



**STATE OF NEW MEXICO
PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION
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NOTICE OF INTENT TO SUBMIT CHARTER APPLICATION

According to NMSA § 22-8B-6(B) a Notice of Intent to Submit a Charter Application (NOI) must be filed by the organizers of a proposed charter school to the Public Education Commission *and* to the superintendent of the school district in which the charter school is proposed to be located no later than the second Tuesday in January of the year in which the application will be filed.

The NOI must be submitted electronically to charter.schools@ped.nm.gov with a cc to the district superintendent by 5:00 PM Mountain Time on the due date.

NOIs that are not received by the Public Education Commission *and* the district by the deadline may result in the application being rejected.

The NOI is intended to provide the primary point of contact information of charter developers and preliminary information about the charter proposal. Use the form below to submit the NOI, which should not exceed five pages.

Name of proposed school

Collins Lake Outdoor School

School district where proposed school will be located

Our school will be located in the geographic boundaries of Mora Independent School District which has a total enrollment of 445 students, but we also anticipate students attending from the Las Vegas, Taos, Cimarron, and Taos school districts.

Grade levels to be offered and enrollment projections

Grade Levels to be offered	Projected Total Enrollment
K-5	40

Primary point of contact

Name	Steve Smaby			
Mailing Address	254 Encinal Rd.			
City	Cleveland	State	NM	Zip code 87715
Phone	575-387-5089 or 281-630-0827 (cell)			
Email	steve.smaby@gmail.com / collinslakeoutdoored@gmail.com			

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

Name	Role on Team	Qualifications: Education, Employment, and Experience
Steve Smaby	Founder	Education: MSME, MSBA, BSME, Michigan Tech. Employment: Retired Experience: Founded Collins Lake Autism Center in 2010. Currently serve as board chair, focusing on strategic planning and fundraising. Father and primary caregiver for autistic son, now 29 years old. Participated in his ABA therapy and worked closely with his schools throughout his life.
Marvin MacAuley	Advisor	Education: BS Environmental Science/Biology, New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology. MA, School Administration, New Mexico Highlands University. Employment: Teacher, Peñasco Independent Schools/Picuris Pueblo, Education Director. Experience: 24 years Education Experience; 11 years teaching, 4 years Principal Experience, 9 Years Superintendent Experience
Roger Montoya	Advisor	Education: AA degree Long Beach State University 1980 Employment: Professional Dancer Los Angeles, New York City 1981-1990. Professional Artist 1990-2000. Founder Arts in the Schools k-6 integrated fine arts state funded program serving 13 schools within the Espanola Public Schools 2000-2011. Co Founder La Tierra Montessori School of the Arts and Sciences 2012. Co founder Moving Arts Espanola-Youth Development 501-C3 2008- present. Former State Representative 2020-22 Experience: 30 years running seven social services based non profits in rural northern New Mexico, professional landscape painter, actor, choreographer. Recognized as a CNN Hero 2019.
Becky Kappus	Board Member	Education: PhD in Curriculum and Instruction (NMSU) Employment: New Mexico Highlands University Experience: Dr. Kappus has more than 30 years of educator experience, including working as a university education administrator and professor, and classroom teacher. Her work in several areas of education helps her understand how all the parts must work together to support student learning. Dr. Kappus' role at New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU) focuses on supporting partnerships with New Mexico school districts and communities to fully support NMHU's work to develop educational pathways toward equitable schools.

Doug Earick	Advisor	<p>Education: BS. Secondary Education, Science; MA. Curriculum & Instruction Multicultural Teacher Education</p> <p>Employment: Currently the Director of School University Partnerships for New Mexico Highlands University's School of Education</p> <p>Experience: Approximately 30 years of educational experience including being a former middle school and high school science teacher, a director of teacher professional development at the university level, a director of environmental education center, and science education faculty at multiple universities.</p>
Kaya Long	Teacher/ Outdoor Ed Program Director	<p>Education: MA Curriculum & Instruction Employment: NMPED SPED teacher, ASL-English Interpreter Experience: Thirty years working with students with disabilities, SPED teacher and case manager: IEP's, UDL in SPED environments. Currently developing inclusive outdoor education programs for diverse learners.</p>
Abbey Orndorff	Teacher/ Outreach Coordinator	<p>Education: UNM Dual License Elementary and Special Education BA. Employment: Student teacher in APS special education classrooms, snowboard coach and instructor.</p> <p>Experience: UDL design and implementation lessons, units, and curriculum. Knowledge of outdoor ed. benefits and how to effectively teach in the outdoors.</p>

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

Collins Lake Outdoor School aligns state standards for academics in an inclusive experiential approach based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Nature-based Learning (NBL) . Integrating Common Core Standards, curriculum, and community, we provide accessible, experiential, and culturally and linguistically relevant teaching for learners with diverse needs.

