



# COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT



## APPLICATION DETAILS

<b>School Name: Gem Prep Meridian South</b>	
Contact Person: Jennifer Ashmead	Contact Email: <a href="mailto:jenniferashmead@gemprep.org">jenniferashmead@gemprep.org</a>
Application Type: Start Up	Grant Budget: \$800,000
Grades Served: K-12	New Seats Created: 574
Application Status: Funded	

**RUBRIC**

**A. Grant Project Goals**

*Identify 3-5 grant project goals and justify each goal in terms of its value in supporting the planning and implementation of your proposed school. All grant spending, including future revisions to your budget, must fit clearly within one of your stated project goals.*

**Reviewer Comments – Grant Project Goals**

**Strengths:**

- Required goals adequately meet the rubric. All other goals are tightly aligned to the vision/mission of the school. A strength of this portion of the rubric is that most goals build upon one another. Another strength is providing cross-site collaboration in order to offer students high quality course work without regard to location.
- The grant goals reflect expectations for CSP grantees and for meeting the mission of the school.
- The applicant includes 5 goals: student enrollment, advanced coursework opportunities, blended/remote instruction, meet/exceed proficiency/growth in ELA & Math, and representative demographic. Goals are measurable over time. Goals are aligned to the mission.

**Weaknesses:**

- Including baseline measures would strengthen this section and provide a better understanding on if goals are appropriately rigorous.

**B. Educational Philosophy, Instructional Practices, and Curriculum**

Fully *describe and justify* the design of the academic program in terms of the educational philosophy, instructional practices, and curriculum that will be utilized to meet the school’s performance objectives. Be sure to include key design elements, references supporting its validity and alignment to state and federal requirements, and rationale for why this education model was chosen and how it will produce strong outcomes for the unique community and student population the school will be located within.

**Reviewer Comments - Educational Philosophy, Instructional Practices, and Curriculum Strengths:**

- The school provides all-day Kindergarten and begins building college competencies at this level utilizing a K-12 graduate profile. Shifts in responsibility are developmentally appropriate at the younger grades and moves toward independence as students grow developmentally and academically.
- The grant cites evidence based curricula, practices, etc., and compares academic growth at other Gem Prep Schools to that of the state, which is favorable all areas.
- Curriculum in the core academic areas is reviewed on an annual basis.
- Well-developed instructional strategies and research-based curriculum choices are evident.
- Integrated use of technology to personalize learning and leverage learning opportunities.
- Weekly data conferences with students to set and track goals.
- Culture of high expectations through reflection, recognition, and accountability.
- Electives identified that provide deeper application of learning.
- Integrated early college from 11<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Research citations supporting educational program design.
- Data is presented to demonstrate the effectiveness of Gem Prep schools’ curriculum (specific curricular resources identified by content area) regarding standards in terms of performance on state and interim assessments.
- Use of computer adaptive programs to reinforce learning.
- Autonomies around teacher selection and retention, innovative instructional methods, extended-day kindergarten, and college-ready competencies are articulated.
- The types and quantities of technology are outlined in the project budget.

**Weaknesses:**

- How does the Gem Prep Meridian South anticipated demographic compare to other Gem Prep schools, and how with this campus achieve similar outcome results?

**C. Teaching and Learning**

Fully *describe and justify* the design of the instructional strategy in terms of the educational philosophy, instructional practices, and curriculum that will be utilized to meet the school’s performance objectives. Be sure to include key design elements, references supporting its validity and alignment to state and federal requirements, and rationale for why this strategy was chosen and how it will produce strong outcomes for the unique community and student population the school will serve.

**Reviewer Comments – Teaching and Learning**

**Strengths:**

- GPMS has outlined a comprehensive approach to teaching and learning utilizing a school, classroom and individual approach to data collection in order to meet the needs of students.
- Teachers meet with the Principal one time per month and students with their teachers one time per month to analyze and set goals for improvement.
- Students learn in a variety of ways that include small group, on-line adaptive programs, digitally in class as teachers instruct from a different location, and after school tutoring.
- The school has an extensive and thorough plan for assessments, the review of data and adapting to student need.
- Use of benchmark, diagnostic, and local assessments to inform instructional decisions as part of the RtI process.

**Weaknesses:**

- While the processes of identifying student need are identified, the specific instructional strategies and methods of differentiation were not clear beyond use of assessments to guide selection of strategies.

