following:

Retirement - ERB Employer Contributions are 14.2 % for FY20 and beyond, not 13.9%.

The ERB Employer Contributions appear to have been from an earlier draft of the budget. This is simply an accounting error of \$711.66 that we would have caught later and should not justify a zero score. Other concerns mentioned by the reviewer (below) were answered within the application.

What are the numbers listed for Life Insurance and Long Term Disability?

These numbers are included in our application. On page 219 in the Polaris School application in the section "II-Organizational Framework; D-Organizational Structure of the Proposed School; D.(3)", the Life Insurance and Long Term Disability are listed:

The budget (see Appendix G: 5 Year Budget) includes line items for:

- Staff Recruitment, \$500 per new staff member each year

- Staffing Salaries- Academic Leader, Operations Director, Office Clerk, Classroom Teachers, SPED Teachers, and Instructional Assistants

Personnel Compensation and Benefits Health Benefits	\$7,225
(Medical, Dental, Vision, Life)	
SSI	6.20%
Medicare	1.45%
Retirement	13.9%
Unemployment	3.20%
Workers Compensation	1.10%
Retiree Health	2%
Life Insurance	\$31
Long Term Disability	\$60

And on page 238 in the Polaris School application in the section "II-Organizational Framework; E-Employees; E.(1)", the Life Insurance and Long Term Disability are listed:

"Primary Conditions of Employment

Benefits and pay terms

Polaris School staff will be paid twice a month, once mid way through the month and once at the end of the month, totaling 24 paychecks per year. All full-time staff will qualify to receive benefits, including health insurance (medical, dental, vision), life insurance, disability coverage, unemployment, and worker's compensation."

And on page 298 in the Polaris School application in the table under the "Positions and Salaries" section, in "III-Financial Framework; B-Budgets; section B.(3); Payroll Expenses: Positions and Salaries", the Life Insurance and Long Term Disability are listed.

The plan is to train new hires between two - four months prior to the start of school - Employees will expect to be paid for these months. Will these training days/months be included in their salaries/contracts? Does the budget reflect that compensation expense? If not, how do you plan to onboard them with limited time before school starts? What does ongoing onboarding look like?

The Academic Leader will take specific training in place based education at the Teton Science School during the planning year and this training is included in their contract. (I'm not sure if we said 2-3 months before school starts, but if so, we misspoke. Place Network training typically occurs in the fall and spring.) The Academic Leader will then

use this knowledge to train staff during professional development days and times which are included in the contract and part of our budget.

Our calendar includes five professional development (PD) days for teachers, they are July 20, 21, September 25, 26 and February 12. These dates are included in teacher contracts, so staffing expenses are covered as part of salaries. In addition to this, the budget has a line item designated for professional development. We plan to use our own funds, Title I and II funds, and CSP money, when possible. We have budgeted expenses relative to the staff, so our first year includes \$10,000 for professional development (with 7 staff members), but that amount gradually increases as we gain staff members to \$28,000 for our 5th year (with 19 staff members).

While we will introduce place-based education during our initial training, most training related to place-based philosophy will take place year-round through our extensive professional development plan. This is a cultural shift that a one-time training will not address. PD outlined in the application includes one hour weekly devoted to team collaboration time, Professional Learning Communities that meet once a month, personal journaling, observations, summer shared reading club, and individual outside PD agreed upon with the Academic Leader. These PD opportunities are part of the teaching contract time, which is part of the budget. We also believe that we will attract highly motivated staff to learn outside of their contract hours because of exactly what one of the intents of Charter School Act is: create new opportunities for teachers. We have already received unsolicited requests to work at Polaris.

What differences exist in the process for hiring mid year if staff vacancies come up? How do you onboard a new teacher in the place-based philosophy, innovations and curriculum in the middle of the school year?

Middle of the year onboarding, specifically addressing the place-based philosophy is addressed through our Mentoring Plan (page 236) and professional development opportunities mentioned above. "Teachers new to Polaris" includes teachers who arrive in the middle of the year.

