



New Mexico Public Education Commission

2022 New Charter School Application Kit Part C. Written Responses



School Information:

Name of Proposed Charter School: Explore Academy - Rio Rancho
School Address (if known): To Be Determined
School Location (City/Town): Rio Rancho, NM
School District within which the proposed school will be located: Rio Rancho Public Schools
Grades to be served: Grades K-12
Requested Enrollment Cap: 1,200

Applicant Team Information:

Primary Contact Person: Justin Baiardo
Address: 2720 Avenida Corazon
City: Rio Rancho State: NM Zip: 87124
Daytime Tel: 505-306-5283 Fax: n/a
Alternate Tel: n/a E-Mail: baiardo@explore.academy

Secondary Contact Person: Elisha Varela
Address: 1325 Peppoli Loop
City: Rio Rancho State: NM Zip: 87124
Daytime Tel: 505-710-3214 Fax: n/a
Alternate Tel: n/a E-Mail: varela@explore.academy

Tertiary Contact Person: Karen Woerner
Address: 11 Pottery House Trail
City: Placitas State: NM Zip: 87123
Daytime Tel: 505-250-4967 Fax: n/a
Alternate Tel: n/a E-Mail: woerner@explore.academy

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I. Academic Framework

A. Mission and Vision

A. (1) MISSION

State the mission of the proposed school . ([NMSA 22-8B-8A](#))

The mission of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) 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 and career.

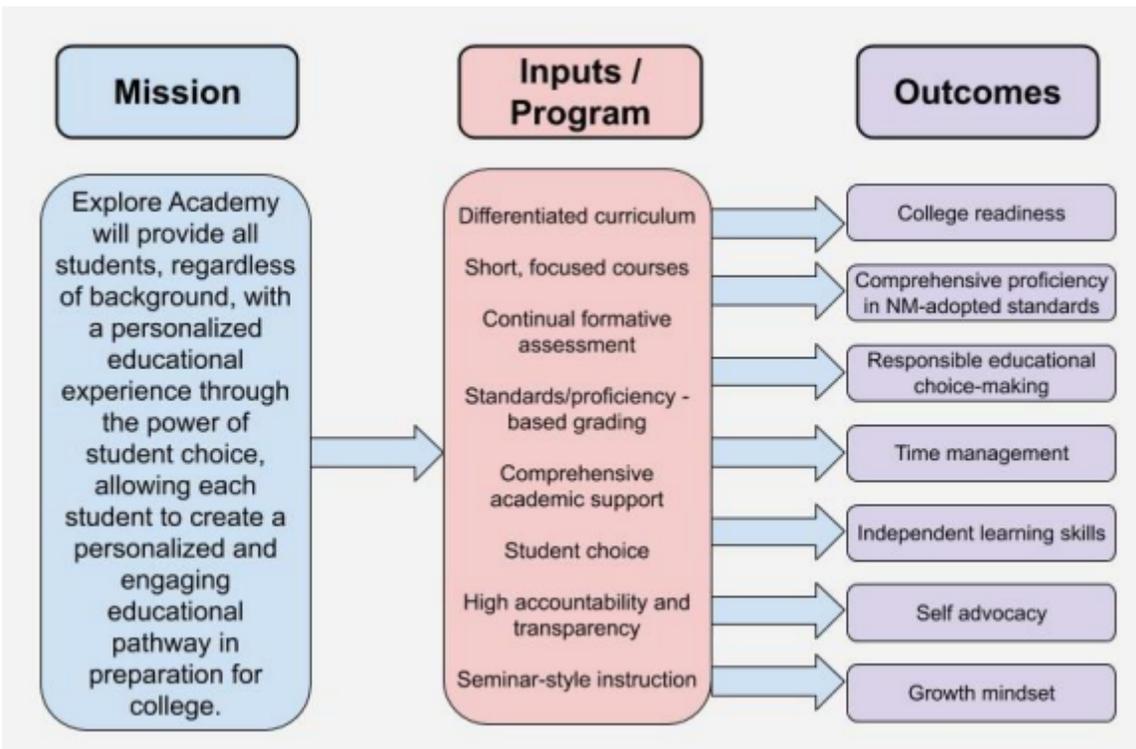
Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will serve grades K to 12, the first and only charter school in the city to serve all grade levels. While the community does provide some options for families with the establishment of two charter schools, there exists no comprehensive college-preparatory option with the choice-based academic system that Explore Academy can offer.

The core academic philosophy and overall vision of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho are based on 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.

Explore Learning Model

The mission is achieved through the innovative and unique curriculum and instruction of the Explore Learning Model (see Sections I.C - Curriculum and I.F1- Instructional Philosophy) for more detailed information about curriculum and instruction). Explore Academy - Rio Rancho students are held to specific requirements which align with state standards; however, rather than learn objectives through longer, semester-based courses, EA-RIO uses quarter-long (K-7) and month-long (8-12) 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 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).

Mission Logic Model for Explore Academy - Rio Rancho



Core Value 1: Seminar Style, Small Class Instruction

The first core value of the EA-RIO 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.

Core Value #2: Student Choice

The second core value, at the heart of the EA-RIO 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, EA-RIO 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. The elective nature of all content areas results in high levels of student engagement and interest (outcome).

Core Value #3: Lifelong Learners

At the core of the Explore Academy model is the establishment of students as lifelong learners who take ownership of their own educational decisions in charting an academic pathway that is unique to the choices they make. The goal of each Explore Academy seminar is to support student growth through formative learning and constant feedback with a “growth mindset” as the focus. Students are expected to reflect on their own academic progress as they strive to close gaps while working to develop greater responsibility for the decisions they make in both how they build their curricular pathways and how they advocate for their own needs in developing a growth mindset.

Mission Success

- 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 shorter academic 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,
 - Ongoing progress monitoring data to determine student growth in foundational literacy and numeracy skills,
 - 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.
- 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, Mission Specific Goals, one goal for EA-RIO 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.

A. (2) VISION STATEMENT

State the vision, or the driving force, that guides this school proposal.

Purpose

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) places each unique child at the center of their education, delivering on the promise to prepare them for success in college and career, while empowering each to exercise curiosity and experience growth through challenge. As students themselves choose a personally relevant pathway to graduation from kindergarten to 12th grade, they build strong connections with each other and their teachers through engaging and creative learning experiences that lead to mastery.

Commitment

The Founding Team is composed of three co-founders and five proposed board members. (See Section II. A2 - Governing Body Qualifications for proposed board members.) This team is committed to providing a high-quality, public charter option for our community for several reasons. First, the co-founders and several of our proposed board members have a history of working to improve educational and social outcomes for students in the zip codes that will be served by this school. Additionally, team members reside in Rio Rancho and have been actively involved in community and service organizations. The work we have done has allowed us to develop connections across our community. We are also committed to founding Explore Academy - Rio Rancho because of the needs expressed to us by the students and parents who live in the city, along with our on-going community outreach efforts. More information regarding our community outreach program, community support, and community relationships can be found in Section IV.B, Evidence of Support.

Community Driven

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will work with the community to provide our children with better academic outcomes

- We will continue community outreach during our planning year by hosting monthly focus groups and brainstorming sessions with families of potential students and other community stakeholders. These meetings will be offered both virtually and in-person within area codes 87004, 87048, 87114, 87120, 87124, and 87144
- We will keep the school's website up-to-date and host open community meetings to share information about the school's learning model and to answer questions and collect general feedback about relevant topics such as our facilities, lottery and enrollment, etc.

Once the school commences operations, we will collect family and community input through focus groups and surveys on annual mission-related instructional, cultural, and operational priorities.

Unique and Innovative

The Explore Learning Model puts students in the driver's seat of their education through the power of choice. The founding team is committed to providing choice to students and families by offering a completely innovative form of education in which all classes are designed like electives, fostering individualism and self-advocacy from kindergarten through graduation. Unlike traditional models and charter models currently available to the students of Rio Rancho and communities around it, Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will bring authentic standards-based education using customized curriculum that is created by the community, for the community.

A. (3) UNIQUENESS AND INNOVATION

Provide **clear evidence** demonstrating the **uniqueness, innovation,** and significant contribution that the educational program will bring to public education. ([NMSA 22-8B-3](#))

The mission of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) 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 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. Compared to the traditional educational model, or any model seen within the Rio Rancho 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 postsecondary enrollment.

In the area of academics, no other school model in New Mexico shows an equivalent degree of accountability placed on student learning. At the time of graduation, an EA-RIO 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 and few that implement standards-based assessment and grading in grades K-12 with fidelity.

With the focus on student growth rather than grading per task, as is traditionally seen, the Explore Learning 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; thus, to complement its rigorous academic program, the school provides a heightened level of academic and social 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 traditional education system, and as such, the Explore Learning Model and the system it implements remains at the forefront of innovation and growing success within its students.

The Rio Rancho community and surrounding area offers few educational choices to families outside the traditional public school model. The founding team was approached by many families who commute up to 2 hours daily to transport their children to charter and private schools in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. With declining academic proficiency as students progress through grade levels and lower levels of achievement for at-risk subgroups (refer to I.f(3) below for more detailed performance data), the students of the Rio Rancho area deserve another option that is designed to engage students and create lifelong learners through a cohesive learning model designed to guide them from kindergarten through graduation and beyond.

Furthermore, many families from Rio Rancho, Bernalillo, and surrounding areas attend or have applied to attend the only other school that implements the Explore Learning Model, Explore Academy in Albuquerque. Currently, over 35% of applicants to Explore Academy in Albuquerque are from Rio Rancho, the westside, Bernalillo, Placitas, or a surrounding community or pueblo. With a lottery and waitlist process for acceptance, this leaves many students without a spot at the school. Additionally, students who are accepted, especially those in Sandoval county, face long bus or car rides to and from school each day, depriving them of time with their families, recreation, sports, and cultural activities. Currently, students attending Explore Academy in Albuquerque who live in Mariposa, near the Santa Ana Star Center, or in Enchanted Hills have to board the bus as early as 6:45am to arrive at school on time, and these students get to the bus stop after school after 4:00pm. This commute, which is over 60 minutes each way, makes attending schools of choice very difficult for families in Sandoval county. This same commute could be less than 20 minutes each way for students to attend Explore Academy - Rio Rancho, giving back over an hour of time to families each day.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will bring the Explore Learning Model to the community, providing the same high quality educational experience that is currently offered to students in the heart of Albuquerque while tailoring it to the unique student, family, and community needs, and flavor, of the Rio Rancho area.

B. Mission-Specific Goals

The Amended Charter School Act Requires that new charter applications include: the goals, objectives and student performance outcomes to be achieved by the charter school as well as a description of the charter school's plan for evaluating student performance, the types of assessments that will be used to measure student progress toward achievement of the state's standards and the school's student performance outcomes, the timeline for achievement of the outcomes and the procedures for taking corrective action in the event that student performance falls below the standards ([NMSA §22-8B-8\(E\)](#))

This application requirement prepares the applicant team for the Performance Framework contents, which will be negotiated with the PEC if the proposed charter application is approved. Specifically, the performance framework shall allow for the inclusion of additional rigorous, valid and reliable indicators proposed by a charter school to augment external evaluations of its performance, provided that the chartering authority shall approve the quality and rigor of such proposed indicators and the indicators are consistent with the purposes of the Charter Schools Act ([NMSA §22-8B-9.1\(C\)](#))

B. Mission-Specific goals

Identify and provide two mission-specific goals or Indicators in the following section.

Goal 1: By the end of the school year, at least 80% of students in grades K-3, enrolled on both 40 and 120 day reporting dates, will score a Level 4 or 5 on IStation and/or make one level's growth from their beginning of year score (i.e. Level 1 to Level 2).

The path to graduation, postsecondary completion, and a family-supporting wage begins in a child's earliest years with their language and literacy development. A long-term study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that students who were not proficient in reading by the end of third grade were four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers. In fact, 88 percent of students who failed to earn a high school diploma were struggling readers in third grade (AECF, 2010). Students scoring at a Level 4 or 5 on IStation, a highly rated assessment aligned with the science of reading, will have demonstrated they are performing at the 61st to 100th percentile range. During the last state summative assessment period in 2019, the state average for K-2 reading proficiency as measured by Istation was 39% and 3rd grade reading proficiency as measured by the Transition Assessment for Math and ELA was 27%. Due to critical unfinished learning in the areas of language and literacy, we know that responding, intervening, and filling students' skill gaps will take place over time, even extending into the 2023-24 school year.

Students scoring in the lower levels on Istation in the beginning or middle of the year, and during progress monitoring, will receive additional tailored support to ensure that they are able to make accelerated progress, receive just-in-time small group instruction, and regain lost ground from during the years interrupted schooling. Students who are not on a trajectory to reach Levels 4 or 5 will be progress monitored frequently through informal and formal measures in order to ensure they are on track to make at least one level of growth as measured on the EOY assessment. In order to avoid the data story told by the Casey Foundation, accelerated learning must be the goal for each of our students, meeting them where they are and individualizing the layers of support provided to them toward their academic success. This goal aligns with the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho mission in its equitable focus on providing all young students with a personalized education that is as engaging as it is rigorous in its college preparatory approach. This is an ambitious goal that would set the school apart for high performance and dramatic learning gap closure in the wake of the pandemic.

This data will be tracked throughout the year and will be analyzed by grade level, class, subgroup, groups of students receiving specific interventions 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.

The data will be shared with all stakeholders in order to analyze and improve instruction. The data will also be shared and discussed at regular public meetings of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho Governing Board. These reviews and discussions will assist the board in monitoring the school's success in implementing its mission.

Goal 2: At the end of each term, at least 70% of students in grades 4-12, enrolled on both 40 and 120 day reporting dates, will pass* 80% of their standards-based exit exams. This will demonstrate Proficiency (80-89%) or Mastery (90-100%) on all seminar-specific standards and skills after "flavored" instruction in each term

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

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's most basic desired outcome is that 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 I.C - Curriculum), students demonstrate their level of proficiency in all standards, and in turn, EA-RIO 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.

The specified metric was selected to ensure that instruction adheres to the mission and charter of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 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 responses, 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, are assessed using the same metric.

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 all 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.

The data will be shared with all stakeholders in order to analyze and improve instruction. The data will also be shared and discussed at regular public meetings of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho Governing Board. These reviews and discussions will assist the board in monitoring the school's success in implementing its mission.

**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.*

C. Curriculum, Educational Program, Student Performance Standards

C. Provide a description of the proposed school's curriculum. The proposed curriculum must be research-based, reasonable, and clearly align with New Mexico Common Core State Standards and the proposed school's mission. (NMSA 22-8B-A(C))

The choice theory model of education, that underlies the philosophy of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) [explained more fully in Section I.F1, Teaching and Instructional Philosophy], 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 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 - Rio Rancho.

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 school utilizing the Explore Learning Model, 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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, called *seminars*, each of which spans 22 days in length for high school grades or 44 days for upper elementary and middle school, 88 days for lower elementary, and a full year for primary. 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-RIO 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 in Section I.E - Graduation Requirements), 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.

In preparation for middle and high school, students in the elementary grades engage in daily STEM (Math and Science) and Humanities (ELA and Social Studies) instruction that is standards-aligned and evidence-based in its approach to incrementally building foundational skills. Seminars are of high interest and relevance to children at different ages throughout their elementary years, while aligning and connecting STEM and Humanities content areas and skill development (e.g. literacy through the lens of cultural celebrations, traditions, and stories, multiplication and plant and animal life cycles). Students also benefit from integrated social and emotional learning, as they form their personal and academic identities. In choosing courses, the frequency of choice increases as students demonstrate they are developmentally ready. Primary (K-1) students choose seminars for the entire year, while lower elementary (2-3) students have the opportunity to choose new courses at the semester. Like the middle school students, upper elementary students (4-5) choose courses each quarter.

Each child progresses through the elementary scope and sequence as they demonstrate readiness on a variety of measures, including standards-based assessments and projects, foundational skills assessments, and social and emotional observations and conversations. Students are met where they are as learners, while allowing for socially appropriate age groupings. Working in partnership with parents, special education and intervention specialists, and school leadership, teachers triangulate student social and performance data to determine when students are ready to accelerate, progress as expected, and/or receive additional support and instruction before advancing in the standards progression. Rather than be grouped for all core instruction based solely on student age, children interact with different peers and near peers each day and throughout the school year based on their demonstrated academic readiness and their interest-driven course choices.

As students progress through their K-12 education, the Explore Learning curriculum approach will increasingly 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. In the secondary grades, 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 an 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 not 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, they 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 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. At the elementary level, special attention is also given to alignment of instruction with developmentally appropriate and evidence-based practices, such as structured literacy.

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 K to 12) from which students will be able to choose. As students change seminars and choose new flavors, 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. From their earliest years, students and teachers build relationships and connections with one another in a more dynamic and responsive manner than a traditional school where young students move through the day and year with an identical group, regardless of personal student interest or academic readiness level.

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 the 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 factor 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 - Rio Rancho 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.

Preparing high school graduates for success in their postsecondary education, training, and career pursuits begins from the moment they enter their first Primary classroom, by assuring each child receives the opportunity to access and support to master key foundational skills, advance through rigorous standards-aligned content, and formulate their personal identities and essential social and emotional competencies. A strong elementary foundation of academic learning paired with fostering the whole child into a self-directed and fulfilled learner allows each Explore student to benefit at the highest levels from the school's K-12 curricular offerings.

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

Within this design, elementary-specific courses are lettered, with A/B-level representing kindergarten standards, C/D 1st grade standards, and so on, concluding with K/L seminars which culminate the elementary years and delve into 5th grade standards. 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 - Rio Rancho implements 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 table below describes the choice students will have as they move from grades K to 12, showing the number of seminars a student takes per year and the number of flavor offerings available for students for each seminar. Each level shows the "tier" level to which all Explore Academy seminars are assigned, denoting higher levels of coursework with increasing tier level. Note: at grades K-1, given the age of the students, teachers will be integrating flavor pathways into the curriculum where students have choice but within the same class, thus helping develop their capacity to choose.

As students move through the curriculum, they are granted more and more choice paired with greater accountability, especially as they enter secondary levels when the number of flavors per seminar, including the 1000-level majors seminars (described below) where the expansion of choice becomes significant.

TIER LEVEL	APPROXIMATE GRADE LEVEL	SEMINARS PER YEAR	FLAVOR CHOICES
A/B	K	2	Flavor pathways within the seminar
C/D	1	2	Flavor pathways within the seminar
E/F	2	4	Two flavors per seminar
G/H	3	4	Two flavors per seminar
I/J	4	8	Three flavors per seminar
K/L	5	8	Three flavors per seminar
100	6	20	Two flavors per seminar
200	7	20	Three flavors per seminar
300	8-9	24	Three flavors per seminar
400	9-10	24	Four flavors per seminar
500	9-11	24	Five flavors per seminar
600	10-12	24	Five flavors per seminar
700	10-12	24	Five flavors per seminar
1000	10-12	32	Thirty or more flavors across all majors per content

To illustrate a more specific curriculum example, the chart below shows the basic scope and sequence for the language arts curriculum for middle and high school. 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 1000-level.

Within the matrix (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 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.

700	ENG 700	ENG 710	ENG 720	ENG 730
600	ENG 600	ENG 610	ENG 620	ENG 630
500	ENG 500	ENG 510	ENG 520	ENG 530
400	ENG 400	ENG 410	ENG 420	ENG 430
300	ENG 300	ENG 310	ENG 320	ENG 330
200	ENG 200	ENG 210	ENG 220	ENG 230
100	ENG 100	ENG 110	ENG 120	ENG 130
Level	Argument	Literature	Research/Comm	Language

Exit Exams

Exit exams serve as the summative, credit-determining measure of proficiency for each seminar for grades 6-12. 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 after each term 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.

Timeline

Leading up to the launch of the school in the fall of 2023, the school will have a fully developed curriculum ready for implementation. Because Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 that are relevant to the culture and community that will 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 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 in other schools, and it 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.

The above-mentioned academic standards also align with the 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 process	June - August 2022	N/A	Founding Team
Planning Year/Implementation Year (IY) Submissions	November 2022 March 2023 May 2023	All items listed on the IY checklist	Founding Team
Hire principal	January 2023	Principal position filled	Founding Team/ Governing Council
Begin hiring of prospective instructional staff	January 2022	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 2023	Assignment of teaching assignments/seminars for the upcoming school year, example sets of frontloading, example student-driven unit plan layout	Founding Team (trainers), EA-RIO Teachers
Second teacher training module - "The Flavor" (flavor-based instruction, student-driven instruction, backward planning, generating of course descriptions)	April 2023	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-RIO Teachers
Predicted completion of hiring	May 2023	N/A	Principal, Founding

of instructional staff			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 2023	Formative assessments for three (3) seminars for the upcoming school year; completion of unit plans for the first four (4) seminar terms (per teacher)	Founding Team (trainers), EA-RIO Teachers
Fourth teacher training module - "Student-Driven Instruction" (inquiry/student-driven instruction)	May 2023	Fully developed student-driven seminar plan for five (5) seminars for the upcoming school year	Founding Team (trainers), EA-RIO Teachers
Submission of all course descriptions for the school's course catalog	July 2023	Fully developed course descriptions from each teacher, deadline: June 30	Founding Team (trainers), EA-RIO Teachers
Ongoing support in developing lesson plans	March - August 2023 (and beyond)	N/A	Founding Team

D. Bilingual Multicultural Education, Indian Education, Hispanic Education and Black Education

D.(1) Bilingual Multicultural, Indian Education, Hispanic Education and Black Education
 Provide a description of how the proposed school's curriculum will ensure equal education opportunities for students in New Mexico by addressing the goals of the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act ([NMSA §22-23-1.1](#)), the goals of the Indian Education Act ([NMSA §22-23A-2](#)), the goals of the Hispanic Education Act ([NMSA §22-23B-2](#)), and the goals of the Black Education Act (HB 43 and [NMSA Article 23C](#))

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) will provide equal education opportunities to all students regardless of race, ethnicity, background, language, culture, or any other factor. 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-RIO, to the learning process, and to the world around them both near and far, leading to greater academic and social outcomes. To ensure that students and families feel safe, heard, and connected to the school community and receive equitable and tailored support, the priority of the Governing Council and school team will be to continually deepen community engagement with students and families, both prospective and ultimately accepted through the lottery and enrolled. In seeking the picture of cultural and linguistic identities manifest in the school community leadership and the teaching staff will receive direction in planning for and designing

professional development and curriculum. Explicitly anti-racist school policies developed, adopted, and annually reviewed with the oversight of the school's Equity Council will guide the actions of the Governing Council and all school employees as we work together to redress historic inequities disproportionately impacting Black, Native American, Hispanic, multicultural students, and English Learners (ELs).