**D. Student Academic Achievement Standards**

As an independently governed public school, charter schools need to ensure plans, systems, and tools for strong oversight and monitoring in the areas of academic performance. In this section, persuade the reader that your school will have rigorous goals and adequate oversight to ensure quality implementation, operation, and accountability.

**Reviewer Comments – Student Academic Achievement Standards**

**Strengths:**

- The school implements a teamwork approach to ensure students' needs are being met and policy decisions are made based on school, classroom, and individual student assessment data.
- Time is set aside in order to analyze data and make decisions.
- An Assessment Framework for all grade levels is evidenced in the grant application.
- A data-driven culture is evident and well developed.
- A comprehensive Performance Management plan is articulated, including assessments, analysis, and by whom.
- Specific interim benchmarks are not identified, but a plan is in place to identify these once baseline data is collected.

**Weaknesses:**

- This section would be strengthened by inclusion of information concerning data management and how data will be kept and secured.

**E. Student Demand and Community/Local Support**

Schools funded under the CSP subgrant must ensure they are in tune with their communities' needs and priorities. In this section schools will document their vitality and long-term sustainability through demonstrating their dedication to developing and maintaining community partnerships and connections.

**Reviewer Comments – Student Demand and Community/Local Support**

**Strengths:**

- GPMS has a robust recruitment plan that intentionally focuses on a diverse student population. Professionals were part of the plan and a modest budget is put forth in this effort.
- Parent engagement consists of both informational (communications from the school to the families), as well as participatory that includes volunteering and sitting on advisory committees. CPMS also engages families outside of school hours (conferences, performances, etc.).
- Several outside community partnerships were mentioned.
- Community need has been demonstrated in addition to a variety of efforts for student recruitment and family engagement.
- The applicant articulates an outreach plan that in the past has resulted in populations with equal or more diversity than the local school district.
- The school plans to employ various communication strategies through a secured digital application; parents will be able to engage with several advisory committees and PTO and a variety of engagements and events engage parents in school activities.

**Weaknesses:**

- The applicant does not identify the results of its outreach efforts to date.
- The application would be strengthened by referencing the amount of parent and community involvement to date.
- Community support for the school is not described.

**F. Effectively Serving All Students**

Charter schools are obligated to take specific actions to ensure an open, fair, non-selective method of attracting and enrolling students, and all charter schools need to be ready to serve the group of students that choose to attend. In this section, describe your plan to offer a continuum of services for all types of students, including those that are educationally disadvantaged (such as low-income, special education, English learners, homeless, migrant and other at-risk students) and gifted and talented.

**Reviewer Comments – Effectively Serving All Students**

**Strengths:**

- GPMS has a sound program to address the needs of all students and an expectation that all will succeed. As students become more independent they are part of the process as a team member to analyze individual goals and give input on what needs to be improved and what challenges may still exist.
- The grant explicitly outlines how students receive access to an equitable education program and the structures in place to move them forward academically and socially.
- School has identified a multitude of supports to provide for its students.
- While specific needs of student subgroups was not addressed in detail, the types of interventions and supports offered would sufficiently address the needs of the identified demographic anticipated.
- Use of a college prep advisor to help develop individual student journeys and provide universal supports to all students.
- SPED supports, staffing, and qualifications are addressed.
- A school lunch program will be provided.
- Busing services will be provided, including special needs and extracurricular.

**Weaknesses:**

- The application would be strengthened by addressing which funds will be utilized or the school lunch program and how the nutritional needs of the anticipated student population will be adequately addressed through the school lunch program.

**G. Staffing and Professional Development Plan**

Describe the approach to staffing, inclusive of ratios, positions, etc. required for effective implementation of the chosen education model. Further, describe the process in which all staff will be supported in their ongoing professional development.

**Reviewer Comments – Staffing and Professional Development Plan**

**Strengths:**

- It is evident professional development is seen as a priority for GPMS. Sufficient days (20 per year) and time during the week (2 hours) are set aside for professional development activities for all staff. New staff members are provided summer PD and identified master teachers provide many of these activities. The Principal is in classrooms on a consistent basis and utilizes an online tool that provides immediate feedback and coaching to teachers. The feedback is based on teachers' individualized professional learning plans.
- A staffing plan, including recruitment and retention strategies, is articulated.
- Engaging early in recruitment process to attract the best staff and have longer to vet candidates.
- 20 days of professional development in addition to weekly 2-hour sessions.
- Teacher coaching and immediate feedback through use of an online tool.
- Increased autonomy for master teachers.

**Weaknesses:**

- Didn't see evidence of hiring for equity or intentionally seeking to have a diverse teaching staff.