It has been widely researched that strong mentorship programs aid in having stronger retention of quality educators. It is in the best interest of our school and our students that all teachers receive the support necessary for success. In addition to the regular professional development outlined above, our mentorship program will provide additional support for novice teachers and teachers who are new to Polaris (after the first year). We believe that each teacher that is new to Polaris needs time to process and align their teaching style with our philosophy, mission, innovations, and culture, and our mentorship plan will help facilitate this integration. Our mentorship plan aligns with NMAC 6.60.10.8. This plan is supported by the budget, providing the time and compensation for mentors and training for mentors. Mentors and the Academic Leader work with Mentees to specifically address the Place-based philosophy, education plan, mission, innovations and specific performance goals

(Mastery-based learning, Advisory time/ Social Emotional Learning, and Place-based learning) of Polaris through weekly observations and meetings with Mentees. Weekly meetings also include time to address specific Mentee needs. One of our proposed Board Members has completed a master mentorship program from the New Teacher Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening the practice of new teachers.

III B2 5 Year Budget (Appendix G in Excel)

B2. Five Year Budget

The Operational Budget is not balanced in any of the years. Revenues do not equal expenditures. Total Revenues in year 5 are listed at 1,812,635, but the 910b-5 calculation is \$2, 002,672. CSP Grant is not balanced in the planning year (0). The ERB Contributions are under- budgeted in all 5 projected years. (14.15% is required.) Also, budget for water/sewer/refuse was not included.

We do not understand the major points of this response. The operational budget is balanced each year. Revenues exceeds expenditures, allowing us to build up an operating reserve. CSP grant revenues and expenditures are balanced in the planning year.

There were three minor mistakes in the submitted budget.

(1) Appendix G did have a mistake in Cell J26, incorrectly displaying the SEG total for Year 5. However, the total revenue (Cell J170) is correct and is used in all other budget tables.

(2) The 2019 Legislature did increase the ERB contribution from 13.9 to 14.15%. We missed that. However, the assumption (13.9%) is clearly stated and easily changed. The increased dollar amount is less than \$1000 in Year 1, rising to approx. \$2300 in Year 5.

(3) Water, sewer, and refuse charges in Los Alamos are part of the Utilities Bill. We did include utilities in the budget, but could have explicitly stated that included water, sewer, and refuse.

The annual total for these is also in the few thousand dollar range. While every dollar counts, none of these errors is substantial in budgets of \$1-2M per year.

We believe the application contains a realistic, complete, and balanced budget that does meet the criteria.

D. Curriculum, Educational Program, Student Performance Standards. *The applicant appears to be approaching the criteria of including a reasonable (as based on the professional judgment of experienced educators) timeline and plan for the development of the entire proposed curriculum. While most of the areas are met, Mastery is still subjective, so how do they align mastery of activities to CCSS and grade level standards?*

Since Mastery Based assessment is new, we understand the confusion. Meeting CCSS and grade level state standards requires specific skills. Mastery based learning assesses those specific skills and expects students to demonstrate mastery of those skills. “Mastery” should be clearly defined to reduce subjectivity (as with any assessment). The Novare platform is designed to help us merge CCSS and Mastery-based skills, and this alignment is critical. This system will allow students, parents, and teachers to document progress and see exactly which skills a student still needs to practice. We believe that demonstrating mastery will ensure that students are not “missing” skills that they will need to meet state standards.

F3. Programs impact for population *Attendance and truancy trends appear to have not been properly addressed. Also, the Applicant appears to have approached the criteria of explaining how the yearly calendar and daily schedule have been designed to meet students’ needs.*

Admittedly, we did miss this one subpoint “identify attendance and truancy trends.”

We did, however, address very specific needs of middle school/adolescent students in D(1) on pages 61 and 62 of the application. The chart on those pages identifies these recommended practices, which are included in our calendar and organization:

- Later start time
- Opportunities to Choose
- Self-awareness activities
- Peer Learning Connections
- Affective Learning
- Learning through the body
- Metacognitive Strategies
- Expressive Arts Activities
- Real-world Experiences

We believe that understanding the needs of our students and designing schedules, programs, and calendars that fill those needs will help alleviate some attendance and truancy problems. Advisory time and Restorative Practices, for example, will help

Polaris to identify individual problems and solutions for attendance problems. It should also be noted that the Habitual Truancy rate in Los Alamos Public Schools was 1.2% as reported to The Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center in 2014-15 by NMPED. The previous two years were 1.4 and 1.2%. Because habitual truancy is far below the state average (13.6-16.3% in the same three years), Polaris staff will notice and address it immediately.

