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OPTIONS FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES DIVISION  
CHARTER SCHOOLS DIVISION  
Year: **2020**

**NOTICE OF INTENT TO SUBMIT CHARTER APPLICATION**

**INSTRUCTIONS**

According to NMSA § 22-8B-6(B) the Notice of Intent to Submit a Charter Application (“NOI”) must be filed by the organizers of a proposed charter school to the Public Education Commission at the address below **AND** to the superintendent of the school district in which the charter school is proposed to be located. *Failure to notify may result in your application being rejected.*

The NOI must be submitted by 5:00 PM Mountain Time by **the second Tuesday of January**. Notices of Intent that are not received by the Public Education Commission and the superintendent of the local school district by the deadline may result in the application being rejected. When you send the NOI to the superintendent of the school district in which your charter is to be located, you are strongly encouraged to send it by certified mail return receipt requested, or request a signed receipt when you deliver the NOI. Contact the local district regarding electronic filing.

Notice to the Public Education Commission should be delivered by one of the following methods:

- Electronically to: [charter.schools@state.nm.us](mailto:charter.schools@state.nm.us)
- By mail or personal delivery: PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION  
c/o New Mexico Public Education Department  
Attn: Options for Parents and Families/Charter Schools Division  
300 Don Gaspar, Room 301  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

The NOI is intended to provide the Public Education Commission with the primary point of contact among the charter developers, and preliminary information about the charter proposal, such as the school’s mission statement, the school’s focus, the representative student population in the intended location, enrollment

projections, key innovations, etc. (not to exceed 5 pages).

1. General Information

- Name of Proposed School

Explore Academy - Las Cruces
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- Grade levels to be offered and enrollment projections

Grade Levels to be offered	Projected Total Enrollment
6-12	700

- Primary Point of Contact

Name	Justin Baiardo				
Mailing Address	2720 Avenida Corazon				
City	Rio Rancho	State	NM	Zip	87124
Phone	505-306-5283				
Email	baiardo@exploreacademy.org				

2. Names, roles, and current employment of all persons on the applicant team, and qualifications of the team members to establish a high-quality charter school

Names	Role on Team	Qualifications: Education, Employment, and Experience
Justin Baiardo	Founder	Founder-Explore Academy Abq, 16 years teaching/administration, National Board certified
Elisha Varela	Founder	Masters-C&I Bilingual Ed., over a decade education experience, founding member Explore Abq
Toni Hull	Head Admin	Principal in Las Cruces, over 20 years experience in education
Louis Lafrado	Board Member	Pd.D, experienced grant writer across NM serving at-risk communities

3. Model or focus of the proposed school (e.g., performing arts, dual language, college prep, STEM, Montessori, IB):

<p>The choice theory model of education, which underlies the philosophy of Explore Academy, is focused on turning each student into an active learner who will increasingly become responsible for his or her own education. By allowing each student to choose and personalize his or her own educational pathway from an exceptionally diverse set of course offerings, they will be provided with that ability, and will thus create a more empowered, more successful student population.</p> <p>The Explore Academy philosophy uses electives to a level previously unseen in public education by incorporating the idea of a differentiated curriculum to provide students with a diversity of educational choices from which they can create individualized, custom educational pathways. Students are held to specific requirements which align to state standards, however, rather than learn objectives through longer, semester-based courses, Explore Academy uses month-long seminars to focus on fewer objectives. What was previously a semester or year-long class is now broken up into several smaller seminars which collectively cover the same academic standards.</p> <p>The diversity of the school and its curriculum come in the manner in which these seminars are delivered. Rather than providing a single option (the traditional manner of teaching), Explore Academy teachers create different themes ("flavors") which differentiate the way in the seminar may be offered to students. It is from this diversity that students can choose the manner in which they are educated. Specific themes for the seminar flavors, and their prominent strategies, will be developed through the creativity of the school's teachers and will advertised to students so that they may choose the themes through which they receive their education. As students move through their seminar requirements, they will come to create a unique and individualized education specific to their interests and passions.</p>
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4. Does the school expect to contract with another entity for either management, or substantial oversight or direction in the school's operation?  Yes  No

If YES, describe the entity and the role it will have in the school's operational plan.

<p>Explore Academy – Las Cruces will contract with Explore Learning Network, a non-profit which guides and oversees the implementation of the Explore Learning curriculum, which Explore Academy will adopt. The Explore Learning team will oversee and manage the school's operation, including oversight of student and institutional data, instructional design and implementation, tracking of academic progress, human resources, financial operation, organizational processes, support services (testing, etc.).</p>
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5. Does the applicant team or any members of the team currently operate any other schools?  Yes  No

Explore Academy - Albuquerque

6. Vision/Mission statement (2-3 sentences)

Explore Academy will 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.

7. Student population and geographical setting of the school

- Define the targeted geographical area of the proposed school from which you expect to draw a significant number of your students.

The target area for the site is within the boundaries for Las Cruces Public Schools. The actual location of the school will depend on the facility chosen from the four we have vetted and prepared, but the site will ideally be located between the four main high schools – Mayfield, Las Cruces, Centennial, and Onate. We have four facility sites that are accessible to a large amount of students who would otherwise not have access to free and innovative educational options outside their district school boundary. The four main high schools’ boundaries divide the city of Las Cruces into four quadrants, similar to the quadrants formed by the interstates in Albuquerque. Explore Academy would like to draw its students from all areas of the city.