Does the school expect to contract with another entity for either management or substantial oversight in the school's operation? Yes No

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

Does the applicant team or any members of the team currently operate any other schools? Yes No

Vision/Mission statement (2-3 sentences)

Mission: Collins Lake Outdoor School is built on the foundational beliefs that learning is an act of life, and teaching is an act of love. Our vision is to grow expert learners who have the skills and knowledge to care for themselves, their families, their culture, their community, and their natural environment.

Vision: Through evidence-based and sustainable practices in inclusive, culturally and linguistically responsive, and nature-based learning, Collins Lake Outdoor school provides:

- a **learning community** that values interconnectedness and equity, embraces diversity and multiple ways of knowing;
- a **learning environment** that nurtures a sense of belonging, fosters self-efficacy, sparks curiosity, and engages all learners in educational progressions that align curriculum and skills with high expectations for academic excellence;
- and **learning experiences** that transform understanding, grow skills, and build a foundation for a life-long love of learning that empowers learners to thrive and succeed.

Define the targeted geographical area from which the proposed school is expected to draw a significant number of its students.

We anticipate that most students will be from the Mora area and the surrounding region where students are either enrolled at Mora Independent Schools, or the nearest schools in San Miguel County, or are homeschooled. Surrounding areas are Angel Fire, Peñasco, and Taos. There are no state-authorized charter schools in PEC District 8.

Describe the student population including key demographic data (academic performance, home languages, English Learners, and special education populations).

In Mora and its surrounding communities, students live in households that are mostly Hispanic, have educational backgrounds beyond the level of a high school diploma, and have access to internet at home. About a third use SNAP benefits, and about a quarter experience poverty. Many households earn outside of the Mora area, commuting to Angel Fire, Taos, Las Vegas, and other locations that provide better economic opportunities. We anticipate that the students we enroll will reflect similar traits to the average of all area charter schools, with higher than national, state, and regional averages for students with disabilities.

	Total Enrollment	SPED (NM 17%)	ELL (NM 16%)	Ethnicity/Race (Hispanic/POC)	SNAP	Home Internet	Some + college	Economically Disadvantaged
Mora	445	<10%	masked	86% / 45%	---	51.3%	No data	29%
LVCS	1117	<6%	22.4%	74% / 46%	32.4%	70.4%	67.3%	19.7%
West LV	1575	15%	21.9%	82% / 48%	66.1%	72.7%	53.8%	38%
Taos	2224	19.6%	16.8%	51% / 33%	24%	83%	79.9	15.6%
Cimarron	370	14.7%	masked	34% / 19%	27.7%	81.7%	No data	6%
total/avg	5731	13%	20 %	65% / 38%	30%	72%	67%	22%

National Center for Learning Disabilities https://nclد.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Snapshot-SoLD-06102023-web_nm.pdf

US Census Quick Facts - Mora County, NM. July 2024. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/moracountynewmexico>

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). <https://nces.ed.gov/Programs/Edge/ACSDashboard/3501860>

NMPED STARS <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/information-technology/stars>

NM Vistas, 2022-2023. Data for MISD, LVCS, WLSL, CMS, TMSD. <https://www.nmvistas.org/>

Summary Table: Charter Schools from Las Vegas, Penasco, Taos, Angel Fire	% Students w/Disability	% Economically Disadvantaged	% ELL
Average of All These Area Charter Schools	20%	30%	6%

Most significant in our demographic assessment is the vital information that cannot be encapsulated in statistics: Mora Valley is rich in history, culture, community, and natural beauty. In recent years, catastrophic events including the COVID pandemic and the Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon fires, have disrupted the longstanding community resources that families rely on. In this rural area where kinship networks and deep ties to the land are central to household health and quality of life, the recent disasters have impacted the community's level of need for support. The long arc of recovery is ongoing; rebuilding and restoring generational vitality – for the land and its people – will take a community that is resilient and resourced, and our program seeks to be a source of support for these learners and their families.

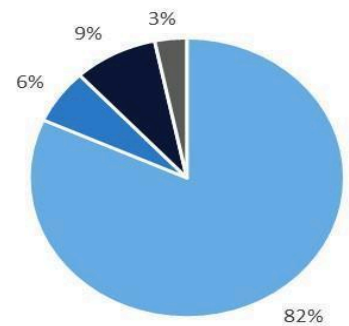
Identify where these students are most likely being educated currently and why they are expected to choose the proposed charter school for their future educational needs.

Based on observation, shared experiences, and anecdotal data with parents and teachers, there are two apparent trends for families in their schooling choices:

- **Mora vs. Las Vegas:** Many Mora families choose to enroll their children in a Las Vegas school. For a variety of reasons, the proximity of Las Vegas offers a choice for families seeking alternatives to the local Mora district.
- **Traditional Classroom vs. Homeschool:** Another trend is for families to choose homeschooling as an alternative to traditional instruction. We estimate roughly 15-20% of Mora's student enrollment is homeschooled - more than 5 times the state average of 3%.

