



# COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

IDAHO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT



## APPLICATION DETAILS

<b>School Name: The Academy</b>	
Contact Person: Joel Lovstedt	Contact Email: <a href="mailto:joel.lovstedt@academycharter.net">joel.lovstedt@academycharter.net</a>
Application Type: Expansion	Grant Budget: \$800,000
Grades Served: K-8	New Seats Created: 282
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:**

- The grant goals are appropriate and align to expenditures and budget.
- Connor Academy's safety and learning goals are well aligned to the mission and vision for the school. The goals are well justified and three are trackable with specific measures and outcomes. One goal does address ISAT reading and math outcomes.
- Four goals are presented that align with the school's mission. Goal 1 addresses representative demographic (though does not state explicitly being within 5%). Goal 2 addresses ISAT proficiency and growth (monitoring/benchmark assessments are also identified). Other goals include the learning environment and curriculum. All goals have measurable and trackable outcomes-focused targets, as presented.

##### **Weaknesses:**

- There is no goal related to ensuring the student demographics are within 5% of those of the student population in the region.
- Concern that, as written, Goal #2 excludes from the target students who do not meet 90% attendance that the school is not held accountable for engaging and supporting students and their families with attendance issues. Perhaps there is opportunity to adjust the language, if this is not the intention.

**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 Harbor School method, along with other cited pedagogy, follow the instructional practices used in their current successful school model.
- Technology is used in a variety of ways.
- Spanish instruction begins in 2nd grade.
- This application goes into great detail regarding the scope and sequence of various content areas. It is easy to envision how and when a student will acquire knowledge and skills. Connor Academy's curriculum and pedagogical practices have clearly resulted in positive outcomes so far.
- The applicant provides a description of key design elements of the school, including well-articulated instructional methods and school culture/design; these include, direct instruction, integrated character development, scaffolding of learning, vertical alignment, student concept boards and math manipulatives, connecting learning to real-life situations, explicit and systematic reading instruction, the Spalding Method, special emphasis on vocabulary instruction, etc. The curricular approach for each core content area is outlined. Spanish language, computer science, and music are also a core components of the school’s educational program.
- Idaho standards serve as the backbone of the educational approach, with English Language Arts, Math, and Science strongly emphasized.

**Weaknesses:**

- It is unclear by reading this application what the curriculum actually is. There are examples of activities and instructional practices but this application of course cannot document the entirety of the instructional program and after reading this I do not know where I would look to learn more.
- There is no description of how technology is used in student assessment, and there is no mention of charter school autonomies.
- Talks about the “well documented” and “successful results” of a variety of elements of the instructional approach, but no citations are provided to verify these. Further, the narrative does not utilize data-based evidence (such as previous performance data for the model) to justify the curricular choices.
- While the curricular approach is laid out for each core content area, no specific curriculum resources or curriculum development approach are identified.
- Behavior-related expectations are not directly identified.
- Use of technology is not addressed (though technology items are included in the CSP project budget request). While elements of technology utilization can be inferred from information scattered throughout the application, there is not a comprehensive picture presented describing the intended, integrated use of technology.
- Some autonomies and flexibilities utilized by the school are apparent, but these areas are not articulated directly.



**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:**

- Direct Instruction is outlined as a primary vehicle for teaching, but inquiry, discussion, problem-based learning are also methods outlined.
- A thorough explanation of strategies and pedagogy is outlined.
- The application gives a detailed overview of the various instructional methods used at Connor Academy, including examples and descriptions of how the methods differ from other instructional practices.
- Across sections B & C, various instructional practices are outlined (Individualized learning, discussion method, direct instruction, scaffolding, Inquiry, Subject Matter Method, etc.).
- Recognition of Howard Gardner's theory on multiple intelligences and its impact on teaching and learning.

**Weaknesses:**

- The range of differentiation is also not addressed here concerning interventions and systems of support, but is articulated somewhat in Section D.
- No mention of assessments or intervention in this section but is outlined in the next section.
- It is unclear how these various instructional methods are actually applied day to day at the school. There is no discussion in this section about student assessment, how differing needs are identified and addressed, or RTI/MTSS. It is covered elsewhere, albeit briefly and with little detail.
- The description of teaching and learning is very input focused.
- The narrative does not explain how classroom and/or standardized assessments will be utilized by teachers to identify individual student needs and to drive instructional adjustments and differentiation.