Advisory time meets for the first period every day. The purpose of this time is for teachers to develop a consistent relationship with students and help them develop social emotional skills. This teacher will know if students are habitually late or tardy and it is his or her responsibility to initially talk with the student to identify problems and potential solutions. For persistent problems, the Academic Leader will meet with students and parents. We believe that parents want their children to succeed, and attendance in school is an essential step toward ensuring that success.

Community Input Meeting

Although not mentioned in the PEC Recommendation, we want to address the concerns mentioned by some PEC members regarding our diversity. We have taken these comments seriously and are currently talking with Dave Olivas, Anna Vargas-Gutierrez, and board member Ken Holmes to help us develop specific strategies to increase the diversity of our Board and outreach to regional communities.

Dave Olivas, PhD He served as Chairman of the Hispanic Diversity Working Group at Los Alamos National Laboratory and then went on to spend four years teaching at New Mexico Highlands University, where he also served as Department Chair for Computer and Mathematical Sciences.

Anna Vargas-Gutierrez, M.A. She is an experienced administrator with a history of working at Los Alamos Middle School (including with the WEB crew), so she knows our community well. She is skilled in Safety and Wellness planning, Special Education, Homeless Education, and Differentiated Instruction. She is also bilingual (Spanish).

Ken Holmes. He is a proposed Polaris board member who has taught over 15 years at predominantly low socioeconomic Native and Hispanic schools. He currently works with a Navajo non-profit mentorship/training organization.

Finally, we believe that the flexibility, local cultural focus, and personalization of the Place Based Philosophy will benefit ELL, Bilingual, Hispanic, and Native American students. We believe that changing the culture and philosophy of schools is needed to meet the recommendations outlined in the Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico

case. Polaris aims to be a model school that can not only help students, but also district and charter schools around the state.

Capacity Interview

During the Capacity Interview, nine responses were scored as “Approaches the Criteria.” We admit that we could have communicated some of our ideas better. Below is our attempt to do so.

Question 6: How does a high quality process to evaluate the effectiveness of the governing body and the school contribute to the success of a charter school? Describe your strategic process for conducting these evaluations. How will these processes support the success of your proposed school? Defined ideas but did not talk about the strategic process. The how and when were not identified. Talked about the feedback they were going to get but did not talk about the synthesizing process and how they would be using it.

This was a long question to answer and we hope to answer it completely. We appreciate you acknowledging that our application presents the need for Governing Board self-evaluation, objective of the self-evaluation, and that data will be used to drive continuous improvement.

To be clear, our potential Governing Board members do have experience with Boards of various organizations, County Councils, and School Boards. The potential Treasurer participated in strategic planning activities and strategic plan development on the Los Alamos County Council. The potential Chair participated on the development team for the LAPS School Board self-evaluation process and for the LAPS strategic plan development and update cycles.

The application contains a Timeline with dates, actions, and responsible parties with the purpose of setting up and executing a self-evaluation. What is missing is the content of the survey, metrics, and some details of data analysis.

Experience of the potential Governing Board members is that the identification of survey questions, distribution groups, metrics, and data analysis is best conducted by the entire Governing Board with participation of the Academic Leader. Examples of self-evaluation surveys are available. Any survey developed to include in the

application would miss the mark entirely. The Polaris team understands the need, objectives, and the process. A survey to address those objectives will be developed and a setup of exactly planned dates will be setup by the entire Governing Board at the beginning of the planning year. This activity will result in the best product; a product understood and supported by the entire Governing Board and the Polaris School Administration. Buy-in of the entire Polaris school team is essential to success.