To support equity-focused initiatives both in and out of the classroom, EA-RIO data collection and analysis methods are designed to monitor trends across all subgroups including Black, Native American, and Hispanic students, 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 surveys, 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. Hiring and staffing data will also be tracked and goals set to increase the proportion of Black, Native American, and Hispanic teachers and leaders in reflection of the makeup of the school community.

EA-RIO will continuously monitor data to detect and track equity across various indicators, including but not limited to social-emotional, behavior and discipline, academic. The school 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 New Mexico's Black, Hispanic, bilingual, multicultural, Native American, and linguistically diverse students in addition to helping all students flourish in language and cultural education and appreciation.

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 K through 12, creating an educational experience that is personalized 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-RIO. This includes myriad 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-RIO teachers will ensure that the customized Rio Rancho 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.

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-RIO students. This exposure to other people and their unique characteristics allows students to see the beauty, value, and interconnectedness of other languages and cultures.

Teachers are encouraged to design seminars that are reflective of the community and students that EA-RIO will serve. The power and possibility is open to teachers to use their creativity and knowledge of their community, families, students, and local culture to conceive and develop relevant, exciting flavors, allowing students to see themselves reflected back in their learning experiences and the school's educators and other staff members. The goal is to design a 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. School instructional coaches and leaders will ensure that curriculum recognizes and teaches Black, Native American, and Hispanic culture and history, and provides students space and time to reflect on their own identities and lifeways. To do this well, teachers will need training and support in reflecting on their own cultural identities, inherent biases, anti-racist beliefs and practices, curriculum design, and the intentional inclusion and amplification of the present state, history, culture, and voices of those who have been historically erased in educational settings.

Although EA-RIO 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. EA-RIO 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.

Additionally, all EA-RIO 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 of 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 a 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.

The school's curriculum and instruction approach is drawn from a proven educational model, the Explore Learning Model. The promise of this approach described here and further below is supported by 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 - Rio Rancho is based. Even with natural transitions in leadership, staff, school size, and student body, the consistent academic approach has allowed students to make dramatic progress and demonstrate mastery.

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 inside and outside the classroom such as social-emotional learning structures like restorative circles (daily) and whole school meetings (weekly), restorative discipline practices, 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 frequently, students are grouped with new students and new teachers often, allowing for greater exposure to many cultural and linguistic viewpoints and perspectives. All teachers will prioritize a safe and inclusive classroom environment, to allow

students to develop trust and confidence in the adults and peers they interact with as they integrate their home culture and school experience.

Timeline

The timeline for development of the Explore Learning curriculum that aligns to cultural and linguistic needs and goals is provided in Section I-C - Curriculum (above).

Action Steps

Action Step 1:
Professional Development and Training in Anti-Racism and Curriculum Design

Staff responsible:
Administration
Founding team

Timeline / deadlines:
Teacher modules and training prepared/identified before January 2023
Teacher training from March through July 2023
Teacher / staff training and professional development days in first week of August 2023
Revisit culturally and linguistically responsive 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 - Rio Rancho mission:
As mentioned above, alignment to the standards is at the core of the Explore Learning Model and the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 Black, Native American, Hispanic, English Learners, multicultural, and diverse student learners while also creating and implementing a rigorous, responsive curriculum to develop cognitive and affective skills in Explore Academy - Rio Rancho students at all levels K-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. Time and space will be protected for teachers to unpack anti-racist learnings from the NMPED “Meeting the Moment” course, and other anti-racism professional developments so that they continue parallel personal development and reflection along with the refinement and adaptation of curriculum and instruction plans.

Action Step 2: Customized Curriculum - Rio Rancho “Flavor” Design

Staff responsible: Content teachers (STEM, Humanities, English, math, science, social studies, PE,

art/music)

Timeline / deadlines:

Initial seminar flavor development to begin as teachers complete training and on-board throughout spring and summer 2023. All seminar titles and course descriptions are due late June 2023 to allow for course catalog finalization for 2023-2024 seminar registration. Seminar plans for terms 1 and 2 are due during professional development days planned the first week of August 2023. This includes the instructional plan for the term, instructional materials, and planned formative assessments. Plans for each subsequent term will be completed at least one week before the start of the term.

Alignment to standards:

All seminars at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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. Humanities seminars in K-5 are created using the New Mexico ELA Common Core State Standards and Content Standards, as well as the NM Social Studies standards. STEM seminars in K-5 are created using the NM Mathematics CCSS and the NM STEM Ready! Science Standards. 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 NM STEM Ready! Science Standards 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 - Rio Rancho mission:

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho, 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 3:

Customized Curriculum - Student-Driven “Flavors” and Instruction

Staff responsible:

Content teachers (STEM, Humanities, 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 - Rio Rancho mission:

In meeting the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 K-12, students are involved and enriched personally and academically.

Action Step 4:

Foreign Language and Global Studies through 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 2023; All seminar titles and course descriptions are due first week of July 2023 to allow for course catalog finalization for 2023-2024 seminar registration; Seminar plans for terms 1 and 2 are due during professional development days planned the first week of August 2023. 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 - Rio Rancho will be required to take two years of a new language and 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, provides 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 - Rio Rancho mission:

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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. From the early grades and throughout their K-12 education, students are exposed to a wide range of cultural experiences and learning experiences about the commonalities and differences between cultures world wide. Through language arts and social studies in particular, students participate in rich discussion and reflection on literature, history, culture, and societal systems across the world.

Action Step 5:

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 22-23 to shape school curriculum
Monthly data collected and analyzed via surveys each August - May
Data collected and analyzed by the Parent Advisory Council and the Equity Council
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-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho mission:

All students at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 student's linguistic and cultural knowledge and abilities will lead to more well-developed, worldly students who appreciate and learn from the world around them.

D.(2) Equity Plan

Provide a description of how the proposed school will create an effective and equitable system of supports for all students focused on root-cause analysis, equity-focused leadership and continuous improvement, and culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum and pedagogy.

To bring forth a system of supports and feedback loops that will be equitable in approach and outcomes, focused on sustainability and partnerships, EA-RIO will follow the steps laid out by the NMPED in its response to the Martinez-Yazzie lawsuit decision in support of Native American, economically disadvantaged students, English Learners (ELs), and students with disabilities. In alignment with the Black Education Act of 2020 EA-RIO will also have a specific focus on the equitable education and support of Black students. Our school will engage in tribal consultation and work in partnership and collaboration with all tribal entities which represent our students.

By inviting and fostering relationships with family members, community members, and tribal entities, engaging with parents and caregivers in ongoing education and discourse on equity, anti-racism, and culturally and linguistically responsive practices, EA-RIO will demonstrate our school's mindset that understanding racism, bias, and prejudice is not something that can be "completed", rather it is a learning process. To paraphrase Tervalon and Murray-Garcia, 1998, we will exercise "cultural humility...self-evaluation, and self-critique" as we seek to develop "mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic...advocacy partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations."

The NMPED established the Equity Council (EC) requirement for all districts and charter schools in the state to ensure that the important work of the Martinez and Yazzie Lawsuit was carried out by the experts at the local level. Explore Academy RIO has a strong commitment to meeting all requirements set forth by the state AND also hopes to work not from a level of compliance, but one of commitment.

Upon approval, the Governing Council in collaboration with the Head Administrator will advertise for and subsequently select up to 15 local members for the Equity Council, establishing a diverse group representing the school and greater community, in particular students identified in the Martinez-Yazzie lawsuit, Black students, and other students identified as furthest from opportunity. Once established, trained, and on-boarded by an identified facilitator, the EC will create a strong working definition of equity and begin the Needs Assessment process to better understand our specific school community and demographics.

We will ensure that there are students represented on the EC from its inception, in order to ground our work in the voices of those who are the recipients of EA-RIO's educational mission and program. Teachers, parents, and community members will bring needed lenses to discourse around qualitative and quantitative data, and root cause analysis, as well as create an organic network to build further relationships and connections in the community.

Once the Equity Council completes the Needs Assessment to identify assets and gaps in systems and structures to support all students, the school leadership will work in collaboration to crosswalk results from the M-Y Needs Assessment with work to design and establish the EA-RIO MLSS process, SE program, EL supports, and more to ensure alignment and braiding of funding, systems, and supports.

The Equity Council will then engage broad groups of stakeholders in completing the Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction Inventory to reflect on and evaluate the efficacy of CLRI at EA-RIO. Assets and gaps in practices revealed will be researched and addressed by the EC and school administration, with regular communication loops to the rest of the school community. Based on research and historical information, these gaps may include data disparities between identified student groups, inequitable discipline data, etc. The school with the oversight of the Governing Council will address any gaps, leveraging strengths, in systems and structures to support students and their complex and unique personal cultures and identities, including professional development and training needed by staff members in evidence-based and responsive practices.

As the Equity Council and school create our own CLR framework, it will serve as an equity-focused strategic planning process for curriculum and instruction, ensuring all elements of our system are balanced and focused on remedying historical gaps in performance while creating an inclusive environment where every student feels seen, heard, safe to reflect on, develop and address their identities, and has established relational trust with adults. The resulting framework created and adopted by the Governing Council will unify and articulate our vision for CLR and equitable instruction for all students, particularly those furthest from opportunity. Ongoing data-driven root cause analysis, and equity-focused leadership, will seek to create a culture of belonging for all students and staff members. To accomplish this, there will be substantial collaboration between content experts, such as the ELL Coordinator/Teacher, Special Educators, and other designated leaders at the school.

The final element of the M-Y response outlined by PED is the advisement package, an ongoing mechanism for meaningful engagement and advisement from the Equity Council to the Governing Board and Superintendent/Head Administrator. Based on the established processes at the state level involving the Indian Education Advisory Council (IEAC), Hispanic Education Advisory Council (HEAC) and Bilingual Multicultural Education Advisory Council (BMEAC), this process will allow our Equity Council to participate in ongoing data analysis and review, program and budget development and evaluation, and ensuring a safe and equitable learning environment inclusive of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Advisements will identify a root cause of inequity in student experience and performance and the process of creating the advisement package to be delivered to the Board and Superintendent/Head Administrator will cede power to the Council members representing those individuals closest to pain, allowing for them to have a meaningful voice in determine school policies and decisions.

E. Graduation Requirements

E. Identify the proposed school's requirements for graduation, if applicable, and explain any changes or additional requirements that vary from state mandated minimum requirements.

While Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 exceeds the semester credit requirements as set forth in the State's graduation requirements. 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 - Rio Rancho seminar count for each content area.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will function as a K-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 out of a possible 200 seminars (5 years x 40 seminars per year)) compared to the maximum available to students beginning in 9th grade (160 (4 years x 40 seminars per year)). 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 requirements.

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 Requirement

Aligned to the NMPED's menu of competency requirement options, EA-RIO students will show graduation readiness through at least one option as outlined by the Assessment Bureau. These include standardized test proficiency (ELA and math - SAT, Science - NM-ASR, social studies - End of Course exam) or the approved Alternate Demonstration of Competency (ADC).

The Explore Academy - Rio Rancho ADC policy, outlined below, will be proposed to the Governing Council. The school will use state-approved demonstration of competency options as outlined in the most current guidance released by the NM Public Education Department. This includes the above as well as scores from tests such as the ACT, SAT, EoC, and Accuplacer. If a student has not met any of the PED-outlined options, they will progress to the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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/proficient 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).

F. Instruction

F. (1) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** overview of the teaching and instructional philosophy

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 reverse this trend, and to bring learning back to the forefront, Explore Academy - Rio Rancho minimizes the use of summative grades to focus more on instruction and assessment for learning, a practice well-aligned with the NMPED's current Balanced System of Assessments which places emphasis on formative assessment in the classroom to more accurately assess students as they work toward proficiency and mastery of state standards.

Students in our public schools have become conditioned to perform the work required to achieve the grades with which they are comfortable rather than being active participants in their learning. 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 move through the system by performing 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 sharing with students and parents where the student stands in the learning process. This formative feedback is 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 a deeper, lasting level.

At the completion of each seminar, students take an exit exam which assesses the scope of 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. At the elementary level, in addition to the use of data from Universal Screeners and frequent progress monitoring, students take a common formative assessment each quarter, aligned with the standards focused on through the flavor during those 44 days. While students learning kindergarten through 3rd grade standards will not change courses at the quarter mark, this assessment information provides important feedback to teachers, children and their families. At the upper elementary (4th and 5th grade levels), student mastery is measured and course progression determined by their performance on the exit exams in alignment with the middle school and preparing them for balancing multiple courses for 44 days at a time in 6th and 7th grade.

Through this system of standards-based assessments, 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 - Rio Rancho will promote a growth mindset in its learners.

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 in Albuquerque. 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 students and their community both now and as they grow and experience change. 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho students will select their own educational pathways, working toward the goal of preparing them for college and career. Classrooms, hallways, and common spaces in the elementary sections of the school are bright, creative, invite curiosity, and feature the academic and arts creations of students from across the curriculum. Choosing their seminar "flavors" from an early age and seeing their learning reflected in their environment will allow academic understanding and foundational skills to blossom as they grow confidence and self-direction as learners. The secondary 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, success, 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho schedule is built with the focus that less is more when it comes to student learning, and as such, students at the upper levels 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 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. Roedigerii. "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 - Rio Rancho.

*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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho are:

Seminar-Style Instruction

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho's 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 secondary 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 1: “A Bunch of Hot Air”
 - o Standards Covered: physical science standards and earth science standards
 - o 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 gasses, temperature, and the atmosphere.
- Example Flavor 2: “Bottom of the Ocean to the Top of the World”
 - o Standards Covered: physical science standards and earth science standards
 - o Approach: Students will learn about the earth’s composition from the ocean to the outer atmosphere (global warming, human impact, ecosystem characteristics) while also learning about the nature of gasses, temperature, and the atmosphere.

Grades 6 to 7

In the lower secondary 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. The seminars and flavors follow the same framework as the upper secondary grades, but are longer to allow students more time to explore their interests and develop the capacity to make purposeful educational choices.

- Example Flavor 1: “Wild Kingdom”
 - o Standards Covered: Research standards and speaking and listening
 - o 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”
 - o Standards Covered: Research standards and speaking and listening
 - o 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.

Grades K-5

At the elementary level, students build the foundational skills and mindsets to grow into themselves as young learners. Elementary students choose to take two core flavors at a time: one humanities (which includes literacy integrated with social studies) and one STEM (which includes numeracy integrated with science). This choice is accomplished in partnership with families; the course catalog for elementary has a storybook feel, with student-friendly descriptions families can go over with their child. The frequency of choice and level of independence in choosing increases as students demonstrate they are developmentally ready. Primary (K-1) students choose seminars for the entire year, while lower elementary (2-3) students have the opportunity to choose new courses at the semester. Like the middle school students, upper elementary students (4-5) choose courses each quarter.

All K-5 seminars integrate evidence-based and developmentally-appropriate practices, with instruction in alignment with all New Mexico standards and benchmarks. Students grow personally, socially, and academically as they gain confidence in themselves and their passions and interests.

- Example Flavor 1: “Art Works”
 - o Standards Covered: foundational literacy standards and New Mexico civics/government standards
 - o Approach: Students will explore and be inspired by art and culture as they learn literacy and social studies standards, beginning at home in New Mexico, including Indigenous and folk art, and then progressing to other regions of the United States as driven by student interest.
- Example Flavor 2: “Chef’s Table”
 - o Standards Covered: foundational literacy standards and New Mexico civics/government standards
 - o Approach: Students apply fundamental reading and writing skills as they learn about recipes and informational text, local food symbols, and celebrated dishes. While applying their academic knowledge and skills, students also choose dishes to prepare in class and share together.

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 - Rio Rancho 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, discussion with family about a topic or question)

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 - Rio Rancho. Academic tutoring is a practice that will be utilized across the campus at all grade levels to equitably 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, especially those furthest from opportunity or in need of specific supports.

Weekly Progress Report List

It is imperative that students are given individual attention and intervention in order to best support their academic progress. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 Weekly Progress Report 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 Weekly Progress Report list report and assign the identified students to a structured flex / study group to provide focused interventions for their academic needs. This is completed weekly for the entire school year.

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 for the proposed age group the school intends to serve. ***If anticipating serving K-5 Students and or an extended day program, please describe and include in a Year 2 calendar.

The Calendar and Instructional Hours

The school's proposed calendars for the 2023-24 school year are attached as Appendix I - School Calendars. The calendars show the breakdown of the different academic terms (shown by differences in colored areas) to illustrate the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) terms, corresponding to EA-RIO's shorter learning modules. The calendar itself will follow the Rio Rancho Public Schools calendar to allow families with children in multiple schools 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 Rio Rancho. The key shows the breakdown of each term, term break, and tentative school holiday breaks for 2023-2024.

Please note that separate calendars are provided for elementary (K-2) and secondary (grade 6) in Appendix I - School Calendars. Also two versions of each are provided: a regular calendar and an Extended Learning Time Program calendar, in the event that the school is approved for ELTP in its first year of operations. The 30-minute lunch period is not included in the calculations below. Due to the length of the school day, the hours are equivalent to more than 180 days in each calendar.

- Regular calendar for K-2 has 167 days with 997 instructional hours (equivalent to 181.21 days) plus 30 hours for Parent/Teacher Conferences
- ELTP calendar for K-2 has 173 days with 1098 instructional hours (equivalent to 199.57 days) plus 30 hours for Parent/Teacher Conferences. This calendar exceeds the required addition of 5 days plus an additional 27.5 hours for ELTP.
- Regular calendar for grade 6 has 174 days with 1086 instructional hours (equivalent to 181 days)
- ELTP calendar for grade 6 has 179 days with 1173 instructional hours (equivalent to 195.53 days). This calendar exceeds the required addition of 5 days plus an additional 30 instructional hours for ELTP.

The calendars, along with the daily schedules provided below, exceed all minimum hour (total instructional time) requirements laid out in [NMSA §22-2-8.1](#) and [6.10.5.8 NMAC](#). As a charter school, waiver requests per [NMSA §22-2-2.1](#) and [NMSA §22-8B-5](#) will be submitted to the Public Education Department.

Important Dates

The calendar shows the projected start date of August 9, 2023 for K-2 students (July 31, 2023 for staff) and a projected end date of May 23, 2024 for students (May 24, 2024 for staff). Term break days are identified, 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 last terms in order to allow for state testing. Please see the School Assessment Calendar schedule provided below.

Daily Schedules

Elementary

The elementary schedule is structured around two extended core instructional blocks per day, one humanities (which includes literacy integrated with social studies) and one STEM (which includes numeracy integrated with science). Students in these grades will also have three recess periods, one flex period, one lunch period, and one elective per day (which include art, music, PE, theater, STEAM,

etc.) Students move through the school day within developmentally appropriate groupings of students at the same relative academic level, so schedules will vary based upon level and seminar choices.

For grades K-5, flex time exists for one block per day and will be used differently depending on student needs. Students with special needs will be able to meet with ancillary service providers to fulfill Individualized Education Program (“IEP”) service hours, students below grade level will be able to receive remedial support from support staff members to help build skills in literacy and math, students in need of general assistance will be able to work teachers and tutors to help with skills and comprehension, and those students who are on-pace will be provided with enrichment opportunities. Data measured on a monthly basis will drive where students go for their flex periods.

A sample schedule is below. There is an alternate schedule for Friday with the insertion of social and emotional learning structures and supports; Choice Elective (“club”) times; and early release for staff meeting time and professional development.

Elementary School Schedule, Mon-Thu

PERIOD	TIME	ACTIVITY
1	8:00 - 9:30	90 minutes STEM (or Humanities)
2	9:30 - 10:30	15 minute Recess, 45 minute Elective
3	10:30 - 11:00	Finish STEM (or Humanities) block
4	11:00 - 11:35	20 minute Lunch, 15 minute Recess
5	11:35 - 12:15	30 minute Flex, then class transition
6	12:15 - 1:30	75 minutes Humanities (or STEM) block
7	1:30 - 1:45	Recess
8	1:45 - 2:30	Finish Humanities (or STEM) block
9	2:30 - 2:45	Class meeting, pack up, dismissal

Elementary School Schedule, Friday

PERIOD	TIME	ACTIVITY
1	8:00 - 9:00	Social and emotional learning in multi-age groups
2	9:00 - 10:00	Choice Elective (clubs), Recess
3	10:00 - 11:00	Student-directed research projects, Lunch
4	11:00 - 12:45	Teacher-Led flex time for interventions, extensions, and small group instruction, Recess
5	12:45 - 1:15	Whole school closing meeting and celebration (weekly)
6	1:15 - 1:25	Closing circles in classrooms, dismissal

Secondary

The secondary 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.