## H. Financial Management and Monitoring Plan

As independently governed public schools, charters are fully responsible for ensuring quality financial management practices and ongoing financial stability. In this section, explain your school's plan to be compliant, strategic, and responsible with finances and business services.

### **Reviewer Comments – Financial Management and Monitoring Plan**

#### **Strengths:**

- The budget is conservative and has a built in reserve in order to weather any shortfalls. There is a contingency plan for opening in the event the CSP grant is unsuccessful.
- GPMS has developed a "Running Start" program in order to orientate educationally disadvantaged and at-risk students and their parents for a successful entry into the school.
- The Budget Narrative and the budget align to the grant narrative.
- The existing CMO of Gem Prep has extensive experience in acquiring facilities, running school operations, and being financially sound. Other grant opportunities provide additional support that is needed.
- A 3-year budget is provided that seems to include reasonable assumptions and produces reserves each year.
- A completed CSP Budget Template is provided.
- Additional start-up funding is outlined under revenues in the operating budget.
- A facility plan and timeline is provided for a facility to be built, which is sufficiently sized for the educational program and student population.
- Facility costs (bond payment + facility operations) will start at 25% of revenues for Year 1, but reduce to 20% for Year 2, and 19% for Year 3.
- Staffing for SPED is very lean with high case loads for SPED Staff (~30 students per SPED teacher).

#### **Weaknesses:**

- No evidence of implementation by key personnel in the Budget Narrative.
- The budget narrative does not include key personnel or target dates for specific purchasing.

### **I. Board Capacity and Governance Structure**

A competent, trained governing board is essential to the success of a public charter school. In this section the school will demonstrate how it has developed a strong governing board with a diverse set of skills. Board members should understand their roles and responsibilities and have in place a transition plan and ongoing professional development to maintain board strength going forward.

#### **Reviewer Comments – Board Capacity and Governance Structure**

**Strengths:**

- Ongoing training and materials are provided to all Board members. Board members have training opportunities through the state, and through self-identified professional development needs.
- Many members sitting on the board have previous experience with Gem Prep Schools and it is evident the board is comprised of expertise in the areas of finance, academics, governance and facilities.
- Monitoring through a data dashboard is presented at each board meeting in order to keep the pulse of the school in the forefront and prioritize needs.
- Decisions are made that speak to the vision and mission of the school.
- GPMS is part of a management organization that has an existing, well-developed governing board that is committed to ongoing professional development.
- Experienced board that has successfully oversaw the launch of schools that outperformed local schools and state averages.
- A board handbook is utilized, as well as standing committees and a data dashboard for monitoring performance on academics, finance, and operations.
- A skills matrix is provided to demonstrate expertise and experience of board members.
- Board professional development is outlined.

**J. School Leadership and Management**

This section should describe the intended leadership structure of your school and demonstrate a strong leadership and staffing plan that ensures high-quality implementation and sustainability of the school.

**Reviewer Comments – School Leadership and Management**

**Strengths:**

- Experience and success in other GEM Prep schools has led to providing strong evidence in this portion of the rubric. Key factors of proactive planning and intentionality are evident, especially when developing a shared vision that includes a secondary instructional model handbook. The principal will be thoroughly trained in the instructional model.
- Strong, seasoned leadership and structures are in place to successful launch a new school as part of this network.
- Support from central network’s executive team (includes CEO, CAO, CFO, COO, and Chief of New Schools).
- Some risk factors are identified.

**Weaknesses:**

- The application would be strengthened with more information on the selection and desired qualifications of the Principal.
- The application could include a broader review of potential risks and operational challenges.

## Overall comments

**Reviewer Comments**

- It is evident that GPMS has thoroughly addressed all areas of the rubric in a comprehensive manner. Experience running other GEM Prep schools has led the team to identify successes that will continue with GPMS focusing on technology and college preparation.
- Mitigation of risk factors have been identified in the areas of facilities, enrollment, and on an effective, uniform instructional program of excellence.
- This evaluator found no overall weaknesses in the grant application.
- Gem Prep Schools is poised to successfully launch another school as part of their network. Meridian South will provide an outstanding educational opportunity in an area that suffers from extreme overcrowding in public schools.
- The application is very detailed and presents a strong educational program with many key features.
- The school plan seems feasible and likely to result in a quality school implementation.
- In general there are parts of the application that focus on the network model without sufficient attention to how it is suited to the particular students to be served on this campus. In this way, the broader risk that Gem Prep's model success may not transfer as strongly with this specific community could be more directly addressed.