Polaris School will collect multiple forms of data, using the Novare system to help us track and organize it into different points of view. This information will drive decisions at all levels. Students and teachers will use individual student mastery to set weekly goals, organize student groups and plan instruction. The Academic Leader (Superintendent) will use data to determine school goals, the effectiveness of the school schedule, culture, and teacher professional development opportunities. The Board will ensure that the school budget is allocated to areas of greatest need to ensure that students are growing academically and social emotionally (two important parts of our mission).

Continuous improvement is part of all steps of the process explained above. Data will be analyzed by people on the Polaris Governing Board and in the greater Los Alamos community with extensive data analysis experience.

Question 8: *Explain the importance of by-laws and policies to the success of a charter school. Describe the strategic processes the proposed school will use to establishing and implementing them and how these will contribute to the success of the proposed school. Mission and culture need to be supported by the bylaws, look at existing bylaws to support in the creation of their bylaws. The governing board needs to have a strategic plan process for the school year. Policy should be driven by compliance, not the mission of the school. Concern that committees are set to manage aspects of the operations and functions*

A strategic plan will be developed at the beginning of the planning year, again by the entire Governing Board – necessary to buy-in and support of the plan. Annually, the strategic plan will be updated by the entire Governing Board using data from the Board self evaluation and other data collected about the effectiveness of the Polaris academic framework and financial planning.

In respect to the reviewer note that *policy should be only driven by compliance*, the Polaris Founding team disagrees. Yes, policy must be compliance driven. However, the definition of a school culture is critical to the success of Polaris school. Polaris

school culture will be distinguished from the current LAPS school district school's culture. Aspects of this culture must be established and demonstrated by the Governing Board, then implemented and demonstrated by the Polaris School Administration, then executed as part of day-to-day instruction by teaching staff. Some cultural aspects of Polaris school will be presented by Governing Board policy. Examples are in the areas of restorative practices and student discipline; project based learning principles; and some Place Network practices.

The Polaris Founding team disagrees with the review team on their concern that Governing Board subcommittees will be involved in operations of Polaris School. Are the lines between operational and governance difficult to maintain and easy to cross? Of course, everyone agrees. However, with clear guidance and charter to Governing Board subcommittees and expected clear and frequent communication between subcommittees and Polaris School Administration, this difficulty can be minimized.

Question 10: *Describe your plan for acquiring a facility and ensuring that the facility meets educational occupancy standards required by applicable New Mexico construction codes and the weighted New Mexico Condition Index. Whose responsibility will it be to carry out this major piece of opening a charter school? Please include details about locating, securing, and funding the facility. Facility not yet established, for how ambitious the mission requirements have been outlined. How do you plan to combat the limitations of potential real estate available to the school?*

Finding a facility to house Polaris school is acknowledged by the application review team, PEC members, and the Polaris team to be the most challenging task to accomplish during the planning year. We have looked at potential properties. Some of those properties have become unavailable during the two years of writing this application, so we are careful about publically committing to a location without legally having a signed contract. It is also difficult for Los Alamos property owners to commit to a school that hasn't been authorized. This is probably why we answer this question hesitantly.

First, we are working with a realtor from ReMax, Kelly Myer. She is committed to helping us finding and securing a location. She will help us secure a contract. We understand that we will need to use a CSP grant or money from our foundation to offer a downpayment, and that we will not have rental funds from PED until July of 2020.

There are currently two properties that we are interested in. Our favorite is a newer facility, so meeting code should be easier, although we understand that it will certainly

need some changes to meet E-occupancy codes. It is located on the main road coming into town, which will help parents dropping students off on their way to work. It is also within walking distance of downtown and on the city bus route, so transportation is available. The owner is currently expanding the parking lot, which will also benefit the school.

We know that the only perfect building, will be the one that we build ourselves, so this is definitely a long-term goal of ours.

But for 2020, immediately after authorization and after forming the Polaris Governing Board, a Facility subcommittee will be formed to find and open a facility. Two Governing Board members and selected community members will form the subcommittee.

The sub committee's charge is to:

1. develop and maintain a project plan of activities, dates, expenses, funding sources, and responsible parties;
2. find a facility;
3. coordinate with PSFA;
4. ensure compliance with eOccupancy standards;
5. furnish the school;
6. prepare the facility to meet PEC June 2020 expectations;
7. open the facility in July 2020 and make ready for start of 2020-2021 school year.