Middle and High School Schedule, Mon-Thu

PERIOD	TIME	DURATION
1	8:00-8:57	57 minutes
2	9:00-9:57	57 minutes
3	10:00-10:57	57 minutes
4	11:00-11:57	57 minutes
5	12:00-12:57	57 minutes
6	1:00-1:57	57 minutes
7	2:00-3:00	60 minutes

Middle and High School Schedule, Fri

PERIOD	TIME	DURATION
1	8:00-8:39	39 minutes
2	8:42-9:20	38 minutes
CLUBS	9:23-10:13	50 minutes
3	10:16-10:54	38 minutes
4	10:57-11:35	38 minutes
5	11:38-12:17	39 minutes
6	12:20-12:58	38 minutes
7	1:01-1:40	39 minutes

Alternate Schedules

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

Elementary School 2-hour Delay Schedule, Mon-Thu

PERIOD	TIME	ACTIVITY
1	10:00 - 11:00	90 minutes STEM
2	11:00 - 11:45	20 minutes Lunch, 15 minutes Recess, plus transition
3	11:45 - 12:15	30 minutes Elective
4	12:15 - 1:45	90 minutes Humanities
5	1:45 - 2:00	15 minutes Recess
6	2:00 - 2:30	30 minutes Flex
7	2:30 - 2:45	Class meetings and pack up

Middle and High School Two-Hour Delay Schedule

PERIOD	TIME	DURATION
1	10:00-10:40	40 minutes
2	10:43-11:23	40 minutes
3	11:26-12:06	40 minutes
4	12:09-12:49	40 minutes
5	12:52-1:32	40 minutes
6	1:35-2:15	40 minutes
7	2:18-3:00	42 minutes

The student schedule for the elementary level is described on pages 41 and 42 above. For the secondary level, students will attend five classes each day, 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 during after school hours.

Middle/High School Student Schedule Example

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

Elementary Level Teachers

Each day, all staff will teach two 2-hour core instructional blocks, have an additional 45 minutes of student contact time for routines, procedures, and social-emotional learning structures. Teachers also have 3 prep periods of varying lengths, including 45 minutes during Elective, 30 minutes during Flex, and 35 minutes during Lunch/Recess. During these prep periods teachers engage in instructional planning, family communication, grading, student feedback, and personal care. This time also allows for collaboration time. On Fridays, all staff participate in professional development, collaboration and planning, assessment and data analysis, and whole school support meetings on a rotating cycle from 1:40 pm - 3:15 pm.

Elementary Teacher Schedule, Monday-Thursday

PERIOD	TIME	ACTIVITY
1	8:00 - 9:30	90 minutes STEM (or Humanities)
2	9:30 - 10:30	15 minute Recess, 45 minute Elective
3	10:30 - 11:00	Finish STEM (or Humanities) block
4	11:00 - 11:35	20 minute Lunch, 15 minute Recess
5	11:35 - 12:15	30 minute Flex, then class transition
6	12:15 - 1:30	75 minutes Humanities (or STEM) block
7	1:30 - 1:45	Recess
8	1:45 - 2:30	Finish Humanities (or STEM) block
9	2:30 - 2:45	Class meeting, pack up, dismissal

Secondary Level Teachers

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.

Middle / High School Teacher Schedule Example

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+

School Assessment Calendar

August	September	October	November	December
Placement exams for new students	Term 1 Exit Exams (8-12), Midterms (K-7)	Term 2 Exit Exams	Term 3 Exit Exams (8-12), Midterms (K-7)	Term 4 Exit Exams
Data collection from STARS for all students	Progress monitoring (ELL,	Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, Weekly Progress Report)	Progress monitoring (ELL,	Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, Weekly Progress Report)

(Assessment Facts) WIDA Screeners if needed (within 20 days)	IEP, 504, Weekly Progress Report) Interim assessment BOY (IStation K-5, iMSSA 6-8)	PSAT grades 9-11 (estimated 10/18) <i>(n/a SY23-24)</i>	IEP, 504, Weekly Progress Report)	Interim assessment MOY (IStation K-5, iMSSA 6-8)
January	February	March	April	May
Start ACCESS testing (estimated 1/15-3/8)	Term 5 Exit Exams (8-12), Midterms (K-7) Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, Weekly Progress Report)	Term 6 Exit Exams Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, Weekly Progress Report) NMASR Science exam for grades 5, 8, and 11 (estimated 3/25-5/3) <i>(n/a in year SY 23-24)</i> Finish ACCESS and return materials	Term 7 Exit Exams (8-12), Midterms (K-7) Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, Weekly Progress Report) Start ELA/math state assessment for grades 3-8 (estimated 3/25-5/3) <i>(only applicable for grade 6 SY 23-24)</i> PSAT for grades 9-10 (estimated mid April) <i>(n/a SY23-24)</i> SAT for grade 11 (estimated mid April) <i>(n/a SY23-24)</i>	Term 8 Exit Exams Progress monitoring (ELL, IEP, 504, Weekly Progress Report) Interim assessment EOY (IStation K-5, iMSSA 6-8) Close all state testing portals and rectify all POs/invoices

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 students 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-promise, 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(s), 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, year long classes. With this structure and calendar, students are able to focus their attention and master 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 Rio Rancho and surrounding area, the supports described above allow for specific intervention strategies in closing learning gaps. Additionally, as mentioned above, the calendar allows for alignment with the Rio Rancho Public Schools district, thereby allowing families to enroll children at EA-RIO and Rio Rancho Public Schools without undue scheduling hardship. In addition, the school will consider the student population and consult with tribal entities before finalizing the school calendar to ensure that religious and cultural days, such as the Friday before Easter and Feast Days, are non-school days to the greatest extent possible.

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 grading period (22 days on average for high school, 44 days on average for elementary and middle school). 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 - Rio Rancho's' 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

EA-RIO plans to commit to an extended learning time program, beginning in the first year of operation, if so approved.

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.

The Explore Learning Model has a track record of success serving the students of the Albuquerque metro area, including those in Rio Rancho, Bernalillo, the westside of Albuquerque, Peña Blanca, Algodones, Placitas, and several pueblos including San Felipe, Cochiti, Santo Domingo, Sandia, and Santa Ana (referred to here using the naming convention of the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center). Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) intends to serve this same population of students with a campus that is closer to their homes, reducing the transportation burden and time it takes students and families to travel into Albuquerque to attend other charter schools, including the only other school in the area using the Explore Learning Model.

Anticipated Student Population

Demographic Information

The chart below shows the current demographic information for the two school districts from which we anticipate students will attend EA-RIO, Rio Rancho Public Schools and Bernalillo Public Schools. Also included is a projection of the student population in terms of diversity and at-risk of EA-RIO extrapolated from the demographic information of these districts, their relative size, and distance from Rio Rancho.

	Black	Native American	Asian	Caucasion	Hispanic	Econ Dis.	English Learner	Students with Disabilities	Homeless
Bernalillo	<1	46	<1	9	44	>99	29	17	2
Rio Rancho	<5	4	<1	31	56	41	4	15	<1
Explore Academy - Rio Rancho	<5	10	<1	30	55	50	10	16	<2

Educational Proficiency

Due to the nature of the last two pandemic years, it is important to view proficiency data from 2019 (the last year with consistent data) and 2021 (online instruction year for most schools) to ensure a more accurate and fair representation of student achievement in the two closest school districts. Due to school closures, there is no data for 2020. The charts below outline proficiency for both Bernalillo Public Schools and Rio Rancho Public Schools for 2019 and 2021 in ELA and math as available from NMPED.

BERNALILLO 2019 MATH % PROFICIENT - PRE-PANDEMIC				
Grade	ALL	ELL	Sped	Econ. Dis.
3	15	10	11	15
4	10	8	<10	10
5	16	<2	<10	16
6	9	<5	<10	9
7	4	<5	<10	4
8	8	<10	<10	8
9	6	<5	<10	6
10	<2	<10	<10	<2
11	3	<10	<10	<2
Average	8	6.1	8.3	7.7

BERNALILLO 2019 ELA % PROFICIENT - PRE-PANDEMIC				
Grade	ALL	ELL	Sped	Econ. Dis.
K	33	18	31	33
1	28	22	<10	28
2	39	29	26	39
3	14	6	<10	14
4	16	10	<10	16
5	25	8	<10	25
6	12	<5	<10	12
7	12	<5	<10	12
8	18	<10	<10	18
9	15	<5	<10	15
10	22	<10	<10	22
11	23	<5	6	23
Average	21.4	10.5	11	21.4

RIO RANCHO 2019 MATH % PROFICIENT - PRE-PANDEMIC				
Grade	ALL	ELL	Sped	Econ. Dis.
3	41	18	23	33
4	37	15	12	27
5	34	6	7	23
6	27	6	19	21
7	30	5	3	22
8	40	<10	8	31
9	31	<10	5	21
10	25	<10	3	14
11	12	<10	16	10
Average	30.1	9.1	10.6	22.4

RIO RANCHO 2019 ELA % PROFICIENT - PRE-PANDEMIC				
Grade	ALL	ELL	Sped	Econ. Dis.
K	49	22	28	39
1	34	15	22	24
2	51	23	25	41
3	35	13	24	29
4	37	18	7	29
5	39	6	8	27
6	38	11	24	30
7	42	7	8	31
8	48	15	8	34
9	42	<10	7	31
10	46	<10	7	30
11	55	15	19	40
Average	43	13.4	15.6	32

2021 DISTRICT-WIDE MATH % PROFICIENT - PANDEMIC				
DISTRICT	ALL	ELL	SPED	ECON. DIS.
BERNALILLO	<20*	<20	<20	<20
RIO RANCHO	48	<20	<20	27

2021 DISTRICT-WIDE ELA 3-12 % PROFICIENT - PANDEMIC				
DISTRICT	ALL	ELL	SPED	ECON. DIS.
BERNALILLO	49	38	29	39
RIO RANCHO	73	<20	23	53

2021 DISTRICT-WIDE EARLY LITERACY K-2 % PROFICIENT - PANDEMIC				
DISTRICT	ALL	ELL	SPED	ECON. DIS.
BERNALILLO	25	<20	<20	21
RIO RANCHO	36	<20	<20	26

* PED did not release specific scores of the proficiency percentages between 0% and 19% in 2021.

The data show a few trends in the target population proficiency and achievement. Bernalillo Public School students are significantly behind Rio Rancho Public Schools students in both ELA and math. Students have proficiency level drops each year, indicating that learning gaps worsen with each grade level. Additionally, the subgroup data show that students with disabilities and English learners fall behind their peers, scoring lower in ELA and math consistently. For Bernalillo Public Schools, the economically disadvantaged students are mostly on par with the general population, but the district has a very high percentage of students who are classified as economically disadvantaged, so the data is consistent with this demographic composition (in that the all-student average is almost always identical to the economically-disadvantaged average).

The data from Rio Rancho Public Schools presents a different trend. Although the proficiency levels for the district overall are moderate to high in some areas, particularly in ELA, students in at-risk subgroups are behind their peers in every area, sometimes with deficits over 30 percentage points. This indicates that English learners, students with disabilities, and students who are economically disadvantaged are not learning at the rate of their peers in math or ELA. The RRPS data also shows that math proficiency levels are lower than ELA, a trend that is seen state-wide, including in Bernalillo Public Schools.

Based on this data breakdown and taking into account 2019 and 2021 data, the chart below illustrates the predicted average proficiency at early elementary (K-2) and middle school (6) grade ranges for the potential student population entering Explore Academy - Rio Rancho for its first year, SY23-24.

PREDICTED % PROFICIENT EA-RIO INCOMING STUDENTS		
Grade range	ELA/early literacy	Math
K-2	37	(not reported by NMPED)
6	43	25

As a point of comparison, 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*.

2019 AVERAGE ELA % PROFICIENT		
	ALL	Econ. Dis.
EA-ABQ	64.2	61.75
RRPS	43	32
BPS	21.4	21.4

2019 MATH % PROFICIENT		
	ALL	Econ. Dis.
EA-ABQ	48	36
RRPS	30.1	22.4
BPS	8	7.7

* Special education and EL data was not reported by NMPED for 2019 for Explore Academy - Albuquerque

Attendance and Truancy Trends

The percentage of students who attended more than 90% of all school days during 2017 - 2019 in Rio Rancho was fairly consistent at 83%. However, the percentage for those same years in Bernalillo was on a downward trend over those same years, from 78% to 67%.

English Language Proficiency

The EL Progress measurement for Rio Rancho Public Schools in 2019 indicates that 45% of English learners were on track toward achieving English proficiency within five years, down from 47% the prior year. In Bernalillo Public Schools, 27% of English Learners were on track toward achieving English proficiency within five years, down from 32% the year prior. It is important to note that Bernalillo Public Schools has a significantly higher percentage of EL students at 29% compared to only 4% in Rio Rancho Public Schools.

Special Education Needs

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho predicts it will enroll at least 15% special education students, and has planned accordingly to meet all IEP requirements. This includes contracting with a special education expert, such as the Director of Special Education from Explore Learning Systems (the service provider team of experts on the Explore Learning Model) to guide on-site special education staff in creating a calendar for IEPs, evaluations, re-evaluations, ancillary services, and other special education events. Additionally, the EA-RIO team has already communicated with both ACES and CES, local educational service providers, to begin discussing contracts and options for ancillary services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, social work, school psychology, educational diagnostician services, recreational therapy, and other services that may be required to best serve incoming students as well as meet needs that arise through data and observation of enrolled students of EA-RIO.

Special Factors

The primary special factor influencing the makeup of the anticipated student population is the merging of students from vastly different backgrounds in terms of socio-economic status and academic proficiency. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho is prepared to serve this diversity via high levels of engagement via student choice and comprehensive, built-in supports. Due to the widespread geographic area, transportation is required and will be provided by Explore Academy - Rio Rancho.

Meeting Student Needs - Educational Philosophy

The philosophy of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 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 while fostering the interests and passions of educators to build engaging and effective curriculum for students. The model builds individuals not only ready for the academic future after high school, 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 K-12 school cannot be found anywhere in Sandoval County. The students in RRPS and BPS have very few options outside the traditional educational model and there are no charter options that offer comprehensive K-12 models that are designed with the entire journey from primary through secondary education in mind.

Meeting Student Needs - Instructional Methods

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will implement a seminar-style of instruction that puts students in the driver's seat everyday they step into the classroom. This two-way discourse embedded in the instructional model places equal focus on the student and the teacher as active participants in the learning process. When paired with the shorter learning modules, choice-based classes, and smaller class sizes, the seminar instructional approach ensures that all students are heard, engaged, and provided the individual attention they deserve.

The unique cultural mix of Sandoval county is not seen in other areas of the Albuquerque metro area. With students from various Hispanic backgrounds, including immigrants from other countries and generations-old New Mexico Hispanic families, Native American families, and families of European descent, the cultural mosaic of the Rio Rancho area provides a wealth of background knowledge and experience from which EA-RIO teachers and students will draw. This rich history and demographic diversity will contribute greatly to the flavor choices that will be created for students to choose from. The resulting instruction will be as unique and diverse as the teachers who create it and the students who are immersed in it. Teacher creativity combined with empowering students to choose their own instructional pathway leads to high levels of student engagement and buy-in, which in turn makes the seminar-style instruction much more successful than traditional direct instruction from common textbooks written by anonymous publishers from outside New Mexico.

Within each EA-RIO seminar, work is formative in nature with the consistent goal of standards mastery in mind at all times. Student efforts on assignments, projects, quizzes, tests, labs, etc. are all assessed quickly and feedback given almost immediately to foster growth and development as well as accountability and metacognition. Teachers use a variety of learning styles in each seminar, thus when students choose their flavor, they are provided with a differentiated method of instruction that is

aligned with their interests and passions as they work toward closing learning gaps and mastering each required standard set before them.

With students in Sandoval County, particularly in RRPS and BPS, showing declining levels of proficiency as they progress through each grade level, the Explore Learning Model will help break that cycle by closing learning gaps through true standards-based instruction that supports students individually as they work through obstacles in each individual standard.

Meeting Student Needs - Calendar and Schedule

The academic calendar is built to support students through shorter, more manageable learning modules rather than overwhelming, year long 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-promise, 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 the flex period, 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, social-emotional learning, and other 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 school calendar is designed to align with the Rio Rancho Public Schools calendar, but also takes into account the unique needs of students who may come from Bernalillo Public Schools including feast days and other cultural holidays. The use of shorter academic terms also provides flexibility for students who may need extended absences for cultural obligations by providing flexible scheduling during particular terms of the year where absences may be more common.

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. Please ensure that you adhere to state obligations as outlined in the consolidated Yazzie and Martinez Lawsuits.

G. (1) Special Education

G. (1a) Provide a **clear, cohesive, and comprehensive** description of how the proposed school will provide required instructional services/supports to students with IEPs.

Describe how the proposed school will identify and provide:

The entire nature of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho will prioritize the identification of students with special needs prior to enrollment or at the time of demonstrated academic need 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-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho 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. Classroom supports are offered to accommodate and modify the learning environment of each student based on their IEP or 504. These include, but are not limited to, 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-RIO will commit itself to maintaining smaller class sizes (average of less than 18 in any class) so teachers may work closely with each student. 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-RIO 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 on 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 -Rio Rancho will provide these service hours to students during their 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 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) which 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 Multi-Layered System of Supports (MLSS) layered 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-RIO 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.

Discipline Policies

EA-RIO will work with a special education expert to ensure compliance related to discipline for special education students including manifestations, behavioral intervention plans, and change of placement protocols. In the spring before school launch, a Special Education Handbook will be finalized and reviewed by both a special education expert and the school’s legal counsel to ensure accuracy, comprehensiveness, and legal compliance. The special education teacher and the head administrator will oversee this process in conjunction with any contracted experts and PED staff who provide technical support for special education. The team will also ensure alignment between the Special Education Handbook and the Student Handbook with regard to the unique needs of students with disabilities as it relates to student behavior, discipline, consequences, placement, etc.

Staffing and Training

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho anticipates its students with disabilities population to be similar to

the surrounding school districts which is currently around 15% of the total student population. The school will begin with one special education coordinator/teacher 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 needs. Ancillary services will be provided through outside contracts so that EA-RIO can provide all types of services, even if for very small time increments.

The special education teachers will work as a team to serve the students in coordination with administration, teachers, and academic tutors. The special education coordinator/teacher 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) providing services and monitoring progress with the IEP goals; (c) ensuring all services are provided as outlined on the IEP and agreed to by the IEP team; (d) monitoring timelines for annual reviews and reevaluations of IEPs; (e) complying with state and federal reporting guidelines; (f) providing professional development and support to general education staff; (g) collecting and compiling all data pertaining to students with IEPs including progress monitoring and modification and accommodation efficacy and (h) ensuring that special education data is stored in a confidential manner. Special education coordinators/teachers will also be responsible for reporting all teacher concerns to the Student Assistance Team (SAT), 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-RIO 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

G. (1b) 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

As Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho. This workflow will operate across several dimensions, the more prominent ones being:

Frequent Assessments

As mentioned in the Assessment and Accountability sections I.H (1-3), Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's 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 - Rio Rancho's standards-based exit exams every term, resulting in multiple scores per student, per term, depending on the age of the child. This means that over the course of the year, EA-RIO staff will be able to analyze up to 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-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho's 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 Weekly Progress Report List

At the conclusion of each week, teachers evaluate student progress and generate a weekly progress report 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.

This 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 weekly progress report and list 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-RIO teachers will review and provide feedback on special education goals each semester, 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 Kindergarten through 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.

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
Weekly Progress Report list	weekly	IEP students with an indicator on the Weekly Progress Report	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 of services for students with disabilities	annually	action steps for improvement	admin, SPED director, Governing Council, stakeholders, students, teachers, data analyst, counselor

G. (2) English Learners (ELs)

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

As mentioned in section G.1 Special Education, the entire nature of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's (EA-RIO) 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 accomplished through properly identifying ELs who are enrolled and providing comprehensive support through scheduling and support services.

Identifying

To identify ELL students, Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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, EA-RIO will use the NM 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 students' previous program qualification as well as previous test scores, including ACCESS scores, if any. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho's 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 the student 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 not eligible for ELL services. 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 (in the January-March window) 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 - Rio Rancho will ensure that all ELs who are enrolled have 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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 K-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

Rio Rancho has a lower percentage of English Learners (4%) than most other areas of the state (overall 16%) and Bernalillo has much higher percentage (29%). Many ELs are functioning at higher levels of proficiency (ACCESS scores of 4.0 and higher). With current projections at 10% for Explore Academy - Rio Rancho, 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-RIO 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

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

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
Weekly Progress Report list	weekly	ELL students on the Weekly Progress Report 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,	data analyst, admin, ELL coordinator/ teacher

		overall students with special needs subgroups	
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 of ELL services	annually	action steps for improvement	admin, ELL coordinator/ teacher, Governing Council, stakeholders, students, teachers, data analyst, counselor

G. (3) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive plan** to ensure adherence to ESSA and State statutes in addressing the needs of Native American Students, Hispanic Students, Black Students and Bilingual and Multicultural educational plan to improve educational outcomes. The narrative should include an explanation of the supplemental program or services offered to ensure implementation and ensure policies will be culturally and linguistically responsive.

Describe how the proposed school will:

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 Black, 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 Bilingual Multicultural Education Act ([NMSA §22-23-1.1](#)), the Indian Education Act ([NMSA §22-23A-2](#)), the Hispanic Education Act ([NMSA §22-23B-2](#)), and the Black Education Act (HB 43 and [NMSA Article 23C](#)). To this end, EA-RIO will address the needs of Native American, Hispanic and Black 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-RIO campus is projected to have over 70% 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 - Rio Rancho's programs and plans for culturally responsive practices for all students, including Native American, Hispanic, Black, Bilingual and Multicultural students, are described in Section I.D - Education Acts. In a target population where most students are Hispanic, multicultural, and bilingual, EA-RIO 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-RIO.