(graphic from: Johns Hopkins University, Institute for Education Policy, 2024. <https://education.jhu.edu/edpolicy/policy-research-initiatives/homeschool-hub/>)

New Mexico SY21/22



■ TPS ■ Private ■ Charter ■ Homeschool

Collins Lake Outdoor School as a Charter Choice

While there are some charter schools in surrounding communities, Collins Lake Outdoor School is unique in its offering of nature-based learning in an outdoor environment. As a **choice for learners**, we provide the thrill of outdoor learning and the support of a low teacher/learner ratio. As a **choice for families**, we provide a nurturing and diverse learning

community that embraces the needs of each student. And as a **choice for educators**, we provide a healthy and sustaining work environment, an integrated curriculum, and professional development support.

We know that New Mexico educates students with IEP's at a rate higher than the national average, yet underutilizes SPED funds; many students with IEP's are not receiving services they need to access learning. We know that special education sets accessibility requirements such as a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), and the 11 considerations for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) that emphasize behavioral supports and modified means of engagement. We are committed to inclusive instruction that can satisfy these requirements and meet the individual needs of all learners. With a student-centered and family-supportive approach to the IEP process, we know we can address and accommodate diverse learning.

We understand that many New Mexico schools are struggling to serve their students, as evidenced by low student outcomes, low attendance rates, and low literacy rates. Nature-Based Learning (NBL) has a causal relationship with improved learner outcomes that traditional classroom learning lacks: it improves cognitive skills and executive functioning, social skills and belonging, and physical and mental wellness. In our natural learning environment we can:

- provide holistic development that focuses on kindergarten-readiness skills and closes the gap for early learners
- improve literacy through science-of-reading and instill the joy of reading with a language-rich environment
- boost math skills through play-based learning that builds cognitive skills along a developmental progression.

We understand that outdoor education and NBL is better for all learning - not just for learning about nature - as a unique and versatile resource that benefits all learners, making it a viable and valuable educational choice.

We commit to accessibility for diverse learners. In response to the Yazzie-Martinez mandate to provide accessible education for learners with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and for learners with disabilities, we recognize the responsibility to meet expectations from families that their children are given the chance to become successful learners. We believe that effective education is a shared effort that includes cultural leaders, field experts, mentors, and role-models who can prepare learners beyond academic content, and empower them with the social and practical skills to pursue their life goals. We see our commitment to meeting the needs of learners and expectations of families as a primary reason for Mora students to choose Collins Lake Outdoor School.

Provide evidence that the applicant team has assessed community need for the type of school proposed (e.g., objective surveys or other measures of local demand for the educational program).

Data from informal inquiries, as well as formal surveys and letters of support, informs us that there is an indicated need for our type of school. Educators, parents, and students have expressed positive feedback on the inviting beauty of the environment, the level of engagement with learners, and the diversity of learning experiences at Collins Lake Ranch. With our unique outdoor-based program for diverse learners, we have assessed that the significant need for our school will be reflected in local demand. Our three-part outreach plan includes: surveys and letters of support, community workshops in surrounding areas, and a culminating event for families to enjoy a day of outdoor learning. Objective measures and data collection and analysis, such as questionnaires and interviews, will be included in our assessment. Preliminary surveys that went to local homeschool families have already yielded valuable data for us.

Identify significant innovative features that the school will implement to help realize the school's vision/mission.

Collins Lake Outdoor School will be uniquely located on 300 acres of forested land, home to the beauty and biodiversity of northern New Mexico as a living presence in our daily learning. Focus areas include: land ethic and cultural heritage, adaptive arts and outdoor recreation, and environmental education and sustainability. Our safe and ADA accessible outdoor campus is also wifi accessible, allowing learners to incorporate online and digital technology into their learning. Here learners can make learning meaningful: explore, inquire, engage, play and take risks, build identity and community, attain self-efficacy and autonomy - and gain learning skills that last a lifetime.