Members of the Facility subcommittee will be experienced, knowledgeable community members and are better skilled than the Polaris Founding team to build the project plan in item 1. above.

We have some potential properties, a realtor, and a plan.

Question 16: *Regarding the mission goal, how is the mastery based assessment aligned to the state standards and how will it impact renewal? School will use Novare system to target performance. With the mastery based system, it will be difficult to demonstrate growth at renewal. The school will need use the state-mandated student assessment to evaluate student proficiency and growth.*

Meeting state standards requires specific skills. Mastery based learning assesses those specific skills and expects students to demonstrate mastery. Understanding

which skills students have, and which skills students need to practice is essential in determining individual student goals and helping students progress. Students who do not master skills will receive additional instruction and learn new strategies.

Demonstrating mastery will ensure that students are not “missing” skills that they will need to meet state standards. This will not only help students grow individually, but also help ensure that they, collectively, will demonstrate measurable academic growth on the nationally normed NWEA-MAPS and the state assessments required for renewal. We do plan to use the state mandated student assessment to evaluate student proficiency and growth, but these will not be our only measures. We believe that additional mastery-based assessments will ensure the growth that the state requires. As stated elsewhere, the Novare system is used to help mastery standards and then collect and organize this data.

Question 17: Regarding the Bilingual Multicultural, Hispanic, and Native American acts, how are you actually addressing the acts/statutes?The school is too focused on the culture and not the law of the Acts. The school needs a better understanding of the Acts and how those will impact the school.

We understand that the education system is inadequate, especially for ELL, Bilingual, Hispanic, and Native American students. We agree with the judge’s ruling in the Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico case. We feel that place based education, student empowerment, increased instruction in core subjects, and project based learning that connects students to the land and culture of northern New Mexico will help ensure that students are receiving the curriculum and instruction that meets their needs.

Our mastery based learning targets individual student needs to ensure that all students, even those who do not qualify for special services, will grow. We believe that a personalized system for all will benefit Bilingual, Multicultural, Hispanic, and Native American students because they will be receiving the targeted instruction that they need. When learning is personalized, we believe that it will help reduce the number of students in these groups who are disproportionately identified as SPED. Mastery based learning has been shown to work toward gap-closing equity.

Student choice also plays an important role in our school. The only waiver that we are requesting is to purchase texts and resources that will help us meet local needs. Some of these books recommended by First Nations Development Institute, National Hispanic Cultural Center, and/or Colorín Colorado are listed in the application.

It is true that we plan to have a diverse and accepting culture, because we believe that culture is essential in addressing the inadequacies within our education system. In addition to culture, we believe that we have systems in place to target instruction and ensure that all students are prepared with the skills to succeed in the 21st Century.

Question 19: *Can you please discuss how you will or will not identify ELL students as SPED students? It was implied but not stated explicitly.* The school understood the process of ELL identification and Sped but did not address these issue of ELL being over-identified as special ed students.

We are not sure what explicit words the committee was wanting in this case. We trust our answer sufficiently addresses the questions concerns. If not, we hope this can be asked directly by PEC.

We are aware that a disproportionate number of culturally and linguistically diverse students are represented in special education programs across the country and New Mexico is no exception to this issue. Polaris believes that teachers, parents, and community members have a key role in decreasing the disproportionality of culturally and linguistically diverse students being misidentified and referred for special education services. The Polaris staff will receive training on SAT, Rtl, ELL, and IEP accommodations prior to the opening of school. Identification will follow the New Mexico Technical Evaluation and Assessment Manual (T.E.A.M.), to reduce bias during the assessment and evaluation process for a student. This process includes using English Language Learner WIDA scores as a cross-reference for other assessments to ensure that all students are receiving appropriate and meaningful support. Our goal is to have TESOL endorsed teachers involved in the SAT planning for students (prior to referring to evaluation and possibly special education). They will understand the development of language and provide appropriate strategies for their acquisition of skills. Also, if a bilingual or ELL student is referred for educational evaluation, a bilingual diagnostician should conduct the evaluations so they can best communicate questions and take the bilingualism into consideration. When a team meets to determine if a student qualifies for special education programming, there is an important question asking if bilingual / or ELL status has been ruled out as a contributing factor and only professionals who understand this can answer correctly. If TESOL or Bilingual staff is involved (including a diagnostician trained in understanding bilingual students), they understand this question and too many times, these people aren't at the table.