Teacher and staff training

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho prioritizes providing quality training to all staff regarding best practices to serve students who are at-risk of marginalization, especially Black, Native American, Hispanic, Multicultural, and Bilingual students attending EA-RIO. 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-RIO, 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
- 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 - Rio Rancho will have an unprecedented amount of choice in their educational pathways. At each 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 Rio Rancho and surrounding areas 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 Rio Rancho 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 mosaic 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 - Rio Rancho. Stakeholders from all subgroups, especially parents of Black, 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho parent and community involvement and feedback, and tailor communication and reporting procedures to the EA-RIO stakeholders, Rio Rancho, and the neighboring communities served.

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 - Rio Rancho. Through these surveys, which provide valuable curricular and instructional data as well, administration will evaluate the feedback surrounding Black, 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 Black, 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-RIO 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 Black, 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-RIO will evaluate all data collected from the school year in regard to Black, Native American, Hispanic, Multicultural, and Bilingual education and students of the school. This includes surveys, student performance data, student behavior and discipline 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 equity 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 Black, Native American, Hispanic, Bilingual, and Multicultural students of EA-RIO, including reporting mechanisms:

Action Item	Date	Deliverable	Responsible Group
Weekly Progress Report list	weekly reports to families, teachers	Black, Native American, Hispanic, Multicultural, and Bilingual (B, NH, H, M, Bil.) students on the Weekly Progress Report list repeatedly	teachers, admin, ELL coordinator/ teacher
Seminar progress	monthly (each term) reports to families, teachers	student report for all B, NH, H, M, Bil. students based on exit exam performance concerns	admin, data analyst
Structured Flex assignment	monthly	B, NH, H, M, Bil. 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 B, NH, H, M, Bil. 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 B, NH, H, M, Bil. student service evaluation	annually	action steps for improvement specific to curriculum, operations, instruction, and services	all admin, Governing Council, teachers, data analyst, counselors, teachers

H. Assessment and Accountability

A charter school application should include a clear plan for evaluating student performance across the curriculum. ([NMSA 22-8B-8](#)(E)). 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 and dissemination of data gathered through assessments should include procedures for how the board will initiate corrective action (both individually and collectively) if pupil performance falls below expected standards.

When developing the assessment plan, consider the following: 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). Finally, 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. Assessment and Accountability

H.(1) Provide a clear, comprehensive, and cohesive assessment plan

There are a variety of assessments that will be used for grades K through 12 to measure academic progress for students at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho. These assessments range from daily formative assessments through annual state-mandated assessments.

The Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 STEM Ready! 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-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho will allow for constant progress monitoring and a feedback mechanism to inform instruction, provide specific 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 - Rio Rancho 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 (Rio Rancho), 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.F3 - 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 - Rio Rancho's 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-RIO 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 Rio Rancho 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 (on the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho weekly progress report list), 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.

Interim Assessments

Interim assessments are an essential part of the learning process because they provide valuable standards-based data that is aligned with summative assessments and comparable across years, student groups, state averages, and students. Yet while aligned, unlike summative assessments, data from interim assessments may be utilized to make adjustments in instruction before the student progresses to the next year of schooling. Using iMSSA, the interim assessment provided by NMPED, Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will assess students in grades 6-8. For students in K-5, iStation will be used as the interim assessment to ensure foundational literacy and numeracy performance is accurately monitored. For students in grades 9-11, PSAT will be given at least two times annually (SAT will replace PSAT for grade 11 each spring) to provide interim data that is tailored to college and career readiness.

Exit Exams

There is a demonstrated need for student academic growth in the Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 mastery rates for different standards and 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.

As stated in Mission-Specific Goal #1, providing students with the opportunity to reach grade-level proficiency in reading by the end of grade 3 is a critical outcome of our program. To that end, early literacy assessments, including Istation, are integral to the school's assessment plan. As a universal screener, progress monitoring tool, and standards-aligned measurement, Istation allows our school to gather real-time and longitudinal data on the development of foundational language and literacy skills, including phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, as aligned with structured literacy components and the science of reading. These data will be supplemented by use of the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) spelling inventories to gauge the extent and progress of a students' orthographic development.

At the elementary level, in addition to the use of data from Universal Screeners and frequent progress monitoring, students take a common formative assessment each quarter, aligned with the standards focused on through the flavor during those 44 days for a given seminar. Like exit exams, these assessments will be broken into two sections, with the half assessing the lower-level Bloom's skills common across all flavors of a particular seminar. This portion of the assessment will take the form of a more traditional standards-based assessment, with predominantly multiple choice and short response questions. The other half, assessing higher order Bloom's skills will be specific to the flavor in question. This portion of the assessment will be project based and access extended thinking, requiring students to apply and expand their understanding of the seminars focus standards. The question levels and test question design increase in difficulty as students progress through each tier. While students learning kindergarten through 3rd grade standards will not change courses at the quarter mark, this assessment information provides important feedback to teachers, children and their families. At the upper elementary (4th and 5th grade levels), student mastery is measured and course progression determined by their performance on these assessments in alignment with the middle school and preparing them for balancing multiple courses for 44 days at a time in 6th and 7th grade.

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 early literacy

assessment, Dyslexia screener, any state-required interim assessments, 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
Istation - early literacy assessment	Beginning, Middle, End of Year All K-2 students <i>*Biweekly for students identified as Level 1 or 2 and in need of layered supports</i>	Measure progress toward mastery of essential foundational literacy skills aligned with structured literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension	Student performance and progress will be analyzed to the individual and sub-skill level to ensure students are receiving responsive, timely, and tailored literacy interventions, including moving students into MLSS or SAT.
Lexercise - Dyslexia screener	By 40th day of school All first grade students	This fulfills the statutory requirements for the early screening and intervention for students displaying characteristics of dyslexia.	This assessment will guide interventionists, specialists, and teachers in data driven instruction and early identification of the characteristics of dyslexia and skills in which students need most support.
Istation Math and Reading	Beginning, Middle, End of Year All K-5 students	This assessment will serve as a universal screener as well as an interim indicator of student progress in foundational literacy and numeracy skills, and grade level standards.	Teachers, specialists, interventionists, coaches, and school leaders will analyze assessments at the different grade, class, standard, student, item levels to reflect on the efficacy of instruction and make adjustments to instructional plans and support to teachers and students.
iMSSA - language usage, reading, math	Beginning, Middle, End of Year All 6-8 students	This assessment will serve as an interim indicator of student progress toward grade level standards, as aligned to the summative assessment, NM MSSA.	Teachers, specialists, interventionists, coaches, and school leaders will analyze assessments at the different grade, class, standard, student, item levels to reflect on the efficacy of instruction and make adjustments to instructional plans and support to teachers and students.

<p>PSAT - ELA/math pre-college entrance exam</p>	<p>Fall and spring annually</p> <p>Grades 9-11 fall (PED-mandated for grade 10, EA-RIO mandated for 9, 11)</p> <p>Grades 9-10 spring</p>	<p>Each fall in October, the PED pays for all NM sophomores to take the PSAT. This test is designed to allow students to 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 9th and 11th grade students also take the exam.</p>	<p>PSAT score reports, unlike most other standardized tests that are given to students, are returned along with the actual test booklet. 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 - Rio Rancho 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.</p>
<p>SAT - ELA/math college entrance exam</p>	<p>Spring annually</p> <p>Grade 11</p>	<p>ELA and math assessment and college entrance exam for students at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho to demonstrate college readiness. The test also allows for comparisons across all NM schools to provide EA-RIO insight into its student achievement levels.</p>	<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 needs and address learning gaps that are apparent in the standardized testing.</p> <p>Data are also compared to exit exam performance to better align</p>

			the exit exams to the standards and accurately reflect student proficiency.
NM MSSA - ELA/math standards-based assessment	Annually April-May Grades 3-11	ELA and math assessments that are aligned to the common core standards and allow for students at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho to demonstrate proficiency in the standards assigned to their current courses. The test also allows for comparisons across all NM schools to provide EA-RIO insight into its student achievement levels.	Scores from the annual state assessments allow for: -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 Teachers are provided with this data when it becomes available in order to adjust the instruction in math and ELA to meet student needs and address learning gaps that are apparent in the standardized testing. Data are also compared to exit exam performance to better align the exit exams to the standards and accurately reflect student proficiency.
WIDA ACCESS English Language Proficiency	Annually February - March All students identified as ELL	The WIDA ACCESS test is designed to provide academic English proficiency of all levels of English learners. With four domains (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing), the data is specific to the unique areas of language that contribute to overall proficiency and successful use of academic English	The WIDA data, along with aligned WIDA standards, provides teachers and school leadership with crucial information on how to best serve English learners in grade level classes as well as in English language development classes. Teachers, including the English language development/TESOL teacher are provided with ACCESS scores for all ELs annually to allow them to adjust instruction and plan differentiation, sheltered English instruction, and accommodations/modifications required to best meet the needs of each student individually as they meet both grade level content and English language goals.
NM ASR - science	Annually March Grades 5, 8, 11	The NMASR is aligned to the NM STEMReady! +6 standards for science instruction and allows all	Scores from the annual state assessment allow for:

standards-based assessment		students to demonstrate proficiency in science for grades 5, 8 and 11 at EA-RIO. It also allows for EA-RIO science achievement to be compared to NM state performance levels.	<p>-school performance from year to year</p> <p>-grade level and subgroup performance</p> <p>-comparison to NM averages</p> <p>-science proficiency levels and areas of strength/weakness</p> <p>The science department is provided with this data when it becomes available in order to adjust the instruction to meet student needs and address learning gaps that are 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>
Exit Exams	<p>Monthly, end of each term, eight times annually</p> <p>Grades 6-12, every seminar</p> <p>End of each quarter, four times annually</p> <p>Grades K-5, every seminar</p>	<p>Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho, 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.</p>	<p>Exit exam results are used in a variety of ways to inform instruction and improve student performance and academic outcomes.</p> <p>-The overall pass rate for exit exams each month is a goal, as identified in Section I.B - Mission Specific Goals 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-RIO will use this as a measure of overall school performance.</p> <p>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</p>

			<p>standard, by student, by subgroup, by period, etc.</p> <p>Exit exam performance will also be analyzed by content area. This will allow the administration and each content to monitor the progress in each content individually and course correct in a way that best meets the needs of that content. EA-RIO 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 needs 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 Weekly Progress Report students) in order to adapt services and improve student outcomes.</p>
Formative Assessments	At least weekly Grades K-12	Every seminar at EA-RIO 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	<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</p>

		<p>edits. This will allow teachers to 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.</p>	<p>data-driven and (potentially) in constant states of adjustment.</p>
<p>Frontloading</p>	<p>Daily Grades 3-12 Weekly Grades K-2</p>	<p>Frontloading is an instructional practice that will be required in all classrooms and contents at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho. 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 a term. The amount of time students should dedicate to frontloading is appropriate to the age, developmental, and academic level of the child.</p>	<p>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.</p>

Professional Development in Use of Data to Drive Instruction

Explore Academy - RIO will facilitate extensive and ongoing, job-embedded professional development for teachers in the area of use of data to drive instruction. Due to the standards-based nature of our

model, data-driven instruction is in many ways the fabric of our curriculum and instruction approach. The following section I.H.2 on Data Analysis comprehensively describes the school's approach to triangulated data use on an ongoing, multifaceted basis. Learning Specialists (interventionists/coaches), school instructional leaders, and content experts provide tailored support to teacher teams in their application of reflection processes and adjustment of instructional plans and strategies. In addition, a more descriptive professional development timeline and plan may be referenced in section II.D.4.

See also the Assessment Calendar in Section I-F2 - Calendar and Schedules.

H.(2) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** description of the how assessment data will be analyzed

Data Analysis

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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, anecdotal notes on the efficacy of interventions, proficiency data from every term, social-emotional learning observations, 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 Weekly Progress 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 4-7, 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.

At the elementary level, in addition to the use of data from Universal Screeners and frequent progress monitoring, students take a common formative assessment each quarter, aligned with the standards focused on through the flavor during those 44 days. While students learning kindergarten through 3rd grade standards will not change courses at the quarter mark, this assessment information provides important feedback to teachers, children and their families. At the upper elementary (4th and 5th grade levels), student mastery is measured and course progression determined by their performance on these assessments in alignment with the middle school and preparing them for balancing multiple courses for 44 days at a time in 6th and 7th grade.

Due to the interconnectedness and dynamic nature of early neurological and foundational skills development, data collection and analysis at the early to mid elementary level will also rely heavily on developmentally appropriate phonological awareness assessments and spelling inventories, as well as

1:1 interview-style assessments in which teachers are taking notes and asking students questions about their thinking throughout. Across the K-5 span, teachers will work to balance quantitative measures with qualitative context and information, particularly as it relates to the integration of social-emotional and academic development.

That said, the entire K-12 staff will be steeped in data-driven processes to ensure that we are using student-centered evidence to drive instructional decision-making, rather than a prescriptive curriculum or the status quo as in so many traditional schools. In collaborative content-specific teams and with the support of intervention specialists, special educators, school instructional leaders and coaches, teachers will engage in regular cycles of instructional continuous improvement. During these collaboration cycles, teachers will identify and celebrate the greatest successes apparent in data; prioritize emergent and persisting learning gaps; identify outliers - specific students significantly under or overperforming the rest of the group; and finally, considering the whole child will determine any students for who there are urgent and important concerns regarding, for example, their physical health or social and emotional state).

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 - Rio Rancho will administer the New Mexico Assessment of Science Readiness (NMASR) each spring to students in grades 5, 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 3-11 will participate in the state-adopted standards-based assessment for ELA. Students in grades K-2 will take the state-adopted early literacy assessment at the beginning of year, middle of year, and end of year to measure and track student growth toward essential foundational literacy skills. The data

from these assessments 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 3-11 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho distribution list as well as kept in pdf format for printing or viewing by the general public. The EA-RIO 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 or 44 days for K-5). As assessment scores from exit exams, midterms, and progress monitoring data 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 - Rio Rancho corrective action plan: remediation, credit recovery, and seminar evaluation.

Remediation

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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-RIO philosophy.

The school's schedule structure (which includes two free periods out of seven daily for all middle and high school students and one flex period per day for all elementary 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 secondary 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. With support from interventionists, specialists, tutors, and their classroom teachers, elementary students are provided with structure and support during Flex times, to help them build the skill sets to effectively self-direct their academic flex periods in the future.

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 Weekly Progress Report 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 Weekly Progress Report 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho's schedule will provide a convenient path toward credit recovery for high school credits, having minimal negative impact on the student. The EA-RIO 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 taken over 5 years, grades 8-12). This is explained in more detail in Section 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 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho philosophy, allowing the curriculum to truly evolve and continually keep up with its changing student population.

Preventive Measures

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's short-course (44-day for grades K-7 and 22-day for grades 8-12) model of instruction and standards-based grading has an inherent safeguard against long-term failure. With shorter, more precise measurements inherently built into and at the end of each course/quarter, 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO's 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 - Rio Rancho 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 I.B - Goals, serve to measure student satisfaction as well as student success because both are essential parts of the EA-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho will meet the requirements of [NMSA § 22-2C-6\(A\)](#) and (B) and [22-2F-3](#). 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-RIO 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
Weekly Progress Report list	weekly	Weekly Progress Report list 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 subgroup performance starting with: SWD ED ELL Hispanic Native Black	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-RIO students	admin, counselor, flex coordinator, school test coordinator, data analysts

H.(3) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** student progress/ achievement communication plan

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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, Weekly Progress Report 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 secondary 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 - Rio Rancho 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.

All elementary students will frequently conference with their teachers and receive qualitative and quantitative feedback in a developmentally appropriate way which prepares students for success in the secondary grades. Students also prepare for and participate in student-led conferences, allowing them to share their learning celebrations and reflections with their teachers and family.

Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians will be encouraged to be active partners in each student's education at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho. EA-RIO 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 Weekly Progress Report report will also be generated weekly and sends a report home automatically to any student who is identified as Weekly Progress Report 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 Rio Rancho and surrounding communities, access to their smartphone is a part of everyday life, so Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will prioritize the use of school technology that is accessible and user friendly on cell phones and not only on computers.

Staff

Teachers at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho will update its Governing Council on all assessment and performance data regularly. 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 - Rio Rancho 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 is released by PED.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho will provide this information at the next Council meeting.

Public Education Department (PED) / Public Education Commission (PEC)

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho will report accurate and timely assessment and performance data, including local and state assessment scores, attendance, survey results, and other achievement data. EA-RIO will maintain accurate records and files and will make those available to the PEC and PED at any time.

Community

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 the communities of Rio Rancho and surrounding areas.. 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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 - RIO 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
IStation	Individual Student Summary Report to student, parent, and student cumulative file Score data to teachers and Governing Council
iMSSA	Score report in parent portal for students and parents two weeks after each testing window ends Score data to teachers and Governing Council

NM-MSSA	Individual Student Report (ISR) to student, parent, and student cumulative file Score data to teachers and Governing Council
NM-ASR	Individual Student Report (ISR) to student, parent, and student cumulative file Score data to teachers and Governing Council
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, Weekly Progress Report list, and in person
Frontloading	Current performance levels discussed with students daily and parents weekly through Google Classroom, Weekly Progress Report list, and in person
SAT	Score to student, parent, cumulative file, counselor for college planning and further test options
PSAT	Score to student, parent, cumulative file, counselor for college planning and further test options

II. Organizational Framework

A. Governing Body Creation/Capacity

A charter application shall include a description of the governing body and operation of the charter school, including: (1) how the governing body will be selected; (2) qualification and terms of members, how vacancies on the governing body will be filled and procedures for changing governing body membership; and (3) the nature and extent of parental, professional educator and community involvement in the governance and operation of the school ([NMSA 22-8B-8\(l\)](#)).

A.(1) Summarize and incorporate **all** key components of your governance structure

Introduction

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 during 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 reports, as requested.

Financial data will operate in a similar manner. The Finance Committee, composed 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. This information will also be published to the school's website and any individual in attendance will be granted access to the information within these reports, as requested. Finance reports are public information and will also 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 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.

For all Governing Council meetings, minutes will be taken by the Secretary or their designee, and both draft and approved sets will be posted to the school's website.

The Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's 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 - Rio Rancho will be an independent charter school, managed and overseen by its Governing Council.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho Governing Council:

The authority of the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 2-5-1 through 22-5-16 of the 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho's 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 - Rio Rancho founding team has formed a proposed 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 and maintain a council that is well-rounded in experience, knowledgeable of academic and business operations, and enthusiastic about Explore Academy - Rio Rancho and its success and community impact.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's 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 Rio Rancho, westside Albuquerque, and Sandoval 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 - Rio Rancho. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 2021 and extended to the Spring 2022. These contacts have been in-person and via virtual, electronic communications.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho shares the school's mission, philosophy and learning model as an opening to a dialogue about Explore Academy, the Rio Rancho and Sandoval 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 about all aspects of being a member of the Governing Council?

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho Governing Council will be the authority responsible for the ultimate success of the school, in alignment with the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho mission and will hold school management accountable to the goals outlined in our charter application. The Governing Council is 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 - Rio Rancho Governing Council will be electing officers, adopting the Bylaws and Conflict of Interest policy, and complying with all sections of the New Mexico Open Meetings Act ([NMSA 10-15-1](#)). As recipient of the charter, Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho is on the path towards fulfilling the mission of the school.
- **Legal Compliance.** To ensure that Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 the 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho’s’ Governing Council Founding Membership

The Founding Governing Council will be responsible and have the authority for management and governance of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho. The anticipated recruitment will be for a minimum of five (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 protecting the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 (see Explore Academy Bylaws in Appendix A).

Officer Structure

The structure of the 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 membership of the Council, to the entire Governing Council. Candidates will be voted on by all board 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 death, resignation or removal (see Appendix A - Bylaws).

Chair of the Governing Council

The Chair of the Governing Council will provide leadership and direction in carrying out the functions as the Governing Council of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho Head Administrator; the Chair will be responsible for establishing a collegial relationship between the charter school's Head Administrator and the Governing Council. The Chair will preside over the meetings of the Governing Council and will have the authority and responsibilities/duties as assigned by the 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 Head Administrator. 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 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho Governing Council will consist of legally required committees and school-specific committees: The portfolio of committees includes, at a minimum, the Finance Committee and the Audit Committee.

The Finance Committee

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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" and would be open to the public.

As necessary, this Finance Committee will request any supplemental information, from either the school's business manager or school administration, or both, 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-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho will annually form an Audit Committee with the expressed purpose of facilitating and overseeing the audit process. The Audit Committee will be composed 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 in addition to, or in the absence of, Council members with the required expertise.

The projected budget for EA-RIO 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 the 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 the

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 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 - Rio Rancho).

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-RIO to become a unique, customized school serving Rio Rancho and Sandoval County. In the area of academic accountability, specific portions of each seminar's exit exam will be common across all seminars of covering the same standards, while a portion of each exit exam will remain teacher-designed per the creative uniqueness of the seminar's flavor. 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-led 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 an "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 of 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 - Rio Rancho's Principal and Governing Council in establishing and maintaining a culture conducive to long-term success. To this end, the Explore Learning Systems Support Team will provide data on a continuous basis (academic, financial, etc.) to the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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-RIO. The Explore Learning Systems Support Team will be available as mentor and guide through a Governing Council-approved contract to ensure that Explore Academy - Rio Rancho has all of the assets, resources, and mentorship at its disposal, thus providing Explore Academy - Rio Rancho the opportunity to focus on its academic and operational goals. In this sense, the Explore Learning Systems Support Team 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 - Rio Rancho Governing Council.

The Explore Learning Systems Support Team consists of the following individuals:

- Justin Baiardo - model founder, academic program director, and data analysis manager
- Elisha Varela - operations manager, ELL program manager, federal programs director, and assessment program manager

- Karen Woerner - compliance manager
- Nancy Holmquist - business/finance manager
- Daniele Knee - special education manager
- Vickie Calzada - data/student information manager
- Dolores Archuleta - systems support manager
- Hannah Peria - elementary instruction manager
- Kimberly Dimiceli - secondary instruction manager
- Rafael Lovato - facilities and maintenance manager
- Karen Casedy - principal/leadership support manager
- Felicia Boatman - logistics/scheduling manager and community manager
- Leticia Fraga - staffing and enrollment manager
- Brittany Lovato - purchasing and procurement manager
- Brianna Boulanger - outreach and marketing 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 a licensed educational administrator as well as a Level 3 National Board-certified teacher with almost 20 years of experience in education. 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 a Level 3 English, Spanish, and bilingual 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.