**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:**

- Problem-solving, Leadership and Curriculum teams all play a part in analyzing data, identifying student needs and making course corrections.
- Progress monitoring and classroom interventions are part of the RTI process.
- Connor Academy has a team in place that monitors student data.
- The application lists a suite of student assessments that are used across grades and content areas, all of which are quality tools. It also describes how often students are assessed depending on their intervention status.
- The applicant presents a performance management plan that monitors and reports progress toward performance expectations.
- A variety of assessments are identified (though not entirely clear as only abbreviations are utilized). A general process for data analysis, and the involved parties, is articulated.

**Weaknesses:**

- The application does not identify specific, quantifiable student learning goals or interim benchmarks (it mentions meeting or exceeding minimum ISAT requirements, but does not quantify those).
- There is little detail regarding how the Problem Solving Team decides which students have been successful or which need interventions.
- There is no discussion of how each classroom teacher uses and responds to data, nor how data is used to inform policy decisions.
- It is not clear what data systems will be utilized for housing and analyzing data.
- Use of formative assessments for driving instructional decisions is not articulated in the application.



**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:**

- The school recognizes a decrease in disadvantaged students and is committed to intentional efforts to reach this population in the community. They have an excellent reputation with extensive waitlists. They are widely known amongst community partners.
- It is noteworthy that Connor Academy has identified a decrease in low income student enrollment and has a plan in place to address this. The application lists a marketing budget and specific strategies that Connor Academy will use to continue to recruit students to the program.
- The school's involvement and outreach in the community is well documented.
- The application describes a very strong parental involvement program.
- Currently 550 students with consistent waitlist off ~300 students. This strong waitlist, combined with new developments, seems to justify the expansion of 282 seats K-8.
- Due to decrease in educationally disadvantaged student representation, the applicant will utilize marketing funds from the CSP project to intentionally market to increase the school's educationally disadvantaged student groups.
- Over the course of the project, the applicant intends to more than double its SPED student numbers and attract seven times their current number of Title I students (a 235-student increase).
- Use of facility for community-based programming in evenings and weekends.
- Parent engagement efforts include parent orientation, open houses, parent surveys, and volunteering.

**Weaknesses:**

- It may further strengthen the section to demonstrate waitlist numbers by grade level alongside numbers of students to be added for each grade level.
- It is unclear what role parents play in the school's decision-making processes.
- To achieve the diversified demographics outlined in the CSP Project proposal (32.86% Title I, 10.75% SPED, and 5% EL), the school would need designate all or nearly all of its 282-seat expansion to these student subgroups (which the application doesn't provide a clear strategy to achieve).



**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:**

- The school will apply for and begin a federally-subsidized lunch program.
- Transportation will be provided through bus hubs and bus passes.
- Staffing and professional development for serving student needs is in place.
- The school appears committed to serving students with 504 plans, IEP, ELL, or gifted needs.
- The application describes sufficient support activities for low income students, gifted students, students with special needs, and English learners. While not particularly above and beyond, the application nevertheless contains sufficient detail regarding required practices.
- It is noteworthy that Connor Academy is planning to begin providing free meals to qualifying students. Not doing so before, coupled with its transportation practices, may partially explain the drop in low income student enrollment.
- Programming for SPED and EL student seems generally appropriate and compliant, with staff training addressed. Supplemental ELA instruction and after-school reading is provided for economically disadvantaged and struggling students.
- Full food service will be added with the expansion.
- The applicant has worked with the local public transportation authority to secure bus routes associated with student needs, and bus passes are provided to qualifying students.

**Weaknesses:**

- It is not clear that Connor Academy's transportation plan meets the needs of all low income students who would like to attend the school.
- Over the scope of the project the applicant intends to increase their SPED population from 40 to 90 students, though a corresponding increase in SPED staffing is not articulated (though the operating budget does show an additional SPED hire, which would bring caseloads to 30 students each). With the increase in educationally disadvantaged students projected with the expansion, it would strengthen the application to articulate how these increased subgroup numbers will be accounted for in terms of school transportation. Likewise, extracurricular transportation provision should also be addressed.

**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:**

- The school has a sound plan for recruitment and has success hiring qualified staff (i.e., low staff turnover).
- Personalized PD plans, weekly collaborative meetings, yearly in-services show a comprehensive PD plan.
- New teachers undergo a two-week training period before school starts.
- Connor Academy's staffing practices sounds reasonable, and providing each teacher with at least one classroom aid surely helps the teaching staff.
- The recruitment plan described in the application is brief but adequate given the most promising avenues for finding teachers.
- Staff development activities appear sufficient.
- The application articulates a feasible staffing structure and a plan for recruiting and retaining quality staff.
- Articulation of coaching and a variety of professional development elements for instructional staff.
- Use of Danielson Framework for teacher evaluation. The Danielson Framework will be utilized for staff evaluation.