Polaris curriculum, instruction, mastery based learning, and schedule support TESOL's Six Principles for Exemplary Teaching of English Learners. While these principles were designed for culturally and linguistically diverse students, we believe that they benefit all students. The first principle, "know your learners," for example, is part of the reason we scheduled daily advisory time and have students keep the same advisor every year. Examples like this can be found throughout our application.

Personalized learning is designed to support students at many different levels. This is a paradigm shift. We believe that often schools over identify students because they do not have a system in place to deal with student differences. Polaris' mastery-based learning is a personalized learning system that we believe will support all learners and reduce the number of students identified as needing additional "pull-out" classes. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) states, "personalized learning has the potential to create a paradigm shift in affecting [student] outcomes. Strategies associated with personalized learning can support clearer, higher expectations for all students; empower student agency and self-determination skills that can positively impact postsecondary outcomes; and direct opportunities and supports to both address student needs and build on their interests."

In accordance with federal law, a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) will be made available to all children with disabilities, at no cost to families. A well-trained staff will implement procedures for the identification and support of students with learning disabilities, giftedness and English learning needs that will be in compliance with all federal and state laws and statutes including: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Title II Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family Educational and Privacy Rights Act, and New Mexico's State Statute and Administrative Code (NMAC 6.31.2). Our processes and procedures follow the RtI process, including appropriate screening, interventions, and specialized instruction and support.

Our goal is for every student to make progress, and we know that students have different needs. When necessary we will work to support, evaluate, identify, and provide services to students with disabilities. However, our mastery based learning targets individual student needs to ensure that all students, even those who do not qualify for special services, will grow. We believe that a personalized system for all will benefit ELL and SPED students because they will be receiving the targeted instruction

that they need. When learning is personalized, we believe that it will help reduce the number of students in these groups who are disproportionately identified as SPED.

Question 22: *The school is not just hiring a principal, but rather a superintendent. The head administrator job description provided is not comprehensive and cohesive in terms of all the administrative functions of the job. How will you ensure that the person hired is able to oversee the school, handle all key functions, and also handle all outward facing needs? What primary roles and responsibilities, not just academic needs, are you expecting to be handled by the head administrator?*

The school did not delineate roles and responsibilities. Volunteers and creating committees is not a substantial fix.

The Academic Leader position is very challenging. The Polaris Founding team does understand the challenges of this position. Polaris school is designed as a small school to better enable the successful implementation of the Mission and the several unique aspects of the educational model presented in the application. Primary focus is ensuring sufficient teaching staff to support individualized and project based learning. Students must feel they belong at Polaris school and their teachers understand how they learn.

Some of the roles are outlined in II.C.4. of the application. Roles of the Academic Leader in addition to those academic roles already identified in the application include:

- a. meet all financial responsibilities and make sure the school operates within budget for the long term;
- b. implement administrative changes needed to resolve any Financial Audit findings;
- c. ensure compliance of the charter school contract between Polaris School and the PEC;
- d. plan for and collect data to be used when Polaris seeks renewal of the authorizing contract with PEC;
- e. day to day school operation;
- f. identify staff needs to the Governing Board;
- g. oversee the administrative functions of the Operations Manager and Office Clerk including:
 - i. Human Resource functions;
 - ii. Facility operation and maintenance functions;

iii. Daily financial transaction;

We understand that volunteers, families, and committees can only serve in a limited capacity for various legal and privacy reasons. We do, however, believe that they can play important roles and functions in helping a school succeed.

Question 23: *How do you plan to address potential teacher vacancies mid-year based on your very specific mission and goals?*

What differences exist in the process for hiring mid year if staff vacancies come up? How do you onboard a new teacher in the place-based philosophy, innovations and curriculum in the middle of the school year?