Karen Woerner is a member of the founding team for Explore Academy - Rio Rancho. As a licensed Level 3 Teacher and School Administrator, Ms. Woerner has over 30 years experience in education, including serving as a Classroom Teacher (K-12), Technology Coach, District-level Administrator, and Deputy Director overseeing state charter schools for the New Mexico Public Education Department and the New Mexico Public Education Commission.

Nancy Holmquist has been a licensed school business manager and CPO for eight years, serving in both district and charter school environments. She has experience in working with governing boards and has managed multiple school business accounts. She has an exemplary track record in strong, ethical business office operations and service practices.

Felicia Boatman, Karen Casedy, Kim Dimiceli, Leticia Fraga, Daniele Knee, and Hannah Peria are all content-area experts and have extensive experience within the Explore Learning Model including teaching, instructional coaching, and instructional leadership, and site administration within their respective content areas. As masters in their fields, 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 added to Explore Academy's staff as the school has grown and will continue to serve as the lead training staff for future Explore Academy teachers.

Dolores Archuleta, Brianna Boulanger, Vickie Calzada, Brittany Lovato and Rafael Lovato have all had extensive experience in serving schools through their respective capacities at the state, district, and charter levels. Each individual has worked with the Explore Learning model program and provides exceptional support to schools in their focus areas.

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.

A. (2) Enumerate the qualifications desired for governing body members.

The Explore Academy - Rio Rancho Governing Council is in the formative stages. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) 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. We will seek 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. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will be using the following criteria for potential Council members.

- Individuals aligned to the mission of charter schools and the mission of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho.
- 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 - Rio Rancho.
- 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 - Rio Rancho’s 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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:

Name	Experience and Skills
Sterling (Skip) Mackay	Mr. Mackay is a retired educator with 20 years of experience, both in administration and teaching students with special needs in middle school and elementary school. He holds a Bachelor of University Studies with an emphasis in Social Studies from the University of New Mexico and a Master’s of Special Education and Educational Leadership from New Mexico Highlands University. Mr. Mackay is a licensed secondary teacher, special education teacher, and school administrator. He is well-versed in the laws and regulations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). He spent ten years of his educational career as the Special Education Instructional Leader (SEIL) at two elementary schools,

	<p>where he advocated for students with special needs to ensure they were successful in the least restrictive academic setting.</p>
<p>Michael (Mike) Mierzejewski</p>	<p>Mr. Mierzejewski is a local business owner operating a print & design company. From 2008-2020, he served as Director of Operations for the Center for Hands-On Learning, a business dedicated to the production of educational materials for in-school and after-school science & math kits. He has also served on the Board for the Rio Rancho Education Foundation since 2012, 5 years as President and currently Vice President, and is Founder and current Treasurer of Above & Beyond Networking, a local business networking group. Originally from New York where he graduated from New York Institute of Technology and started his career. While in New York, he also taught at Briarcliffe College as an Adjunct Professor.</p>
<p>Terrill (Teri) E. Pierce</p>	<p>Ms. Pierce has been a lawyer for many years, generally engaged in employment litigation and civil rights defense, including several years in New Mexico when she represented schools in such matters. She is committed to education and betterment of her community in many different capacities. She has contributed to the education of others through many public speaking engagements on employment issues for various organizations, including the Employment Law Institute and the National College of District Attorneys, and she has conducted sexual harassment trainings for the College of Santa Fe. She has served on several boards for nonprofit organizations in the state, coached a mock trial team for years, served as a mock trial judge, served as a Mentor for Big Brothers Big Sisters, tutored kindergarten students, volunteered for Animal Humane for over a decade, and taught yoga for over two decades to date.</p>
<p>Veronica Sanders</p>	<p>Ms. Veronica Griego-Sanders has been involved in education for almost 30 years. As an Elementary Education major from New Mexico State University in 1993, she started her career as a teacher in Grants, NM where she eventually worked as an Elementary Principal. In 2009 she moved to Rio Rancho and worked for the school district as an Elementary School teacher, Elementary Assistant principal, Assistant Director of Parent, Community, and Staff Engagement, Middle School Assistant Principal and Principal. Before she retired, she also worked with pre-school as well as high school students as an interim principal. Since retiring, she has worked for the New Mexico Public Education Department supporting principals and schools with a variety of federal grants regarding Reading and Math initiatives and Career, Technical Education programs. Currently she is the Early College High School Coordinator for the Extending Equity into the Digital Workforce Program with the NM Regional Education Cooperative 1 (REC1). She holds a Master's degree in Education Leadership from the University of New Mexico and is working toward her Ed.D. in Education Leadership with an emphasis on the Superintendentcy from Loyola University Chicago which she hopes to complete by Summer of 2024. She is the mother of 4 children, all who have graduated from Rio Rancho Public Schools.</p>

<p>Barbara Sena</p>	<p>With a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science/Pre-Law from New Mexico Highlands University, Ms. Sena went back to NMHU for her teaching degree in Special Education, General Education, and Bilingual Education. She started her career as a bilingual special education teacher advocating for bilingual students with disabilities. After three years of teaching special education, Ms. Sena went on to teach middle school bilingual social studies/humanities in Albuquerque for 10 years. Her passion is advocating for students with disabilities, as well as students’ and parents’ rights, and giving students the opportunity to be successful in two languages. She also worked with an educational consulting company where she helped school districts find the best school materials for their needs. In 2021, Ms. Sena left the education arena to fulfill her passion with animals and open her own doggy daycare business. She loves to help the community and local rescue organizations with free daycare and donations. She spends her time caring for and adopting rescue dogs with disabilities, special needs, and older dogs.</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 at monthly meetings, 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 reference 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 - Rio Rancho 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 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 training in the above areas to supplement their knowledge and experience in these key areas of charter school governance.

A.(3) Provide a **clear and appropriate process or plan** for selecting new Governing Body members.

Identification and recruitment of individuals who are aligned to the mission of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho Governing Council. The GC will ensure that the process of recruitment, evaluation, and selection of Governing Council Members aligns with the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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-RIO mission and may be interested in being considered for Governing Council membership. In addition, the GC will work with school staff to utilize the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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
- Rio Rancho Chamber of Commerce
- United Way of Central New Mexico
- CNM
- UNM

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 select a board or staff member(s) to 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO Governing Council structure, expectations, and anticipated time commitment. 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho's mission to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of its students.
- What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho school area, Sandoval County and the surrounding areas?
- What experience do you have with complicated budgets? When you are given a budget for Explore Academy - Rio Rancho, what will be your process to determine if it is a good budget for the school?

5: Evaluation and Selection

The Governing Council will review the candidate's qualifications, skill set, and commitment to the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho mission. 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 - Rio Rancho.
- 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 - Rio Rancho.
- 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 - Rio Rancho 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.

6. Notification to the Public Education Commission

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will adhere to the Public Education Commission's amendment policy, submitting the appropriate forms and documentation within 30 days of the change and, though not anticipated, requesting an extension if unable to fill the vacancy within 45 days.

Process After School is Approved

Assuming authorization of the charter application 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 daily 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 - Rio Rancho 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 1 and 2 (Review and Working List above) 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 - Rio Rancho.

Onboarding Process

Governing Council members will participate in mandatory training sessions and required onboarding with the school. In addition to fellow Council members, new members will have the support of the compliance manager in areas such as, but not limited to, following the Open Meetings Act, understanding board roles and responsibilities, and participating in the authorization and renewal processes.

B. Governing Body Training and Evaluation

B.(1) Provide an **ongoing, clear, comprehensive, and cohesive plan** for annual Governing Body training.

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 - Rio Rancho Governing Council must complete 10 hours of governing council training as required by [NMSA 22-8B-5.1](#) and [6.80.5.8 NMAC](#). This training, provided by the Public Education Department (PED), will focus on school

governance, specifically (1) ethics and responsibilities, (2) charter school fiscal requirements, (3) understanding and evaluating academic data, (4) open government, legal and organizational performance requirements, and (5) equity and culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR) practices.

At the beginning of the 2023-2024 fiscal year, 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 training 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 the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho website; and
- Open meetings and voting – all meetings will be open to the public and will comply with the state laws and Explore Academy - Rio Rancho Governing Council Bylaws.

Along with the new Governing Council training required by Statute and the New Mexico Administrative Code, Explore Academy - Rio Rancho Governing Council will offer an orientation and additional training opportunities for incoming members, which if so approved by the PED Charter Schools Division, may count as the required three (3) hours after the seven (7) hour introductory training provided by that division (for a total of 10 hours).

. Each new Council member will be provided with the following overview and materials:

- Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's' mission and core values
- Bios of current Council members along with contact information
- Governing Council job descriptions and expectations
- Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's Conflict of Interest policy
- Explore Academy - Rio Rancho Governing Council Bylaws
- Copy of the New Charter Application (and Charter Contract once approved) for Explore Academy - Rio Rancho
- A calendar of Council meetings, Committee meetings and Council activities/topics for the year
- PED Calendar of Governing Council Professional Development Trainings
- General discussion of the Open Meetings Act

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 ([6.80.5.9 NMAC](#)). 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 equity and CLR practices. 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 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 ([6.80.5.8 NMAC](#)), new Governing Council members will complete a seven-hour 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 during the first school year 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 provider. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's Governing Council will request the first Governing Council Introductory training immediately after authorization. New Council Members who join the Council after the beginning of the school year will be required to complete the required Public Education Department introductory training prior to having voting rights on the Council.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's 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 - Rio Rancho 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 training attended by all Governing Council members, including the date, times, instructors, and the course code assigned by the Public Education Department.

Internal Training: Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho Governing Council will submit an Application for Approval to Provide Governing Body Training to request that its onboarding be approved for the 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. A

Governing Council member will mentor the new member. During this individual training, the new Council Member will review and sign the Council Member Agreement 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.

Experienced Council Members: Council Members who have served on the Governing Council for more than a year must complete eight (8) 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 responsibilities, three hours of fiscal requirements, two hours on academic data, one hour on open governance and organizational performance, and an hour dedicated to equity and CLR practices. The Public Education Department training is offered locally in the greater Albuquerque area and virtually, 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 training attended by each Governing Council member, including 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 - Rio Rancho Governing Council will conduct an annual Governing Council workshop at the end of each fiscal year. During this work session, 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 - Rio Rancho 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, the school's legal counsel, or other sources of training.

The training of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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. 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. The topic of Governing Council training will be a regular topic on the monthly meeting agendas.

B. (2) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive plan** for an annual self-evaluation of the Governing Body.

The importance of a thriving, active, and functioning Governing Council is not lost on Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO). The EA-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho. 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 - Rio Rancho 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.A2 - Governing Body Qualifications.
- Council Function and Legal Oversight. Ensuring that the Governing Council is following Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO Governing Council recognizes the importance of soliciting feedback from students, families, community members, and EA-RIO staff, to ensure that governance is reflective of the community EA-RIO serves, as well as to ensure transparency in governance. Each year, Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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-RIO staff in electronic and paper form, in both English and Spanish. The community input survey will be distributed to Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) Governing Council aims for staff and families to resolve conflict with Explore Academy - Rio Rancho at the school level. However, in the case that a conflict cannot be resolved through the methods outlined in Section II.E - Employer/Employee Terms and in the Governing Council Policies for EA-RIO staff or the process outlined in Section II.F2 - Processing Concerns and Complaints for families and community members, then Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho mission.

Timeline Graphic

	Monthly GC Meeting	GC Member Training	GC Member Self-Surveys	Parent Assm’t of GC	Mid-Term Assm’t Rept	Year End Assm’t / Rept
July	x	x	x			
Aug	x	x	x			
Sept	x	x	x			
Oct	x	x	x			
Nov	x	x	x			

Dec	x	x	x	x	x	
Jan	x	x	x			
Feb	x	x	x			
Mar	x	x	x			
Apr	x	x	x			x
May	x	x	x			x
June	x	x				x

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.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho’s 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-RIO Governing Council will comply with all requirements as laid out in New Mexico Administrative Code (Procedural Requirements 6.29.1.9). The EA-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho 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 discuss performance at monthly meetings held under the Open Meeting Law. The performance data dashboard will show academic performance data aggregated by subgroups 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 - Rio Rancho 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 PEC's Performance Framework for Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho is fulfilling its mission for all students.

Organizational Performance

The organizational performance of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho Governing Council clearly understand the role of management and governance as related to organizational performance. As noted in administrative code [6.29.1.9 NMAC](#) 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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 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 - Rio Rancho. A structured school community, with high-quality instruction and intensive and individualized academic support, only exists if it is closely monitored and supported academically, organizationally, and financially.

The founding team of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho fully understands that the Governing Council must act as a responsible public entity, ensuring all students receive a quality education. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho’s 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-RIO 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-RIO will inform decision-making.	July through June of each academic year	EA-RIO Governing Council, Leadership Team

C. (2) Identify and provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** plan for hiring a head administrator.

Following the approval of the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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-RIO head administrator has been included as Appendix B. The EA-RIO head administrator is expected to embrace the Explore Learning model and translate the model to the students and families of Rio Rancho and Sandoval County. In brief, the head administrator will possess the following skill sets and qualities to be considered for an 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-RIO 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
Experience in school management and operations	As the school leader of a growth school which will function as its own district, the candidate should possess experience in the management of school operations including student discipline, instructional support, staff/personnel, parent engagement, and dispute resolution.
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 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 begin on or before January 15th, 2023.

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, 2022	The founding team
The founding team will collect materials for interested applicants/candidates including resumes, cover letters, and references.	September, 2022 through November, 2022	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, 2022	The founding team
Candidates will interview before the Governing Council and founding team	January, 2023	The Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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, 2023	The Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 -Rio Rancho 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.

C. (3) Describe how the governing body will convey and distinguish their roles and responsibilities with those of the proposed school's head administrator.

After its initial assemblage, one of the first duties of the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) 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-RIO'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-RIO's 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 of the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho to the Public Education Commission as described in this application. For a new hire, the candidate's application will include review and evaluation of the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho and that it is their role to ensure that Explore Academy - Rio Rancho achieves its academic, cultural, community, and mentoring expectations and goals.

As previously stated, it is essential that the roles and responsibilities of the EA-RIO Governing Council and EA-RIO head administrator are explicit and well defined. These roles and responsibilities are codified in the EA-RIO 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-RIO moves to assume implementation and operation. In this sense, it is important to differentiate the notion of governance and management. The EA-RIO Governing Council's role is oversight, while the role of the EA-RIO 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

C. (4) Identify and provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** plan for annually evaluating the head administrator.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) recognizes that evaluation of the school's lead Principal (Head Admin) 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 - Rio Rancho Governing Council will take an approach to Principal assessments more closely aligned with formal evaluation processes. The evaluation of the Principal will be adapted, in part, on the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE); this system remains the standard of practice

in New Mexico. The HOUSSE assessment will be modified to create a model specific to the Explore Learning model.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will perform a quarterly evaluation of the Principal using students data, observations, and quarterly feedback surveys disseminated to staff, teachers, and parents (which provide qualitative and quantitative data). The Explore Learning Systems team, if contracted, will help support this process as well. The final, quarterly (Q4) assessment will function as the Principal's final end-of-year summative evaluation. Prior to that assessments from Q1-Q3 will be formative in nature, true to the Explore Learning model. The Principal will develop a professional development plan to respond to the data collected for the Q1-Q3 reports.

Monthly Governing Council meetings may include, as an agenda item, Principal evaluation updates, results quarterly feedback surveys, and academic and school-specific metrics to assess the evaluation reports throughout the year. 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 - Rio Rancho 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 following competencies:

Competency Area	Competencies
Organization Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Represents Explore Academy with integrity, honesty, sensitivity, and objectivity - Maintains compliance with state and federal laws, policies, and initiatives - Maintains compliance with authorizer requirements, directives, and initiatives - Maintains communication with school authorizer as needed - Maintains strong communication and collaboration ELS district staff - Maintains responsibility for organizational decisions among staff and students
Operational Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manages day-to-day school logistics to maintain efficiency in daily operations - Manages workflow through efficient multitasking and prioritization - Managing school-specific financial oversight (payroll, HR, quotes, invoices) - Maintains a school environment that is safe and clean for students and staff

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manages timely and consistent enforcement of all school policies among staff and students - Communicates consistently with parents and students concerning current school news
Systems Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conveys advanced knowledge of the Explore Learning model - Promotes the Explore Academy model and school mission / philosophy - Manages the implementation of the Explore Learning model with fidelity - Examination and reflection of data sets regarding trends to establish school priorities - Manages adjustments in operational and instructional practices, processes, and procedures - Promotes a standard of high accountability, with balanced support, for students and staff
Community Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engages in honest and respectful interactions with stakeholders - Maintains an active, daily presence among staff and students during the school day - Promotes, organizes, and leads community events for students and families - Upholds school and Explore Learning values among all school community stakeholders - Promotes consistent and transparent communication with students and parents - Establishes and maintains cooperative partnerships with community members and entities - Functions as the central source of positivity and inspiration among the school community
Staff Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotes the school's objectives and larger mission through continuous staff collaboration - Maintains effective communication with staff members, promoting staff inclusiveness

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fosters and maintains a staff culture based on collaboration and respect - Maintains an effective staff work culture focused on advancing the school's mission - Proactively addresses the needs of staff for which concerns and issues have been cited - Promotes data-driven initiatives to cultivate ongoing growth opportunities for staff
Instructional Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintains commitment to quality instruction as the primary focus - Engaging in frequent teacher classroom observations, provides feedback - Identifies areas of improvement based on data collected and adjust through teacher coaching - Manages the implementation of instructional adjustments in a proactive and timely manner - Utilizes a formal teacher evaluation tool for measuring teacher performance

New and incumbent Principals will be made aware of the expectations of the Governing Council approved evaluation instruments and processes including changes and metric evaluation data. Formal training will be provided each year for new Principals or as a refresher for returning Principals. New and incumbent Principal contracts will contain all requirements and expectations and notices of changes to metrics.

Summative Evaluation

The formal, annual summative evaluation at the conclusion of the Q4 evaluation will begin with the Principal completing a self-assessment and reflection of the data collected within the matrix above and professional development plan implemented throughout the year.

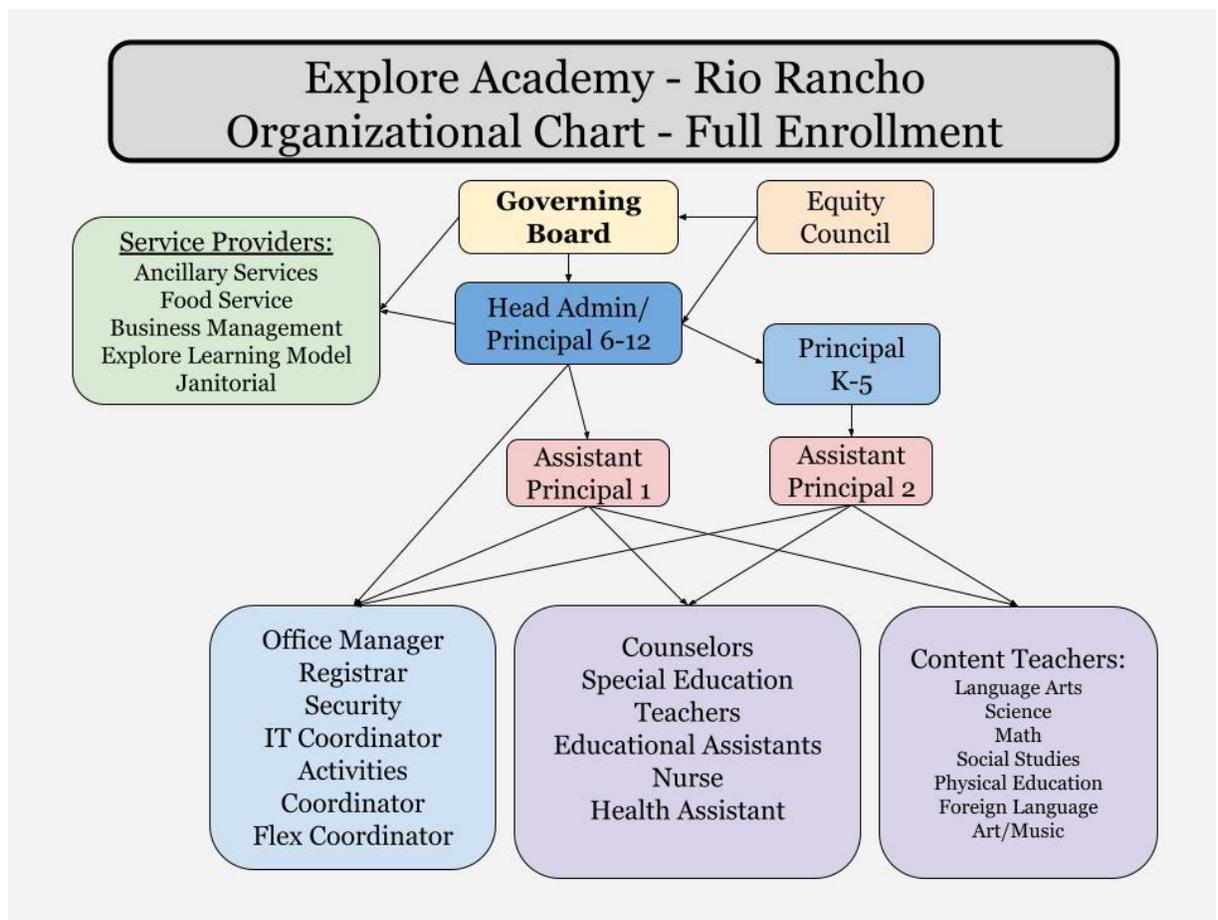
The self-assessment will be aligned to the competencies described above. Completion of this self-assessment will inform the Principal of their measured strengths and assets and inform them of challenges and limits to that success within the six competencies. This information will inform the Principal in the development of the professional development plan moving into the following year. 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 following the first Q1 evaluation report.