**Weaknesses:**

- This section would be strengthened through providing a timeline of both recruitment and professional development.



**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 organization is financially secure, owns its building, has high financial ratings, and demonstrates strong operational success. CSP funds will be used for one-time start up costs for this expansion.
- Connor Academy has a strong financial position and has clearly made sound financial decisions so far. The 3-year budget appears reasonable and in line with the rest of the application. There is no indication that the budget would not enable the school to meet its goals for low income and at-risk students.
- The school enters expansion from a solid financial footing with a significant unrestricted cash balance, well exceeding the best practice of 60 days cash on hand and entering the expansion build with an investment-grade bond rating. The applicant's operating budget show healthy generation of reserves during the course of the expansion, and facility costs that remain below 15% of revenues.
- A CSP budget narrative is provided that articulates the areas for which CSP funding is requested. The CSP budget template and 3-year operating budget are included. Facility plans to expand by adding an additional building and associated timeline are included within the Budget Narrative.

**Weaknesses:**

- Risks and mitigation strategies are not addressed.
- Facilities considerations are mentioned but the application does not contain a facilities plan.
- There is no implementation plan with personnel and timelines shown.
- The CSP budget narrative and budget template are not sufficiently detailed to determine timeline for purchases and key staff involved. Elements of the CSP budget narrative and funding request are not articulated within the context of the Grant Goals identified in Section B and so it is unclear if and how all spending items align.
- No articulation of qualifications of finance/operations staff or specific plans to mitigate risk.
- The specific details of the facility addition are not articulated.
- Staff for implementing grant are not identified.
- No identification of risk, or mitigation thereof, is articulated.

**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:**

- The existing Academy board is well poised to handle the expansion and oversight of the new school. They are committed to continual development and represent a wide range of expertise.
- Connor Academy's board role and bylaws are appropriate and comprehensive. Board training as described is sufficient, though perhaps a little thin, being based on one book. The application explains the board's commitment to the school's mission.
- The board member composition presents a reasonably qualified board with a variety of skills and expertise. Board training is outlined. Areas the board reviews for performance and accountability are identified.

**Weaknesses:**

- The school could invest more time in ongoing board training than what is described here.
- No articulation of full scope of existing board policies and procedures. A board self-evaluation annually is not addressed.

**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:**

- The experience of the leadership team will provide for smooth and thoughtful transition with the expansion. Roles and responsibilities were outlined (though not through an org chart) to show the range of functions within the team.
- The organizational and management structure described in the application is quite thorough and seems well conceived. The application describes oversight of the new expansion building and division of labor among Connor Academy's leadership team. The application dedicates a good deal of thought to risks and mitigation strategies.
- The school will have two full-time administrators, and duties are split to cover the school's overall leadership needs, including one on-site at each building (K-5 & 6-8). Other administrative staff and action committees are outlined.
- The applicant clearly presents three relevant areas of risk with mitigating strategies for each; these risks are the same ones highlighted by technical assistance experts in terms of preserving the existing school culture and institutions during expansion and replication projects.

**Weaknesses:**

- Evaluation process for the school Superintendent is unclear.

## Overall comments

**Reviewer Comments**

- This new (expansion) school is well-positioned to open with full enrollment, a strong governing body and leadership team, and a community of support around them.
- Connor Academy is clearly a successful school with a committed board and staff as well as clear established norms and procedures. The application makes it obvious that leadership has hand picked classroom practices and learning methods across grades and content areas.
- There is ample detail regarding Connor Academy's instructional philosophy and the way in which the school seeks to differentiate itself from other schools.
- It is notable that the school is implementing strategies to target low income students, a student group that has seen declining enrollment.
- The school's parent and community engagement strategies are strong.
- The application did not address some elements of the grading rubric, especially in the financial management section. In addition, the services Connor Academy provides to students with special needs, while sufficient, sound compliance-oriented, at least according to this application. The schools assessment and continuous improvement strategies were also vague.
- The school enters its proposed expansion project with a sound financial footing, a large wait list, and skilled and experienced staff. Clearly there is community demand for the model and for the expansion. Overall the application follows the outline of the selection criteria and articulates a thoughtfully curated educational program.
- The document could use improved citation and reference of elements that are backed by performance data, research, or best practice. The school does not present a comprehensive picture of the academic performance of the existing school upon which the replication is based.
- Many sections have criteria that were missed and not included in the narrative.