The school, because of its program design, creates a unique concern for hiring midyear and having substitutes carry on the mission. These teachers will not be trained in the specific pedagogy for PBL.

Middle of the year onboarding, specifically addressing the place-based philosophy is addressed through our mentoring program (page ---) and professional development opportunities mentioned above. "Teachers new to Polaris" includes teachers who arrive in the middle of the year.

It has been widely researched that strong mentorship programs aid in having stronger retention of quality educators. It is in the best interest of our school and our students that all teachers receive the support necessary for success. In addition to the regular professional development outlined above, our mentorship program will provide additional support for novice teachers and teachers who are new to Polaris (after the first year). We believe that each teacher that is new to Polaris needs time to process and align their teaching style with our philosophy, mission, innovations, and culture, and our mentorship plan will help facilitate this integration. Our mentorship plan aligns with NMAC 6.60.10.8. This plan is supported by the budget, providing the time and compensation for mentors and training for mentors. Mentors and the Academic Leader work with Mentees to specifically address the Place-based philosophy, education plan, mission, innovations and specific performance goals (Mastery-based learning, Advisory time/ Social Emotional Learning, and Place-based learning) of Polaris through weekly

observations and meetings with Mentees. Weekly meetings also include time to address specific Mentee needs.

Question 26: *How will grievances be handled, specifically for students receiving special education services? How are you going to be compliant with IDEA laws, federal guidelines, and what is your process for dealing with these issues? The school was relying too much on the PED. The school should be versed and should have a better understanding of IDEA laws and federal guidelines.*

Special Education

Polaris has a specific processes, procedures, and guidelines for communicating and working with families of special needs students based on NMPED 6.31.2.13. We understand that IDEA laws outline a parent's rights. The purpose of our school specific procedures is to not only meet legal requirements of IDEA regarding records, notifications, consent, and meetings, but also to develop a working relationship with families. We believe that developing positive two-way communication will enable most conflicts to be solved between families and teachers.

If, however, a formal grievance is filed over a student's IEP or educational program, it will either follow the standard grievance process outlined below, or, if a family or the school chooses, they may elect to request a trained mediator from the NMPED Special Education Bureau. The Facilitated Individualized Education Program (FIEP) is provided, at state expense, to parents and school districts in order to resolve a dispute. Finally, families may choose to file a state-level complaint with the Special Education Bureau. The state has specific outlined procedures for IDEA complaints.

Grievance Initiation

Any member from the community (community, parents and families, and students) who has a grievance with a member of Polaris should first attempt to resolve the differences or conflict by reaching out to the specific person directly involved. (This follows the restorative justice model, which is one of the innovations of Polaris.) The Academic Leader may be asked to mediate a meeting between the conflicting parties. Most concerns should be resolved at this level. If resolution is not possible, then a formal complaint may be filed with the Academic Leader.

Formal Complaint

Formal complaints regarding a violation of a federal statute or regulation, including discrimination or harassment based on race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, health, or age at Polaris School by a staff member should be sent to the Academic Leader within 30 days of the incident. The complaint must be written and signed by the complaining party or his or her designated representative. The formal complaint should include:

- Name of complaining party

- Contact Information for complaining party (address, phone number and email address)
- Name of the person with whom the grievance is being filed
- Statement of the facts. This should be a detailed description of the discrimination or harassment.
- The specific requirement or law that is alleged to have been violated.
- Date of discrimination or harassment
- Names of witnesses or those who may have additional information about the incident.
- Description of how the person filing the complaint would like the issue to be resolved.

Review of the Complaint

After receiving a formal complaint, the Operations Director review the complaint, investigate and interview both parties within 10 days of receiving the complaint. The Academic Leader will then meet with the complaining party and attempt to resolve the issue. A written summary of the complaint, reasons for the decision, and resolution or an update on the investigation (if additional time is required) will be provided to the complaining party and the Governing Board within 20 days of the formal complaint.

Final Step and Appeal to the Governing Board

If the complaining party is not satisfied with the decision or resolution provided by the Academic Leader, they may send a written appeal to the Governing Board. The Governing Board will review the appeal and respond within 30 days.

Thank you for taking the time to read this response and giving thoughtful consideration to our application.