The Governing Council will take the feedback from the self-assessment, professional development plan, and Q4 evaluation scoring into account before ratifying the final, summative annual evaluation for the Principal. It will be based on this evaluation that decisions for re-hiring will be based. All hiring decisions will be made before the end of the current fiscal year (June 30).

D. Organizational Structure of the Proposed School

D.(1) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, cohesive, and reasonable** organizational chart and narrative.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's (EA-RIO) 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-RIO Governing Council assumes the full responsibility and authority over EA-RIO. This is clearly stated in the organizational chart. At the heart of the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 school. The lines of connection radiate from the Principal to each of the school's components and activities.

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 both academic and non-academic areas of the school, in concert and at the direction and guidance of the Head Administrator.

The organizational chart also outlines anticipated 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. All service contracts are at the discretion of the Governing Council and are executed on a year to year basis with no long term obligation to renew.

Each of the positions outlined in the Organizational Chart is essential to the fulfillment of the EA-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho will follow the delineation of duties between the Head of School and the Governing Board, as outlined in [6.29.1.9 NMAC](#).

By Year 5 of EA-RIO operation, the school will serve grades K-10 with two more years until reaching full enrollment of 1200 students in grades K-12. This staff will accommodate 977 students, with a student-teacher ratio of 16:1. A more granular staffing description through the five-year timeline is presented in Section II-D3 - Staffing Needs and Plans below.

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).

The Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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.

Head Administrator/Head Principal

The Head Administrator is a licensed school administrator (Level IIIb license). This person is responsible for developing and maintaining Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's 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. In Year 3, with the hiring of the Principal, the head administrator position will focus more on one grade range (K-5 or 6-12) while overseeing the Principal (see below) who will coordinate and oversee the other grade range. This position reports directly to the Governing Council. (Note: During its first two years, there will only be one principal employed, the head administrator. During this time, this position is referred to as the "Principal" until the separation of roles is established with the split-campus structure)

Principal

The Principal position operates and oversees one grade range of the school campus (K-5 or 6-12) in coordination with the Head Administrator. Within the scope of this oversight, the Principal will

manage operations, both instructional and administrative, for the specific grade range. The Principal will report to the Head Administrator.

Assistant Principal

The school's assistant administrator, or assistant principal, will be administratively certified (Level III-B license) and will work under the principals 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.

Office Manager

The office manager will provide direct support for the school's principals and will manage the school's front office operations. This position will track purchasing, accounts payable/receivable, and supply inventory. 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 [6.63.8 NMAC](#). 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/Flex Coordinator

The position will oversee student activities across all grades on campus and will manage students in their flex periods (including structured flex, lunch flex, and remediation). The coordinator will create and maintain all schedules including tutoring, intramurals, and clubs. Activities and athletics will be a key component of EA-RIO's success. The activities/flex director reports through the Principal and Assistant Principal.

School Nurse

The school's nurse will oversee all health-related concerns for students across the campus. This individual will monitor student medications, health screenings, student health records including immunization files, and 504 plans. This individual will also manage on-site medical incidences and coordinate with local and state health officials.

Health Assistant

The health assistant will coordinate with the school's administration for the monitoring of student medications, health screenings, student health records including immunization files, and 504 plans until the school nurse is hired. At that point, they will support the nurse in the duties within the greater health office.

Special Education/Gifted Coordinators/Teachers

Special education coordinators/teachers will be teachers who are licensed instructors, holding a valid New Mexico teaching license with certification in special education and/or gifted. We look forward to educating and supporting a diverse group of students at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho. 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho Educational Assistants support the school in a variety of ways. These staff members may support teachers in classrooms directly, serve students with special needs both in and outside of class, provide tutoring support under the direction of licensed teachers as part of the individualized academic program, manage student flex periods, supervise students during lunch and at recess. Educational Assistants' reporting structure is to the school's administration.

Information Technology Coordinator

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 Coordinator reports to the Assistant Principal and the Principal.

Security

EA-RIO 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.

Registrar

This staff member will be responsible for student information and data, both academic and cumulative records. This individual will process incoming and outgoing requests for information.

Content Teachers

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho understands that high academic achievement starts with quality instruction delivered by talented and creative teachers. Teachers at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 school administration (Head Admin, principals, assistant principals).

D.(3) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** staffing plan that demonstrates an understanding of the proposed school's staffing needs.

Introduction

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 of strong teachers. The majority of staffing needs are within the teaching ranks; our hiring philosophy is to

recruit, hire, and retain the teachers with the potential for making the greatest impact on Explore Academy - Rio Rancho students. Each Explore Academy - Rio Rancho staff member hired will demonstrate a profound belief that all students can learn and be aligned to the mission of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho. To find these individuals, the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 tables below illustrates the school’s staffing plan, which is aligned to the proposed budget for each of the first five operational years. Note: the school will continue to expand staffing in the years after Year 5 as the school continues to enroll through grade 12.

Teachers	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Kindergarten	5	5	6	6	6
1st Grade	4	4	5	5	5
2nd Grade	4	4	4	4	5
3rd Grade		4	4	4	4
4th Grade			4	4	4
5th Grade				4	4
6th Grade*	7	6	6	6	6
7th Grade*		6	5	6	6
8th Grade*			5	5	6
9th Grade*				5	5
10th Grade					5
Electives**	2	3	5	6	8

*Grade level teachers will span multiple grade levels (6/7 split, 7/8 split, 8/9 split, etc.), so the numbers per grade level may not be fully committed to the grade level shown

**Elective teachers will cover grades K-7 in the first two years of operation before separating to focus on elementary vs. middle school grade levels

Admin/Support Staff	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Head Administrator	1	1	1	1	1
Principal			1	1	1

Assistant Principal		1	1	1	2
Counselor		1	1	2	2
Special Education/Gifted Teachers	1	2	3	4	6
Educational Assistants	6	8	11	14	15
Nurse			1	1	1
Activities/Flex Coordinator		1	1	1	1
Health Assistant		1	1	1	1
Office Manager	1	1	2	2	2
Information Technology		1	1	1	1
Security		1	1	1	1
Registrar		2	2	2	2

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 - Rio Rancho 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 (2027-28). As outlined here in this section, projected staffing plans 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 an existing Explore Academy K-12 campus.

As a concept for Explore Academy - Rio Rancho, 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 Rio Rancho and Sandoval 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 tables 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 through grade 10. If renewed, the school will continue to staff as it enrolls through grade 12. The prospective enrollment cap at K-12 is 1200 students.

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 Rio Rancho 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, most likely a Language Arts teacher.

Staff Recruitment Process

One of the most powerful recruitment methods for Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho founding team has and will continue to 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 - Rio Rancho to recruit the most talented teachers from across Rio Rancho and Sandoval County as well as the entire 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 Rio Rancho and Sandoval 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 Explore Academy - Rio Rancho.

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 University of New Mexico, Central New Mexico Community College, and New Mexico Highlands University, 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-RIO is open to recruiting from teacher preparation programs as well. The content knowledge and creativity that teachers bring with them is the key to their success at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho, 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 Rio Rancho and Sandoval County organizations to recruit teachers. The team has met with city officials in Rio Rancho, with elected officials, the Chamber of Commerce, and educator organizations. The goal is to foster relationships with leaders and members of these and other organizations to help Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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, social media platforms

and the school's website. The goal is to make Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho, 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 seminars that deeply address a few standards/skills at a time. Students studying K-1 standards take seminars for a full year, 2-3 seminars are 88 days, seminars in grade 4 to 7 are 44 days, while high school seminars are a very focused 22 days. 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 - Rio Rancho 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, Explore Academy 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, high quality professional development and coaching, flexibility related to teacher's personal needs such as appointments and emergencies, quality and availability of classroom supplies and teaching materials, pathways for career development and growth, 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 Explore Academy in Albuquerque is over 95%, showing that the model is truly appreciated and embraced by the teachers.

Hiring Plan

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho. 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-RIO 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 Rio Rancho and Sandoval County stakeholders, Explore Academy - Rio Rancho believes it will be in an ideal position to recruit from local assets and resources including local universities and colleges mentioned earlier; 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 four (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, Indeed and established community networks in Rio Rancho and Sandoval County.

The final step in the process will be interviewing, assessing, offering, and hiring the most qualified, talented candidate. From the close of application announcements, to the review and interview of qualified candidates, EA-RIO expects to complete 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 staffed 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.

D.(4) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and compelling** plan for Professional Development.

Introduction

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will provide mentorship, professional development, and support to teachers and staff through the service provision agreements with Explore Learning Systems Support Team (ELS) 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 Systems may provide mentorship, professional development and curriculum guidance (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 - Rio Rancho 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, special education student progress toward goals, weekly student progress reports, and quarterly feedback data from staff, teachers, and families. The Principal will communicate directly with ELS 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 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 provided to them through ELS reports each month and at the end of the year. The teacher training that takes place before the beginning of the school year includes grading policies, seminar standard breakdown, scope and sequence of the content they are teaching from K-12, exit exam structure and examples, weekly progress report process, list, 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 ELS team.

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

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 Systems staff will partner with school leadership (upon approval by the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho Governing Council) 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 - Rio Rancho, 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 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 Systems 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 K-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. K-5 teachers also have access to trained in-house LETRS facilitators who provide onsite professional development in the science of reading.

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 ELS 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.

Sample Professional Development Plan and Timeline

Timeline	Professional Development Session	Description
March 2023 or upon being hired during onboarding process	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
April 2023 or upon being hired during onboarding process	Second teacher training module - “The Flavor”	Flavor-based instruction, student-driven instruction, backward planning, generating of course descriptions
May 2023 or upon being hired during onboarding process	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 2023 or upon being hired during onboarding process	Fourth teacher training module - "Student-Driven Instruction"	Inquiry/student-driven instruction)
July 2023	Submission of all course descriptions for the school's course catalog	Fully developed course descriptions from each teacher, deadline: June 30
August 2023	Whole-staff Professional Development Days	School mission and vision, culture building, team collaboration, reorienting to the model/building off of the onboarding modules, creating an environment for learning/organizing physical space, finalizing instructional plans
2 per term break, 14 days total Approximately every 22 school days: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - early September 2023 - mid-October 2023 - mid-November 2023 - mid-December/early January 2023-24 - mid-February 2024 - mid-March 2024 - late-April 2024 	Term Break Days	Responsive professional development days driven by needs identified in data, which may include: workshops led by onsite experts and contractors, assessment data analysis, reflection on instruction, adjustment to upcoming instructional plans, collaboration, child study teams, parent communication, conferences Topics: culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, formative assessment during instruction, practices for crisis intervention and behavioral support, data analysis and action planning, science of reading (LETRS)
Weekly on Friday from 1:45 - 3:15 pm (4 early release days per term)	Early Release Professional Development or Collaboration Time	Mini professional development led by school site staff and peer leaders, collaboration meetings, data analysis, instructional planning, parent and family communication
Ongoing, before, during and after the school day throughout the year	Teacher Mentorship Program	Tailored supports for individual teachers new to the profession by an assigned, experienced mentor teacher (see section directly

		below)
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Mentorship Program

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho leadership will work with the founding team and representatives from the Explore Learning Systems Support Team 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](#), Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's 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 - Rio Rancho will ensure an active teacher-mentoring program for new teachers, as well as teachers new to the school itself, in compliance with [6.60.10.8 NMAC](#), 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 [6.65.2.8 NMAC](#), as well as the program evaluation requirements outlined in [6.65.2.9 NMAC](#). Furthermore, teacher and staff development will be in line with the New Mexico professional development framework and fulfill any funding requirements, as outlined in [6.65.2.10 NMAC](#).

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. It is predicted that the school will contract with Explore Learning Systems in order to provide its staff the required professional development in the implementation of the Explore

Learning Model. The school's projected work will continue in allowing new staff to be trained and continuous professional development to be offered based on need as indicated by data collected.

E. Employees

E. 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).

Introduction

The Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) 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-RIO 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 the school's vision, mission, and goals.

The provisions of the EA-RIO 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-RIO Handbook. The policies in the EA-RIO Handbook will be amended, revised, supplemented, or rescinded at any time, in the sole discretion of the EA-RIO 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-RIO 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-RIO model. The following is a review of the terms and conditions for employment and expectations for all staff of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho. For a full review of the Handbook see the attachments.

Employment Classifications

Positions at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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-RIO's' 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 - Rio Rancho 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,"
- [6.66.2.8 NMAC](#) "Licensed School Instructor Contract Requirements."

Compensation

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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 works 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.
- B. COBRA: Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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.
- C. 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.
- D. Social Security: Governing Council and staff will decide on participation; it is understood that "opt-out" is a one time decision.
- E. Workers' Compensation: Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will maintain Workers' Compensation Insurance coverage for employees who sustain an injury or illness compensable under the New Mexico workers' compensation laws. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho pays the full cost of the workers' compensation insurance. All workers' compensation claims are subject to evaluation and investigation by Explore Academy - Rio Rancho and its insurance carrier.
- F. Unemployment Compensation: Explore Academy - Rio Rancho employees will be covered in accordance with applicable unemployment compensation laws and regulations that also govern eligibility for unemployment benefits.
- G. Family and Medical Leave (FMLA): Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho will maintain an official grievance policy and procedure, outlined in the Employee Handbook (EA-RIO 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-RIO Handbook), as well as in the Governing Council By-laws (Appendix A).

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 a 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho employees are not covered under a collective bargaining agreement and are not employees of a school district. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho does not intend to have an employee bargaining unit; although if one is certified through employee-driven organizing efforts, the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho Governing Council will negotiate a collective bargaining agreement in accordance with the Public Employees Labor Relations Act. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 at least 15 days 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.D3 - Staffing Needs and Plans).

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 [6.69.2.8 NMAC](#)), an employee may be terminated, following the termination hearing procedures described

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.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will operate at four levels of governance, 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 weekly. 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 emailed to families each week.

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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 Rio Rancho and the surrounding communities 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.

The school's Equity Council will serve as an advisory body to the school's Governing Council and Head Administration in the areas of equity and culturally and linguistically responsive instruction. EA-RIO will follow the steps laid out by the NMPED in its response to the Martinez-Yazzie lawsuit decision in support of Native American, economically disadvantaged students, English Learners (ELs), and students with disabilities. Upon approval, the Governing Council in collaboration with the Head Administrator will advertise for and subsequently select up to 15 local members for the Equity Council, establishing a diverse group representing the school and greater community, in particular students identified in the Martinez-Yazzie lawsuit, Black students, and other students identified as furthest from opportunity. Once established, trained, and on-boarded by an identified facilitator, the EC will create a strong working definition of equity and begin the Needs Assessment process to better understand our specific school community and demographics. Then, the Equity Council will complete the CLRI Inventory described in Section I.D.2 and will collaborate with the Governing Council and school leadership in creating the CLR Framework for EA-RIO. In alignment with the Black Education Act of 2020 EA-RIO will also have a specific focus on the equitable education and support of Black students, including anti-racist policies and ongoing training opportunities for all teachers, school staff, and board members. Our school will engage in tribal consultation and work in partnership and collaboration with all tribal entities which represent our students.

The Equity Council, through ongoing relationship and discourse with the Governing Board and Head Administrator will provide advisement to the school's governance body and management (Head Administrator/Principal). Advisements will identify a root cause of inequity in student experience and performance and the process of creating the advisement package to be delivered to the Board and Superintendent/Head Administrator will allow for the Equity Council to have a meaningful voice in determining school policies and decisions. Ultimately all advisements to the Governing Council and

Head Administrator are centered on the present and future benefit the students at the school furthest from opportunity. Example topics may include: needed professional development for teachers, examining disparities for a specific subgroup of students, etc. The Equity Council will participate in ongoing data analysis and review, program and budget development and evaluation, to ensure a safe and equitable learning environment inclusive of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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.

F. (2) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** plan to receive and process concerns and complaints from the community and parents.

Grievance Process

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 [6.10.3 NMAC](#). 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 - Rio Rancho 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. If the complaint is against the Principal, the person may file the complaint with the Governing Council.

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 person 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 [6.10.3 NMAC](#), 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 - Rio Rancho 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 [6.31.2.13 NMAC](#).

G. Student Recruitment and Enrollment

G.(1) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** outreach and recruitment plan

Introduction

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) will adhere to all legal and required admission policies, and will be non-discriminatory 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 - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) has crafted a family and student recruitment process that includes early efforts to increase awareness for EA-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho has viewed the city of Rio Rancho and county of Sandoval 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 Rio Rancho Chamber of Commerce, Central New Mexico University, Intel, Hewlett Packard, and New Mexico Highlands University. The objective has been to place Explore

Academy - Rio Rancho 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 Rio Rancho and Sandoval region.

These initial efforts have been keyed to the 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" opportunities for the founding team as Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 charter school and it will benefit and impact their children and their futures.

At the time of this writing, the founding team has hosted several online "meet-and-greet" events through which they have engaged with interested families and other stakeholders. Prior to the application approval and throughout the Planning Year, the founding team, Governing Council, and principal will hold both virtual and in-person meet-and-greet events each month through July, 2023 for the presentation of information or to provide families any additional information they might need.

Traditional recruitment efforts of families and students will include direct mailing through the US Post Office to targeted zip codes throughout Rio Rancho and Bernalillo. Explore Academy has acquired lists through US Census data for homes with grade levels within the targeted age ranges. Direct mailers to these addresses have included descriptive Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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/rio). 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 (@[exploreacademy/rio](https://www.facebook.com/exploreacademy/rio)). Within the school's budget, it is anticipated that part of the funding for advertising will be spent through direct mail.

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 Principal, once hired in the planning year and for future years of recruitment, will be the "face" of the school in its campaigns to engage families and will function as the central point of contact for information.

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 Rio Rancho. It is assumed that part of the school advertising budget as shown in its five-year projection will be used to "boost" social media postings to help drive awareness and engagement.

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 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 - Rio Rancho and it expands

beyond the traditional catchment area of the city and county. New digital media outlets also permit Explore Academy - Rio Rancho to be conservative in its cost-based messaging services including the Rio Rancho Observer, local television broadcasting stations, and public broadcasting television and radio.

Once attracted to the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho. The depth and breadth of the outlets and mechanisms scheduled across twelve 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 Rio Rancho and Sandoval county; family contacts with EA-RIO have been recorded through email, text messages, voice messages, Facebook and Instagram messages and comment threads, and website chats 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.

On the school’s website exists a “Letter of Interest” where families can sign up to receive further updates. Once approved, and as the school enters into its enrollment season, students who are interested in attending Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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. This enrollment process will begin December 1st of each new year when the enrollment period opens.

During the third quarter of any given school year, families of current students 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 - Rio Rancho, their seat will be up for consideration for a new student applicant for the following school year.

Student recruitment and enrollment has been strategized by the founding team in response to the Rio Rancho and Sandoval educational needs, challenges and assets. The city and county present unique opportunities for EA-RIO to reach its first year enrollment and eventual five-year objective. The recruitment process takes advantage of 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 - Rio Rancho 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 Rio Rancho area. We have performed these efforts in the spring 2022 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-RIO to penetrate deeper into the Rio Rancho 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 Explore Academy - Rio Rancho.

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 members. Budgetary impact will be seen through advertising in the Rio Rancho Observer 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 - Rio Rancho 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.

G. (2) Provide a **complete, comprehensive, and cohesive** plan to implement a lottery admission process.

Lottery

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will conduct a transparent, open, and public lottery with application forms submitted prior to the middle of March. 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.G1 - Outreach and Recruitment (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 - Rio Rancho will be from December 1st through March 15th.
- EA-RIO will announce its open enrollment period and provide an enrollment application that can be submitted online through the website or in person at the school site. Submission of the application officially places a student on the list for a position at Explore Academy. Parents and students should ensure that the information entered on the application is accurate.
- Parents of current Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 1-12.
- Siblings of current EA-RIO students and children of EA-RIO employees will be provided preferential enrollment for the following school year. Parents of these students will be notified in December and must commit via an application 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 - Rio Rancho will count the number of student seats remaining at all grade levels. This will occur during the first week of March annually and will determine the available seats for each grade level for the following academic year.
- At the close of business day on March 15th annually, the application open enrollment list for each grade level will be locked and finalized. At this time, should Explore Academy - Rio Rancho receive applications 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-RIO will enter all students from that grade level application list into a random lottery. The lottery itself will be “blind” and will not take into account any of the student applicant’s personal information with the exception of the student’s grade level in sorting the resulting waitlist.
- The lottery will be held annually on March 17th. 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 - Rio Rancho received more applications than there were available seats. For each grade level lottery, students are assigned a computer-generated, randomized number. This number is sorted to determine their position on the student waitlist for the grade level in question.
- Students whose number corresponds to an available seat will receive an acceptance letter by the end of March annually. All students who are not accepted for enrollment through the lottery are placed on grade level waiting lists. Any student who submits an application after the lottery date will be added to the grade level waiting lists in the order of application submission.
- All students accepted in March after the lottery process, both from the lottery process or from sibling and employee priority acceptance, have two weeks (fourteen days) 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 within the two-week window from the date of their acceptance letter, they will forfeit their position immediately.
- If seats become available for any grade level after the initial lottery and acceptance period, these seats will be given to students assigned to the applicable grade level waiting lists in

numerical order. These families have two weeks to complete the enrollment process from the date of their acceptance letter, or they will forfeit their position.