More than a connection with nature, Collins Lake Outdoor School is supported by a connection with community; educators, leaders, and artists who provide learners with mentoring, shared knowledge, and healing. Currently, the Collins Lake Outdoor Education program partners with outdoor educators to build a network of resources specific to adaptive outdoor learning; specialized learning materials and educational resources for learners such as outdoor equipment and winter gear will be provided as part of our commitment to removing economic barriers to outdoor engagement for our learners. Additionally, our program is in partnership with New Mexico Highlands University: the School of Education and the Institute for Culturally and Linguistically Relevant Learning and Teaching will play a central role guiding effective

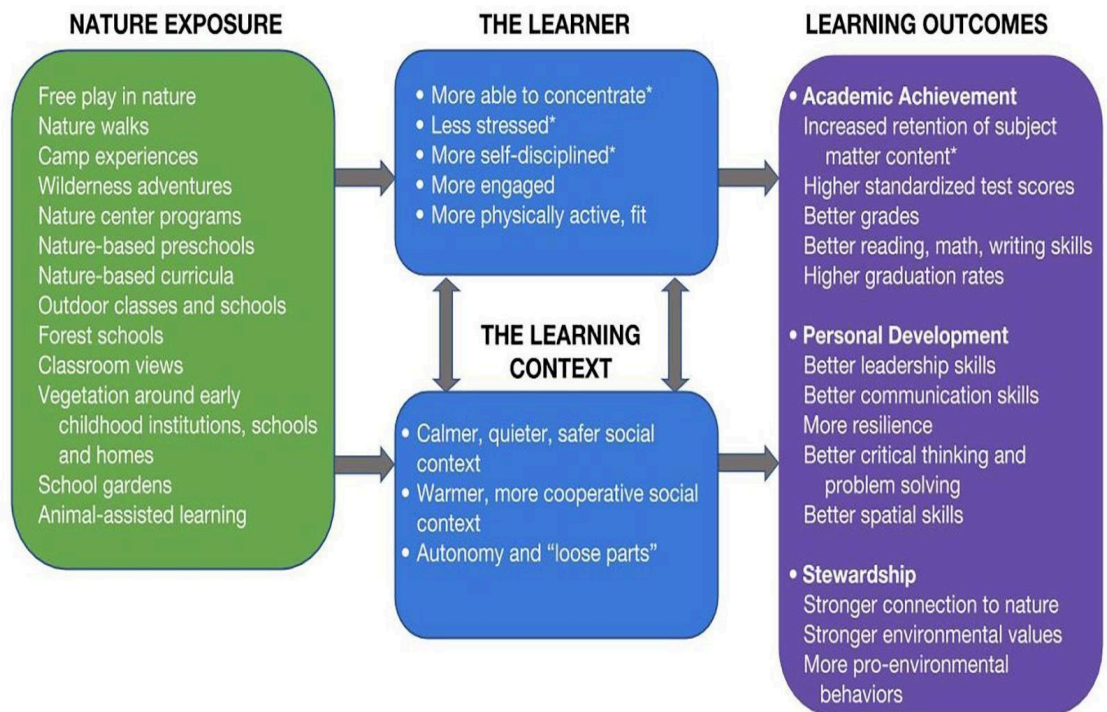
instructional programming, and teacher development. We intend to support new teachers and retain high-quality teachers, especially special education teachers through this partnership. Sharing resources and responsibility for educational engagement is a long-standing practice at Collins Lake and is central to the culture of our learning community. This culturally rich and well-resourced community makes Collins Lake Outdoor School a place for high-quality learning where 21st century learners can thrive.

Describe how the school will be more effective in terms of academic achievement than the schools currently serving the targeted student population. Provide any data you have, to support this assumption.

Outdoor Learning and Special Education in New Mexico

New Mexico schools serve special education students at a higher rate than the national average, yet many districts are challenged by underutilization of special education funding. Students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) make up almost half of all students receiving special services under IDEA, with most of those students from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. As the number of students with disabilities increases, particularly those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Developmental Delay (DD), the need for accessible learning grows. Current conditions in traditional classrooms show that schools are struggling, and students are stressed. High disenrollment and low achievement rates have compelled families to seek alternative options for their children’s learning needs.

Recent research advances show that the benefits of outdoor education – especially for students who are not effectively served by traditional classroom settings – make it not only an undeniable benefit for all learners but also a significant resource for learners with special needs. Causal evidence shows that outdoor learning has a positive impact on academic outcomes such as better reading, writing, and math skills, and higher test scores.



(Kuo, Ming, Barnes M., Jordan C., 2019.

Do Experiences With Nature Promote Learning? Converging Evidence of a Cause-and-Effect Relationship, *Frontiers in Psychology*.)

NM State Snapshot, 2023 National Center for Learning Disabilities.

https://nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Snapshot-SoLD-06102023-web_nm.pdf

Instead of a struggling system, we offer a beautiful inclusive environment with specialized faculty, daily learning in nature and community, and meaningful learning experiences that provide robust and holistic teaching of cognitive, physical, and social-emotional skills and wellness. Given the current challenges and lack of services for students with IEP’s, and the wealth of benefits outdoor learning provides for diverse learners, Collins Lake Outdoor School is aptly prepared to provide evidence-based instruction that will improve educational outcomes.

[Handwritten Signature]

1/13/25

Signature of primary point of contact

Date