- Describe the student population including key demographic data (academic performance, home languages, English Learners (ELs), and special education populations) in the location in which the school intends to locate.

The Las Cruces Public Schools is comprised of about 25,000 students, 13,000 of whom are at the middle and high school level. The average percentage of ELs (English learners) in the middle schools is 8.8%, while the high school average for district schools is 7%. The district charter schools, however, report 0% ELs enrolled. Over 75% of students in the district are Hispanic, with smaller percentages of Caucasian, Native American, and Black reported. The graduation rate for Las Cruces Public Schools is over 80%. The percentage of students receiving special education services at the middle and high school level is about 15%. Students classified as FRL (free and reduced lunch) districtwide account for 77% of the total student population. The percentage is higher, 86%, in the middle schools, while the high schools report an average of 56%. There are several schools, however, which contain 100% FRL students, particularly in the elementary level. About 90% of students speak or are exposed to Spanish in the home, and about 50% are immigrants or first generation Americans. Achievement data released by PED show that the math proficiency across the target area is below 30% and the ELA is below 40%.

- Identify where these students are most likely being educated currently and why they are expected to choose the proposed charter school for their future educational needs.

Currently, most students in the heart of Las Cruces Public Schools attend the main district high schools. Of the total high school student population (~7000 students), only 13% attend one of the three district charter schools. Of those, few are English language learners and only 7.7% are receiving special education services, compared to 14% students with disabilities in the district high schools collectively. Explore Academy’s model provides a rigorous, individualized learning experience for all students, allowing students, especially those from underrepresented subgroups such as ELLs and students with disabilities, to receive a college-preparatory education in a small school setting that is focused on learning and student growth and accountability.

8. Provide evidence that the applicant team has assessed community need for a school of the nature that will be proposed in the application (e.g., objective surveys or other measures of local demand for the Proposed educational program).

The founding team has analyzed achievement and demographic data for the Las Cruces Public Schools to assess need related to college preparedness and overall academic achievement in the high school setting. We have also analyzed ELL and free and reduced lunch percentages in public schools as well as the college preparatory options for students in relation to their district schools. There is a need in Las Cruces for a rigorous, engaging, college preparatory education option for students who would otherwise have no access to this type of education. After speaking to educators in the area and hosting community meetings with the school leader and public, we are confident that the model will be successful for the students in Las Cruces and provide them with a high quality education that is based on authentic learning through choice, engagement and rigor.

9. Identify significant innovative features that the school will implement in order to help it realize its vision/mission (e.g., non-traditional school year, longer school day, partner organizations, etc.).

See below

10. Describe how the school will be more effective than the schools currently serving the targeted student population, and/or plans to improve student achievement and exceed the academic performance of existing public schools in the targeted service area and any data you have to support this assumption.

The central component of the Explore Academy model is the freedom for students to choose the manner in which they receive their education, thus shifting the focus from educating a large group in one particular manner to identifying each student as an individual, and thus allowing for a personalization of one's education based on each individual's unique academic strengths, passions, and interests. The system allows for student choice within the charter environment's choice-based system. This is crucial for Explore Academy's efficacy with student achievement, engagement. In contrast to our model is the local school district model, where students are provided very little choice in how they complete their educational requirements. With schools becoming increasingly large, and with classes increasing proportionally, the inflexibility of the traditional model for teaching and learning becomes vividly apparent when compared to more streamlined and efficient approaches found in other industries. Students from subgroups such as ELs and economically disadvantaged students needs more support and individualization which is offered with the Explore Academy model.

Explore Academy's core philosophy is based on the promotion of freedom for academic choice in how all students complete their required credits. Because Explore Academy utilizes shorter learning modules, there is a significant increase in the opportunities a student has to choose compared to students who are locked into a semester or year-long course in the traditional model. Further, Explore Academy provides significant choice at each of these monthly junctions, allowing students to choose the "flavor" for the seminar they require as part of their larger graduation requirement. In this case, the element of compounded probability essentially creates a mathematically infinite number of pathways through which students can pursue their education, vastly surpassing what a traditional school can offer. It is this difference that sets the Explore Academy model apart.

*Please Note: Should your charter be awarded, the founding governing body could undergo a background check to determine if it qualifies to be a board of public finance in the state of New Mexico.*

Signature of founder(s):

  
Justin Baiardo

Date: 12-11-19

Question 9:

Explore Academy values individual attention, so class sizes are kept much lower than in public district counterparts (average of 14 students per class). The use of our majors, or focused areas of studies for upperclassmen, allows students to explore college-like majors, taught with college-level rigor, in order to better understand both the post-secondary educational system as well as their own personal interests and passions in various contents. This exposure to specialized content in various disciplines provides students with valuable growth and experience before ever entering college. Furthermore, the organization of the school year into eight 22-day terms allows for very targeted instruction of a small set of skills and standards, increasing both the teachers' ability to teach effectively, the students' ability to reach mastery in a manageable amount of standards, and the overall accountability of the educational system in which all students earn credit for a class, or seminar as they are called at Explore Academy, only when they are truly proficient in the content from the term.