- Families do not need to attend the lottery for their students to be accepted. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 enrollment 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 - Rio Rancho are filled and students have completed the registration process.
- If a student does not attend the first three days of school, EA-RIO will make three attempts to reach out to the family to determine if the student expects to attend Explore Academy - Rio Rancho. 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 - Rio Rancho may choose to continue its enrollment process throughout the school year contingency upon enrollment openings and current staffing.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will ensure all families have access to Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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.

H. Legal Compliance

H. Provide a **current, clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** Conflict of Interest Policy.

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 - Rio Rancho Governing Council Conflict of Interest Policy is in alignment with [NMSA 22-8B-5.2](#) and meets all statutory requirements as outlined below:

- A. A person shall not serve on the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho Governing Council. Individuals who knowingly violate the subsection may be liable as an individual by Explore Academy - Rio Rancho for any financial damages caused by the conflict.
- B. No member of the EA-RIO Governing Council or employee of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho shall participate in selecting, awarding, or administering a contract with EA-RIO 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 or employee has a financial interest in a group with which Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho. 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho.

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 - Rio Rancho Charter School Conflict of Interest Policy or result in a conflict of interest, as defined by the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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- Rio Rancho 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 waive this nepotism rule. As a best practice, Explore Academy- Rio Rancho 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.

I. Evidence of Partnership/Contractor relationship (if applicable)

I.(1) If there is /are third party relationship(s) (partner organization, a contractor, foundation) that are essential to the existence of your charter school, governance, key instructional staff, or management functions, identify them (entity, person, contact information etc.).

Explore Learning Systems (ELS) will provide extensive training, implementation, and both operational and instructional support of the Explore Learning Model curriculum for elementary and secondary levels. ELS is a contracted services provider and will provide instrumental support for the school in performing services that help alleviate administrative burden from the school leadership team. The goal of the ELS service is to help allow school leadership to manage the day-to-day responsibilities by shifting many of the system/district-level tasks to a strong team with experienced individuals in a wide array of focused support areas.

The relationship between EA-RIO and ELS would be based on an annual contract, approved by the board at their discretion, with a buffet of back office service offerings from which the school could choose to bundle. Based on the projections shown for this service in the school's budget, the school's budget would benefit considerably from the menu of services included in such a contract.

The area of services included in the contracted amounts projected in the school's budget are: school operations, teacher training/support/instructional coaching/professional development for teachers in grades K-12, state and federal compliance, principal leadership support, business management (including payroll, accounts payable/receivable, school budgeting, etc.), procurement, special education administrative support, marketing/community outreach, student enrollment, human resources/staffing/onboarding, student applications/enrollment, student scheduling, food service management, Powerschool student information system management (including STARS reporting), state testing, state and federal grant applications and monitoring (IDEA-B, Title programs, etc.), information technology/networking/internet safety, student data tracking, and facilities/maintenance.

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.

Draft MOU is provided as Appendix D. Please note that a signed document cannot be submitted at this time as the school is not yet approved and the agreement will be between the service provider(s) and the Governing Council, at the discretion of the Council.

J. Transportation and Food

J. (1) *If applicable*, state how the proposed school plans to offer transportation to its students.

For further information, please see the following link:

<https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/transportation/>.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho plans to utilize transportation services for students to provide as many students within the greater Rio Rancho 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. As such, the school is budgeting for the cost of buses in its first year of operation.

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.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Buses	2	3	4	5	6
Student Riders	120	180	240	300	360
Total Enrollment	318	485	682	882	977
% Student Riders	38%	37%	35%	34%	37%

Within this analysis, it is assumed that each bus can carry 60 students using an average figure of 5 students per row (12 rows per bus).

Explore Academy plans to rent 2 buses per day beginning in its first 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 estimates from local service providers, the cost per bus is approximately \$45,000 per year, resulting in the following cost breakdown for the planned number of buses:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Buses	2	3	4	5	6
Total Bus Cost	\$90,000	\$135,000	\$180,000	\$225,000	\$270,000

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 will be sufficient in offsetting the cost of the bus service, so no additional money will have to be spent from the operational fund.

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.

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.

The timeline below shows the steps in implementing the transportation plan:

Description of Step	Timeline
Investigation potential service providers	Fall 2022
Applying for state transportation funding	Fall 2022 (for Fall of 2024)
Service contract negotiation and approval	Spring 2023
Establishment and approval of transportation policies	June 1, 2023
Identification of student transportation needs	June 1, 2023
Establishment of travel routes and pickup/drop-off points	July 1, 2023

J. (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).

Food Services

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 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.

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 - Rio Rancho 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 a food service provider does not provide service as part of its package, the school will seek out training for its support staff (educational

assistants) 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 Rio Rancho, 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 the USDA National School Lunch and Breakfast Program (NSLBP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP) After School Lunch Program. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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) and Cooperative Education Services (CES), who have established contracts with state-approved vendors, specifically in the Rio Rancho area. Such entities approved through ACES or CES are Rhubarb and Elliot or NAMA Catering, both of whom serve the Rio Rancho area.

Upon application approval, the founding team will commence further discussion with its prospective food service providers. In the event that the above-mentioned food service providers do 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/CES-approved providers	Fall 2022
Submit applications for the USDA NSLP and NSLBP	Fall 2022
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 2023
Hired staff receive food handling service training (as required)	Spring 2023
Food service area is inspected to ensure that it is equipped with all required infrastructure (hand wash station, electrical outlets, etc.)	Spring 2023
Begin RFP process (as required) or finalize contract with ACES for approved food service provider	Spring 2023

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 2023

K. 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:

nmpsfa.org/legacy/pdf/planning/Charter_School_FMPEd_Specs_Renewal_Program_August_2019.pdf

K.(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.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho's Public Schools Facilities Authorization (PSFA) approval of the Master Plan is attached in Appendix E.

K. (2) Provide evidence that you have researched facilities/properties and **identified at least one appropriate, viable facility/property in the targeted geographic location**.

The founding team for Explore Academy - Rio Rancho has conducted an extensive survey of the greater Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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.

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:

- September 15th: final selection of facility (existing structure) or facility site (for construction)
- November 1st: rental agreement closes/bond financing closes for facility purchase
- November 15th: approval of all entitlements including design, zoning, permits, etc.
- December 1st: begin renovations (existing structure)

- July 15th: completion of phase I of renovations 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 team 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-RIO founding team has conducted much of the preliminary exploratory work ahead of this application. The expectation is that identification and securing of the final site will occur in the summer 2022 to be ready for the fall of 2023.
- 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-RIO 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 2023 as the site agreements are finalized.
- Investor/foundation acquisition of an existing facility in order to renovate a facility to achieve E-Occupancy status: the school could enter into a rental agreement with 501(c)3 non-profit foundation who would purchase a building/land in order to renovate the structure into a school facility and rent the resulting school facility to the school
 - Timeline: The EA-RIO founding team has secured investor approval for a potential bond financing deal. With the facility identified in the fall of 2022, the bond financing deal could close and be ready for construction by December 1st to be ready for students in July, 2023

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 multiple potential investors for the purchase of a facility using bond financing and a non-profit foundation as the borrower. It is this option that is presented in the budget narrative below.

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 § 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 examples of properties identified at the time of the submission of this application, the founding team has evaluated the two properties as potential sites in which the school may ultimately reside. Those are pictured and described on the following two pages

6090 Zenith Court Rio Rancho, NM 87144

FOR SALE OR LEASE > OFFICE SPACE

Office Space For Sale or Lease

6090 ZENITH CT NE, RIO RANCHO, NM 87144



Building Amenities

- > Ideal for Call Center, Open Office, Charter School or Light Manufacturing
- > Located in the heart of the north Rio Rancho corridor
- > Close to area amenities and services
- > Convenient access to labor force
- > **Building availability flexible upon buyer need, no later than September 2022**
- > Modern architectural design
- > Open floor plan with high ceilings
- > Tilt-Up concrete construction

Details

- > Sale Price: \$7,640,000
- > Lease Rate: \$14.00/SF
- > Lease Type: NNN
- > Available Space: +/- 50,000 SF
- > Lot Size: 7.84 Acres
- > Zoning: SU
- > Parking Spaces: 404 Surface parking spaces (8.08/1000)

601 Quantum Rd Rio Rancho, NM 87124

FOR SALE > OFFICE/FLEX SPACE

Freestanding Building

601 QUANTUM ROAD, RIO RANCHO, NM 87124



HIGHLIGHTS

Colliers International has been retained as the exclusive agent for the sale of the fee simple interest in a 28,000 square foot state-of-the-art office/flex building situated in the heart of New Mexico's 3rd largest city, Rio Rancho. The property is located within the New Mexico Business Tech Center, just off NM Highway 528 (Pat D'Arco Hwy), the major north-south arterial through the city.

*Building availability flexible upon buyer need, no later than December 2023. Building is currently leased to AURA (www.aura.com).

OFFERED BY:

JOHN RANSOM, CCIM, SIOR
SR VICE PRESIDENT | PRINCIPAL
+1 505 880 7011
ALBUQUERQUE, NM
john.ransom@colliers.com

TIM WITH, CCIM, SIOR
SR VICE PRESIDENT | PRINCIPAL
+1 505 880 7092
ALBUQUERQUE, NM
tim.with@colliers.com

DREW QUINN, CCIM
SR VICE PRESIDENT
+1 816 556 1108
KANSAS CITY, MO
drew.quinn@colliers.com

FEATURES

- > State-of-the-art facility
- > 100% Leased. thru 12-31-23
- > Modern architectural design
- > Open floor plan with high ceilings and perimeter offices
- > Suitable for call center, charter school, light manufacturing, open office, etc
- > Concrete tilt-up construction
- > Excellent parking: 7.4 per 1,000 SF (207 surface spaces)



III. Financial Framework

A. School Size

- 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.

State the requested enrollment, grade levels to be served, and student/teacher ratio. Please note that this is a projected enrollment. If approved, actual funding will be determined by NMPED School Budget Bureau based on data regarding enrollment membership including, but not limited to, lottery applications submitted and registrations completed in spring of the implementation year.

Academic Year	Number of Students	Grade Levels	Student/Teacher Ratio
Year 1 - 2023-24	318	K-2, 6	16:1
Year 2 - 2024-25	485	K-3, 6-7	16:1
Year 3 - 2025-26	682	K-4, 6-8	16:1
Year 4 - 2026-27	882	K-9	16:1
Year 5 - 2027-28	977	K-10	16:1
At Capacity (Enrollment Cap)	1200	K-12	16:1

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). State and federal funds, including but not limited to student funding, shall not be used to pay, compensate or reimburse contract management organization or education management organization, regardless of their organizational or tax-exempt status. Ensure that your worksheet **clearly demonstrates your understanding of, and your capacity to implement, New Mexico public school funding.**

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho has completed the required 910B5 State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) Computation Revenue Estimate Worksheet and it is attached in Appendix F.

B.(2) Provide, and attach as **Appendix G**, a proposed five-year budget plan, fully aligned with 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. State and federal funds, including but not limited to student funding, shall not be used to pay, compensate or reimburse contract management organization or education management organization, regardless of their organizational or tax-exempt status. 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.).

- 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.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho five-year budget plan (910B5 SEG Revenue Worksheet) has been attached to Appendix G.

B.(3) Provide a clear, comprehensive, cohesive, and reasonable budget narrative.

In projecting a five-year budget, the founding team utilized specific local district (Rio Rancho 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 318 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 II-D3 - Staffing Needs and Plans). In addition to this, the specific rationale for each section is provided below.

Staffing - Teachers

The focus of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho’s (EA-RIO) 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, 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 budget for teachers based on an average salary of \$63,000 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-RIO will seek to limit class sizes to twenty (20) students at a maximum.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Teachers	21	31	44	55	64
Teacher Salaries	\$1,323,000	\$1,953,000	\$2,772,000	\$3,465,000	\$4,032,000
Students	318	485	682	882	977
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	16:1	16:1	16:1	16:1	16:1

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 and classroom aides to help provide supplemental instructional support in and outside of the classroom. Starting with six educational assistants in its first year, the school expands by adding additional staff each year as it grows to add both elementary and middle/high school grades across the five years projected (function 1000).

EA-RIO 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/Gifted

Based on its budget calculation, the school is estimating a 10% special education population to include gifted students. 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 \$63,000 (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	318	485	682	882	977
Special Ed Students	32	49	68	88	98
Special Ed Staff	1	2	3	4	6
Ancillary	\$20,000	\$24,000	\$28,800	\$34,560	\$41,472

Staffing - Miscellaneous

Additional staff (11000-2100 and 11000-2500) are shown phasing-in beginning in Year 2. These include:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Counselor	\$0	\$63,000	\$63,000	\$126,000	\$126,000
Health Assistant	\$0	\$32,000	\$32,000	\$32,000	\$32,000
Nurse	\$0	\$0	\$65,000	\$65,000	\$65,000
Activities/Flex Coordinator	\$0	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000
Registrar	\$0	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$40,000
Information Tech (11000-2500)	\$0	\$35,000	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$40,000

Staffing - Administration

For management of student and campus safety, beginning in the second year, the budget shows the addition of a security official with a second security official hired for Year 5.

For the management of the school's front office and clerical functions for the school as a whole, an office manager is inserted into the budget for all five projected school years. As the two grade ranges begin to grow and their needs begin to diverge, a second office manager is added in Year 3.

In the area of school administration, the school will employ a head administrator as the sole administrative official for the first year of the school's operation. The salary for this individual is set at \$90,000, meeting the minimum requirement for a principal at the elementary school level. This salary will increase to \$95,000 in Year2. Also in Year 2, an assistant principal is added.

In Year 3, a separate principal is added as the head of the elementary or middle/high school to separate oversight of the two grade ranges. In Year 5, this principal will receive an assistant principal, at which time both grade-level principals will have the support of assistant principals.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Head Administrator	\$90,000	\$95,000	\$95,000	\$95,000	\$95,000
Principal	\$0	\$0	\$90,000	\$90,000	\$90,000
Assistant Principals	\$0	\$85,000	\$85,000	\$85,000	\$170,000

Employee Benefits

As a whole, the following supplemental deductions are included in employee benefits. Within the budget projections, it is assumed that most 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 shows the estimated 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 43.32% based on total salary, and as such, the 43.32% calculation for benefits calculations for all staffing categories as shown 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	17.15%
ERA - Retiree Health	2%
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	43.32%

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. The majority of the school’s professional development will be performed through its contract with Explore Learning Systems, the potential service provider for the school to assist with the implementation and growth of the Explore Learning Model.

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 (Est.)	\$250,000	\$500,000	\$663,180	\$663,180	\$850,000
Lease Assistance	\$234,048	\$234,048	\$356,960	\$501,952	\$649,152
Amount Supplem from Operational	\$15,952	\$265,952	\$306,220	\$161,228	\$200,848

The school anticipates utilizing a third party non-profit foundation through which to issue tax-exempt bonds for its facility purchase. Facility debt service (lease) is calculated based on bond financing structuring with the following assumptions:

- Facility cost (50,000 sq ft) - \$6,500,000 (prospective facility already identified)
- Initial renovations for 40,000 sq ft @ \$50/sq ft - \$2,000,000
- Total price - \$8,500,000
- Annual debt service @ 5.75% - \$663,180

The school (through its foundation) will utilize an interest-only structure and capitalized interest for the first two years to lower its debt service as it grows its enrollment into the space. The full debt service is seen in the above table for Years 3-4. For Year 5, it is assumed that additional construction will take place to renovate the remaining 10,000 sq ft, which would increase the annual debt service.

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 a heavy 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. While the amount of supply spending remains high, it does decrease as more non-consumable supplies are purchased and the school's supply foundation grows. The founding team will apply for CSP funding; if approved, it will offset a considerable portion of this supply expense in Each area is described below:

- Function 1000 (Instruction): the budget has projected a significant 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 budget 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 11000-2300 (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 11000-2600 (Operation and Maintenance of Plant): there is a service provider contracted for custodial for each of the five years shown
- Explore Learning Systems support (11000-2400): support from the Explore Learning Systems team, with which it is anticipated the school will enter a contract as an educational service provider, will provide team members with exceptional experience and knowledge in charter school startup and general operations. The Explore Learning Systems service provides services in operations, teacher training/support/professional development for grades K-12, state and federal compliance, principal leadership support, business management (including payroll, accounts payable/receivable, budget analysis, etc.), special education support, marketing/outreach, enrollment, human resources, student applications/enrollment, student scheduling, food services, Powerschool student information system management (including STARS reporting), state testing, information technology, student data tracking, and facilities/maintenance. These specific services are not itemized within the school's budget as

they can be provided through the school’s contract with ELS. The bundling of the above services into one fee will save the school considerable costs in the early years.

Transportation

The school will apply for transportation funding prior to the start of its second year of operation. It will carry the cost of the funding of two buses in its first year at a rate of \$45,000 per bus. Transportation estimates as received by the state (based on estimated student riders, routes, and distances) are assumed to cover the cost of transportation services in future years, and as such there is a net zero budget allocation.

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. The founding team recognizes that, despite the net zero cost for food service, the school will be required to pay its food service vendors prior to receiving its first USDA reimbursement. The anticipated costs to the school in the first few months is estimated to be \$27,720 (120 students eating per free day, on average x 66 days of food service x \$3.50 per meal).

For budgeting purposes, the budget projections use the following assumptions:

- 40% of students eat per day
- \$3.50 per meal

For the enrollment changes over the first five years, the following shows the food service projections, with the amount paid for meals offset by reimbursements or student payment:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Meal Costs	\$82,807	\$126,294	\$177,593	\$229,673	\$254,411
Meal Payments*	\$82,807	\$126,294	\$177,593	\$229,673	\$254,411

*payments for meals either through USDA reimbursement or student/family payment

Grant Funding

After the submission of this proposal, 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. No CSP monies have been assumed within the budget, nor is there implementation year money assumed

prior to the start of SEG funding in July. The school's founding team has launched schools with no startup funding available and they have experience in troubleshooting the spending within a tight budget and narrow timeframe and working with vendors who understand the constraints of a new school with a tight budget and cash flow delicacies.

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.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) 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 - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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-RIO leadership may use their experience as needed. In addition, the ELS team members have opened and operated charter schools, adding to the considerable experience available to the principal and Governing Council.

Pursuing Flexible Relationships in Financing

As a school who is just starting operations, in the event that financial challenges present themselves, EA-RIO 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 charter 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-RIO 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:

- Kindergarten: 5 teachers
- 1st Grade: 4 teachers
- 2nd Grade: 4 teachers
- Art: 1 teacher (split with 6th grade)
- Physical Education: 1 teacher (split with 6th grade)
- 6th Grade: 6 teachers to cover the four core content areas (math, science, English, social studies)

Within the staffing plan above, there are multiple layers of flexibility built in to allow for adaptation if enrollment goals are not met.

Flexibility in Class Sizes

Within the above staffing plan, and considering the enrollment projections, the average class size is 15.8 students, allowing for a considerable buffer in the event that staffing must be reduced. Although it is assumed that, with enrollment drop there would be a proportional loss in teaching staff, the small class sizes built into the budget projections allow for another layer of flexibility in maintaining class sizes below 20 students. With a 25% reduction in budget, the school could reduce its teaching staff by 5 FTE and remain in compliance with the school's academic model.

Flexibility in Positions

While the positions within grades K-2 described above place teachers within one grade band, these teachers may float within the K-2 bands depending on enrollment fluctuations. For grades 6-12, the school plans to hire some teaching staff members with dual certification (English/social studies, math/science) to allow for greater flexibility in utilizing staff members to cover the number of sections generated based on enrollment.

Flexibility in Scheduling

The Explore Learning system, both at K-5 and 6-12, allows for the shifting of class sections for students to meet the demands of a tighter budget and reduced staffing plan. Such areas of flexibility include:

- Utilizing physical education as an elective, which allows for larger class sizes
- Providing core elective courses instead of art (electives in STEM/Humanities for K-5 and elective classes for the core content areas for 6-12), thereby absorbing elective offerings within the core teaching staff
- Shuffling days when classes are taught (as needed). Electives can rotate on a weekly basis for K-5 (rather than being taught each day) to provide flexibility.

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.

Budget Adjustments and Spending

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 on 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 in Year 1 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. 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.

C. Financial Policies, Oversight, Compliance, and Sustainability

C.(1) Provide a description of the internal control procedures.

As part of Appendix H, Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) 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-RIO 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-RIO 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 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 coordinate 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.

C. (2) Identify the appropriate staff to perform financial tasks.

The Governing Council for Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) will ultimately select the contracted provider to perform the school's business management services. However, for the purposes of this application, the founding team has utilized the expertise of the Vigil Group and Explore Learning Systems 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 what the Vigil Group offers within its scope of services.

The cost of using a contracted school business manager has been included in the Explore Learning Systems contracted service estimate. The school's business manager would be one component of the total umbrella of services available to the school through the ELS contract. Within the predicted services 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.

The school's principal will serve a critical role in the financial management and operational functions for EA-RIO and will serve 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 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. This individual will be strongly supported, however, through the Explore Learning Systems team. Additionally, site-based staff, specifically the office manager, will be instrumental in helping process purchase orders and invoices for the school and an employee of the school (or another school via an MOU) will be designated as the Chief Procurement

Officer (CPO). The CPO will be certified by the state of New Mexico and will renew said certification biannually, as required.

Further, the principal, with the above supports, 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. The school's office manager will manage the ordering of supplies, inventory, accounts payable, and accounts receivable under the authority and supervision of the principal.
- Supervision in maintaining ongoing inventory. The school's office manager will maintain the ongoing inventory.
- 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

As stated above, and the school plans to contract with Explore Learning Systems, which will offer a component to its service umbrella, 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

The consideration of any school business management service providers, whether in conjunction with any larger service contract with Explore Learning Systems or contracted separately, will be required to meet the following criteria:

- Licensed Level II Business Manager and all associated competencies as described in [6.63.12.9 NMAC](#)
- 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 - Rio Rancho 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 and the Explore Learning Systems team in preparation of this application, and the founding team will recommend the ELS team as a candidate in consideration for its business management services as the school plans to commence operations during the Planning Year. The process of selecting this provider will take place 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.

