



## **New Mexico Public Education Commission**

### **2022 New Charter School Application Kit**

#### **Part B. Executive Summary**



## Part B: Executive Summary

This section should be no more than two to three pages long and should address, in a narrative form, the following points:

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

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

Name of Proposed Charter School

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho

New Charter Application Executive Summary

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho seeks to locate in the city of Rio Rancho, NM, allowing easy access to Rio Rancho and its surrounding communities including Bernalillo, Placitas, Algodones, and several pueblos. The projected student population reflects this community, with anticipated demographics as follows: Native American 10%, Caucasion 30%, Hispanic 55%, English Learners 10%, economically disadvantaged 50%, and students with disabilities 16% based on the current student population of Rio Rancho Public Schools and Bernalillo Public Schools. Students in these two districts currently have limited educational options outside the traditional school and traditional educational model, and those who seek school choice must commute long distances into Albuquerque or Santa Fe in order to attend charter or private schools that offer a different educational model. Many students from this area apply to attend the only other school in the area that offers the Explore Learning Model (Explore Academy in Albuquerque), resulting in 35% of that charter school's applicants originating from the Rio Rancho and Bernalillo area. This shows a clear desire from our community in the Rio Rancho area to bring the Explore Learning Model to our students, families, and communities.

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. Students personalize their own educational pathway from kindergarten through graduation through an exceptionally diverse set of course offerings. This creates a more empowered, more successful student population who are prepared for college, career, and life.

The Explore Academy philosophy uses electives to a level previously unseen in public education by incorporating the idea of a differentiated curriculum with a diversity of educational choices from which they can create individualized, custom educational pathways. All core content courses are required, however, course offerings are elective in nature. In offering a curriculum that is customized for the unique students of the Rio Rancho area, teachers, families, and students have the ability to integrate their own cultural and personal interests, priorities, and passions into the instructional and curricular content of the school. The founders and board members are longtime residents of Rio Rancho with deep roots in the community. Community connections and market research demonstrate that the families of Rio Rancho and its surrounding area welcome and support the Explore Learning Model and its innovative and proven effective educational vision to our children.

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 which 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 be advertised to students so that they may choose the themes through which they learn each subject matter. As students move through their seminar requirements, they will come to create a unique and individualized education specific to their interests and passions.

The other key focus for Explore Academy is true standards-based instruction and grading at all grade levels. Students are held to specific requirements which align to state standards. However, rather

than learning objectives through year-long courses, Explore Academy uses various term lengths, determined by grade level, to focus on fewer objectives. In elementary and lower secondary grades (K-7), seminars are each 44-days long. In the upper secondary grades (8-12), seminars are each 22-days long. What was previously a semester or year-long class is now broken up into several smaller seminars which collectively cover the same academic standards. All assessments during a term are formative, leading to summative assessments that determine the students' grades. Students are required to show proficiency in the standards in order to proceed.

There is substantive data to support the likelihood our school will improve the achievement of students from the identified communities. The data in the charts below compare the average of Rio Rancho Public Schools, Bernalillo Public Schools, and Explore Academy - Albuquerque, the only other school in the area that is currently implementing the Explore Learning Model proposed for use by Explore Academy - Rio Rancho. The average proficiency for ELA and math is higher using the Explore Learning Model for both all students and economically disadvantaged students.

A brief summary in chart form is below:

	2019 AVERAGE ELA % PROFICIENT		2019 MATH % PROFICIENT	
	ALL	Econ. Dis.	ALL	Econ. Dis.
<b>EA-ABQ</b>	64.2	61.75	48	36
<b>RRPS</b>	43	32	30.1	22.4
<b>BPS</b>	21.4	21.4	8	7.7

The Explore Learning Model and its instructional practices have been developed from, and are supported by a significant body of research as well as a multitude of data-driven success from the founding campus. It is truly an instructional model that is built for success both now and in the future educational climate, due to the flexibility and adaptability of the curriculum and instruction approach to respond to the needs of our students and their community both now and as they grow and experience change.

The founding team consists of three seasoned educators who are dedicated to the students of Rio Rancho and surrounding areas:

Justin Baiardo - founder of the Explore Learning Model and inaugural Explore Academy campus. Mr. Baiardo is a licensed administrator and Level 3 National Board-certified teacher. His expertise includes the Explore Academy model as well as extensive experience in the launch and operations of an independent, state-authorized charter school. He lives in Rio Rancho with his sons, down the road from many family members.

Elisha Varela - member of the founding team of the inaugural Explore Academy campus. Raised in Bernalillo, she resides in Rio Rancho and has family in both cities. Ms. Varela has both classroom (Level 3 English, Spanish, and bilingual teacher) and administrative experience (curriculum and instruction, assessment, data management, and bilingual education).

Karen Woerner - licensed Level 3 Teacher and School Administrator with over 30 years experience in education, including classroom instruction K-12, Technology Coach, and district-level administration. She was formerly the Deputy Director overseeing state charter schools for NMPED. Mrs. Woerner was a longtime Rio Rancho resident who now resides in Placitas.

The Board consists of five Rio Rancho area residents who are committed to education and academic achievement for the students of their community:

Sterling (Skip) Mackay - retired educator with over 20 years of experience, both in school administration and teaching middle school students with special needs in Rio Rancho. He served as a Special Educational Instructional Leader (SEIL) and is well-versed in the laws and regulations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Michael (Mike) Mierzejewski - a local business owner of a print and design company. He has served as the Director of Center for Hands-On Learning, founder and current Treasurer of Above and Beyond Networking, and has been on the board of the Rio Rancho Education Foundation since 2012.

Terrill (Teri) E. Pierce - an employment litigation and civil rights defense lawyer. She is committed to education and betterment of the community in many capacities, including public speaking on legal issues, conducting sexual harrassment trainings, coaching a high school mock trial team, mentoring through Big Brothers Big Sisters, and volunteering for Animal Humane.

Veronica Sanders - an educator for over 30 years in NM traditional public schools. She has served as an elementary teacher, preschool, elementary and middle school administrator, NMPED Education Administrator in Student, Schools, and Family Support Bureau and the College and Career Readiness Bureau and presently the Early College High School Coordinator for the Extending Equity into the Digital Workforce Program.

Barbara Sena - a former educator and small business owner. She has taught special education and middle school bilingual social studies/humanities in Albuquerque. She has also been an educational consultant helping school districts find the best school materials to meet their needs and recently left the education field to fulfill her passion for animals, operating her own doggy daycare business.