C.(3) Provide a **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive plan** for how the Governing Body will provide proper legal and fiscal oversight.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) 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 from the school's business manager or school administration or both 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-RIO 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 - Rio Rancho will annually form an Audit Committee with the expressed purpose of facilitating and overseeing the audit process. The Audit Committee will comprise 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 a current student of EA-RIO. 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-RIO 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 includes 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 by the authorizer. EA-RIO 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 the 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 the 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 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.

IV. Evidence of Support

A. Outreach Activities

A. Provide **clear, comprehensive, and cohesive** evidence that you have developed an effective and thoughtful outreach program. Describe an outreach program to develop community support for the proposed school that has been implemented during the application process;

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) is founded on the experience and success of Explore Academy - Albuquerque (EA-ABQ). There are 178 students from Rio Rancho, Bernalillo, Corrales, and Placitas who attend that school, with an additional 181 students who reside in the NW Albuquerque neighborhoods bordering Rio Rancho. Over the past three years, student applications from the above-mentioned communities represent 20% of all student applications for Explore Academy - Albuquerque with an additional 10% from the NW Albuquerque neighborhoods bordering Rio Rancho. This represents an average of 435 students applications per year out of an average of 1450 total student applications the school receives for the approximate 300 openings each year. As a result, the school has a long waiting list for most grade levels. Parents of existing students and potential students alike repeatedly ask about a Rio Rancho or Albuquerque Westside option, with the Explore Learning Model. Additionally, the founders are current or former long-time residents of Rio Rancho.

Chartered in 2014, Explore Academy - Albuquerque 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 Rio Rancho to craft an equally effective Governing Council for families, students and community stakeholders in Sandoval County.

We have reached out to the Chambers of Commerce in Rio Rancho and Bernalillo to begin partnerships with community leaders and business leaders of Rio Rancho and the county. This relationship will provide access and introduction to the drivers of the city's and county's economic development and sustainability, an important entree for graduates of our Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho is also reaching out to the local community and leaders through the branches of the University of New Mexico, Central New Mexico Community College, and New Mexico Highlands University. We have meetings planned with representatives of Rio Rancho non-governmental organizations (including nonprofits), community-based activists, Chamber of Commerce-based local businesses, city and county charter schools, city and county faith-based organizations.

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-RIO in making the best decisions possible.

All of the activities to be conducted by Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho founding team is working to refine its interpretation of Rio Rancho and Sandoval County.

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

2020 - Present

Explore Academy - Albuquerque receives requests on a regular basis from residents of Rio Rancho and neighboring communities for a school in Sandoval County or Albuquerque's Westside that implements the Explore Learning Model. The founding team has engaged with many of the parents described above through social media, electronic correspondence, and virtual meetings to measure feedback and interest in the proposed school's establishment.

Outcome: The team was able to verify the significant interest level for the establishment of an Explore Academy campus within the Rio Rancho community.

March 2022

Explore Academy leadership worked with Dave Hill, broker with Maestas and Ward in Rio Rancho, to investigate the facility landscape and identify potential sites. These investigations have included building tours, architectural planning, correspondence with building owners and facility investors.

Outcome: The team was able to find 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 2023.

March - May 2022

The Explore Academy - Rio Rancho founding team met with school leaders and teachers from various schools, both district and charter, to discuss local educational needs and how Explore Academy might add value to the Rio Rancho and Sandoval County learning environment. A secondary intent of the meetings was the identification of candidates for the head administrator position for the Explore Academy - Rio Rancho charter school.

Outcome: The need for an educational option to the traditional school setting, particularly one that serves accelerated, on track, and at-risk students was apparent. While Rio Rancho does provide some pathways for students in preparation for college, there is very little differentiation to allow for student choice outside of Advanced Placement programs (a strong emphasis of the district) and accelerated online/independent learning. Although the district does perform well overall, the general concern is that the district focuses on a "one size fits all" approach which does adequately serve the diversity of its student population.

April - May 2022

Explore Academy leadership met with Rio Rancho families, students, and stakeholders via virtual information sessions.

Outcome: Over fifty families and interested parties participated in the information nights. 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 2023. The meeting lasted well over the

designated hour and parents were clearly excited about the prospect of having a K-12 charter school option close to home. 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-RIO when it opens.

April - May 2022

The Explore Academy founding team prepared a list of potential board members for the school from the local community and met with several individuals to determine interest and fit. The team followed the guidelines in terms of criteria (background, expertise, interest in serving community, passion for education and the Explore Learning Model, etc)

Outcome: A solid group of potential board members has been formed, as described in Section II.A2 - Governing Body Qualifications of this application.

May 2022

Explore Academy leadership launched the EA-RIO website at www.explore.academy/rio 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-RIO 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 fifty 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.

May 2022

Explore Academy leadership launched EA-RIO 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 Rio Rancho 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-RIO team for questions, suggestions, and dialogue about the community and the school.

May 2022

Explore Academy leadership corresponded with several teachers from Rio Rancho, some of whom are employed in charter schools and others are employed through Rio Rancho 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-RIO 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: The majority of this teacher focus group felt that Rio Rancho does not have nearly enough options for parents and students who are seeking different ways of learning and more individualized

attention and support. The strongest sentiment expressed was the overall size of the Rio Rancho schools, the size of classes, and the resulting anonymity students face. 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 180 students in a given day.

Planned Activities

Spring - Summer 2022

Further communication with members of the Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho and the educational needs and concerns of Rio Rancho. 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, interested families, and potential school facilities. Additionally, spreading the word about the Explore Learning Model and what the school will offer to the Rio Rancho 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.

Overall Outcome

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho is now well-positioned to enter the Rio Rancho and Sandoval County environment as a charter school prepared to share the success of the educational learning model, per the request of community members. 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 Rio Rancho. Many of the outreach and partnership activities we have described have been adjusted and practiced over the last eight years for the Explore Academy founding school. Lessons learned from Albuquerque through challenges and successes will inform how we approach the city of Rio Rancho and other areas of Sandoval County. 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 - Rio Rancho will partner to benefit Rio Rancho and Sandoval County.

The long-term outcome is the benefit to the families and students who are reached by Explore Academy - Rio Rancho. 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.

B. Community Support

B. Provide **sufficient measurable**, quantifiable, and **qualitative** data-based evidence of abundant, broad-based support for the proposed school among residents in the targeted community. **DO NOT provide names or specific letters of interest from families or students.**

Introduction

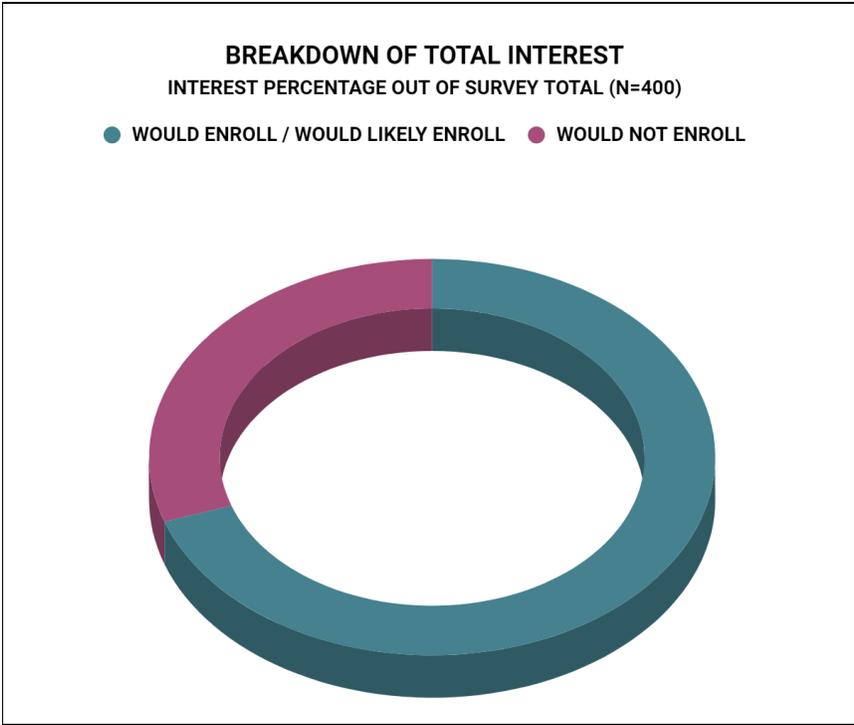
Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) will rely upon the strength of its community in order to continually adjust school curriculum, instructional practices, and operations to best meet the needs of its students, families, and community. This process has been a driving force behind the success of the founding campus Explore Academy - Albuquerque. The integration of stakeholder input into school policies and procedures as well as curriculum and scheduling will allow EA-RIO 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 Rio Rancho 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 Rio Rancho community, the founding team engaged target population stakeholders in a variety of ways, across various platforms and in person. The major demographic and academic performance breakdown of the target population is described in detail in Section I.F3 - Anticipated Student Population. 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.

Quantitative Support Data

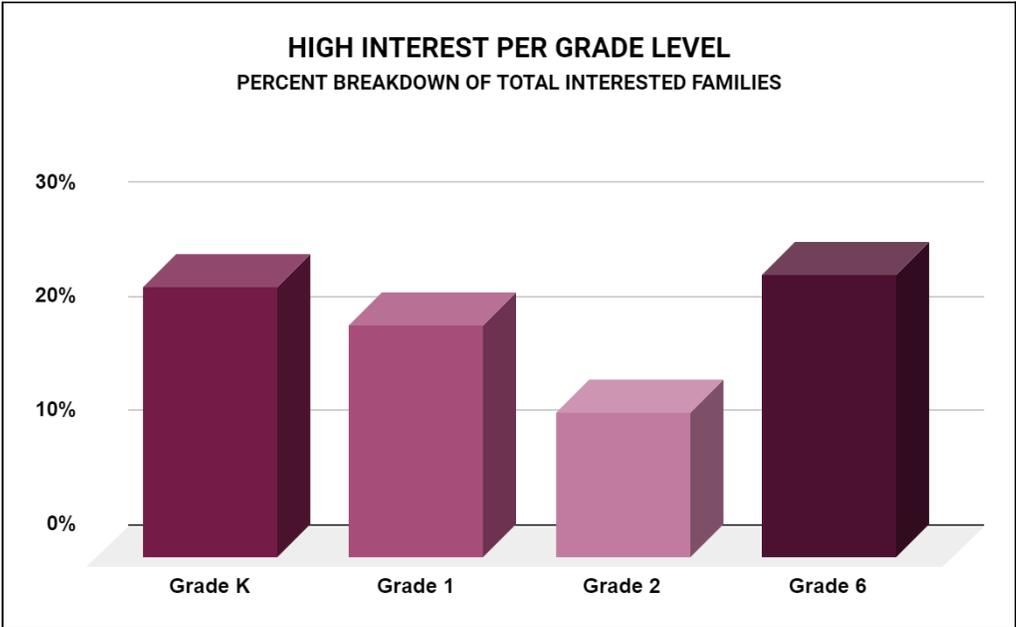
The founding team performed market research analysis of the area (utilizing Fordis Consulting) to analyze the prospective support of Explore Academy in the Rio Rancho community. The goal of the research was to determine the level of interest for potential enrollment based on the ideals of the proposed charter school model, where those families would be coming from, how far they would travel, and what grade levels have interest. The data below is presented from the market research that was performed from a sample population of 400 respondents with school-aged children in the months of March and April of 2022

As it relates to student interest in the model, families polled were overwhelmingly interested in the Explore Academy model and the level of choice and accountability inherent in the model itself. The chart below shows the total interest from the respondents utilizing a scale from 1 (would not enroll) to 3 (would definitely enroll):

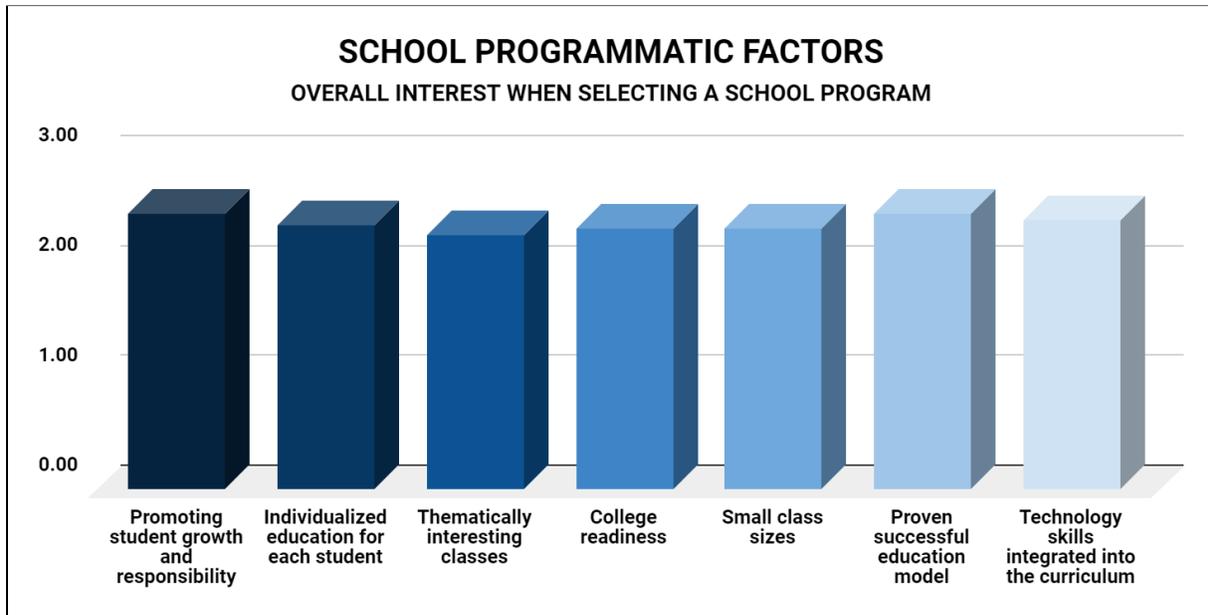


The data below is presented from the 72% from the above data set who stated that they would enroll or would likely enroll, 288 families in total.

Of those families with high interest, the following chart shows the distribution across the prospective grade ranges proposed within this application for Year 1:



When asking for the specific metrics for what factors participants were looking for in a school program, the factors are displayed below, again on a scale of 1 (not important) to 3 (very important). These factors are strongly tied into Explore Academy’s academic model:



The above research shows a strong level of support for the school’s academic model within the grade ranges the school is proposed to initially serve.

Demographic Breakdown

The anticipated demographics of the students who will be served by EA-RIO are listed below based on the 71 interest forms collected as of May 31, 2022.

	87124	87144	87048	87004	87043	87114
Zip Codes	26	22	4	8	2	9

Schools (K-5)	Rio Rancho Elem	Sandia Vista Elem	Placitas Elem	Corrales Elem	Carroll Elem	Bernalillo Elem	Enchanted Hills Elem
	MLK Elem	Colinas Elem	Stapleton Elem	Maggie Cordova	Seven Bar Elem	Sierra Vista Elem	Hope Christian

Schools (6-8)	Lincoln Middle	Rio Rancho Middle	Bernalillo Middle	Eagle Ridge Middle	St Thomas Aquinas	Mountain View Middle	Albuquerque Academy
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	Public	Private	Charter	Home-school
School type	60	5	0	6

	Male	Female
Gender	33	38

Information Night Attendance

Information events held through the months of April and May had strong showings for parent and student interest. In total, over fifty families were in attendance across the three virtual events. The family breakdown was as follows:

City of Residence	Number
Albuquerque	4
Bernalillo	6
Corrales	9
Placitas	6
Rio Rancho	34

Interest Form Submissions

At the time of this application, there have been 71 official interest forms submitted for students interested in receiving updates as the proposed school moves through the approval process. The students and families indicated their current grade level, anticipated grade level for the 2023-24 school year, and the school they currently attend.

Grade Level	Interest Forms
K	11
1	12
2	10
6	38

As evidenced in the tables above, there is a significant interest in and support for EA-RIO from in and around the Rio Rancho area.

Social Media Activity

The Facebook and Instagram pages have been very successful and have allowed for communication and engagement with many families and community members. There has been a lot of traffic on both platforms, much of it from interested families with questions, suggestions, and the desire to enroll their children at Explore Academy - Rio Rancho in the fall of 2023.

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 from within the Rio Rancho community. The social media accounts also allow the founding team to maintain in constant contact with the target community and all Rio Rancho stakeholders, fostering the positive and successful relationship between Explore Academy - Rio Rancho and the community it will serve.

As the social media interactions, information night attendance, and stakeholder communication clearly indicate, even within this exploratory phase for the purposes of gathering data for this proposal, there is community support for partnerships, interest from 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 and following sections (IV-A - Outreach Program and IV-C - Networking), demonstrate a supportive and engaged presence in support of Explore Academy - Rio Rancho and its proposed opening in 2023. We are excited and engaged by this abundant support and feel Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will be well positioned for success with the support of a partnership with the Rio Rancho community.

C. Community Relationships

C. Clearly demonstrate that you have developed **meaningful and strategic** networking relationships or resource agreements with local community agencies, groups, or individuals. (not including formal partnership agreements that are integral to the proposed school's operations, as described in Section II. I (1) of this application.)

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho (EA-RIO) has been engaged in networking efforts in Rio Rancho and Sandoval County, as well as leveraging current relationships in Albuquerque. Meaningful relationships are established through the several networking opportunities that have presented themselves through the school's founding team who reside in the Rio Rancho community, and also through the Governing Board who are active citizens within their community. These relationships along with the other connections that have been made open Explore Academy - Rio Rancho to the myriad community and business leaders in Rio Rancho and the county. As described in Section IV.A - Outreach Program above, substantial outreach and networking efforts have already developed connections with groups of educators - both leaders and teachers - in the community, as well as families and students who have attended repeated virtual and in-person events and communicated with members of the team.

Over the course of the winter and spring 2021-22, we have met repeatedly with groups of and individual parents and families, including students who are residents of Rio Rancho and neighboring communities for a school in Sandoval County or Albuquerque's Westside that implements the Explore Learning Model and in so doing amplifies student choice and centers them in their education. Virtual meetings and correspondence have revealed frustration with a lack of divergent school options in the area, leading families with the capability to seek private options and/or take on significant transportation burdens. Others express frustration at their children remaining in a more rigid

traditional school setting. Our outreach data suggests that word of mouth is the primary mechanism for informing parents and community members about the school, thus this is of utmost strategic importance in ensuring that families are aware of this option for their child or children.

To update our understanding of the educational landscape in Rio Rancho and the surrounding areas, including the perceptions and interests of educators and leaders in such a school, we have conducted several listening events with teachers and leaders - current and retired - from the community. This informed and subsequent events will continue to inform our understanding of local educational needs and how EA-RIO can add value to the community. We also expect that continued engagement of the local community will lead to attracting high quality administrator and teacher candidates during our Planning Year in preparation for Year 1.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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 - Rio Rancho 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.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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.

We have reached out to the Chambers of Commerce in Rio Rancho and Bernalillo to begin partnerships with community leaders and business leaders of Rio Rancho and the county. This relationship will provide access and introduction to the drivers of the city's and county's economic development and sustainability, an important entree for graduates of our Rio Rancho 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.

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 business leaders will continue to be important as Explore Academy - Rio Rancho begins graduating students into the community; employment, career guidance, and community activism will flourish as our graduates leave EA-RIO and contribute to the greater population. Student mentorship by local business leaders will be a result of business partnerships with Explore Academy - Rio Rancho and not just an informal relationship. The founding team has already spoken with a printing business, local libraries, food service providers, a real estate group, and a graphic designer to begin the process of forming connections between EA-RIO and local business leaders.

Explore Academy - Rio Rancho is also reaching out to the local community and leaders through the branches of the University of New Mexico, Central New Mexico Community College, and New Mexico Highlands University. We have meetings planned with representatives of Rio Rancho non-governmental organizations (including nonprofits), community-based activists, Chamber of Commerce-based local businesses, city and county charter schools, city and county faith-based organizations. Explore Academy - Rio Rancho must 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 Rio Rancho and county of Sandoval, Explore Academy - Rio Rancho 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-RIO sees its successful curriculum as a recruitment tool to mentor the next class of students.

Beyond the local collaborations and partnerships, Explore Academy - Rio Rancho will seek to 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 Rio Rancho.

V. Applicant Remarks

Additional Remarks

No comments at this time. The team looks forward to the capacity interview.

The applicant team is invited to provide additional remarks, not to exceed 500 words. This section will not be rated by the Peer Review Team.

NVI. Appendices and Attachments

	Appendix Description	File Naming Convention	Attached (Check if Yes)
A	II-A1_Governing Body Bylaws	A_SchoolName_Bylaws	X
B	II-C3_Head Administrator Job Description	B_SchoolName_HeadAdmin	X
C	II-D2_Job Descriptions for Certified, Licensed, and Other Key Staff	C_SchoolName_JobDesc	X
D	II-I2_Proposed Agreements Governing Third Party Relationships and Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs) (*Required if applicable*)	D_SchoolName_MOUs	X
E	II-L1_PSA-Approved Projected Facility Plan Documentation	E_SchoolName_FacilityPlan	X
F	III-B1_Five Years of 910B5 State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) Computation Revenue Estimate Worksheets	F_SchoolName_910B5	X
G	III-B2_Five-year Budget Plan	G_SchoolName_BudgetPlan	X
H	III-C1_Internal Control Procedures	H_SchoolName_InternalControl	X
I	School Calendars	I_School_SchoolCalendars	X
J	Staff Handbook	J_School_StaffHandbook	X