

Executive Summary: Connor Academy is built on the Harbor Method. Harbor Schools are child-centered educational programs built on high expectations for both student and academic endeavors. The Harbor method proactively sets up an environment that allows students to focus on learning while in a safe, secure setting.

Mission: The Academy's mission is to educate and nurture student confidence and achievement with a safe, character-building teaching method so that students become capable of pursuing any subject. They will understand how to learn and enjoy the process of learning.

Vision: The Academy's vision is to provide teachers, parents, and students with highly successful, research-based teaching tools and methods.

Community Need & Interest: The Academy provides a high-quality public-school choice for approximately 13,000 students in the Pocatello/Chubbuck area. Since opening in 2006, The Academy has operated at 97% total capacity nearly every year. We have a reputation for providing a safe, caring environment with a rigorous curriculum. Our students are well-behaved and academically-minded who distinguish themselves in high school. Because of this, we continue to maintain waiting lists following each annual lottery.

Recently we have seen accelerated population growth in our area. New construction is at an all-time high, and there is a continued demand for more seats in our school. The Academy Board of Directors proposes to address this deficit by expanding our enrollment capacity from 550 to 850 by adding a third track of K-8 students.

To accomplish this expansion, we will be dividing our school into two programs. Grades K-5th will remain in our current building, and grades 6-8th will move to our new facility. This expansion will allow us to continue and enrich our current successful program, better focus on

the developmental needs of our students and expand our capacity to support disadvantaged students.

We are submitting this proposal for Communities of Excellence funding to supplement the state and federal funds to support the additional students from this expansion to offer a state-of-the-art education to more students and continue our tradition of success.

A. Grant Project Goals

Grant Project Goal #1: The Academy will add 279 high-quality K-8 charter seats while maintaining a balanced demographic of students representing the local community.

The Academy will accomplish this by building a new three-track 6th-8th grade school building and converting our existing building from a two-track K-8th building to a three-track K-5th building. By adding a third track of K-8 students, we will increase the number of children who will have access to our high-quality program.

Grant Project Goal #2: The Academy will prepare students to exceed state proficiency and growth benchmarks for English Language Arts and Math. We expect 85% of our full-time students (90%+ attendance) in grades K-8 to grow at least one grade level annually in English Language Arts and Math.

Language Arts: Language arts progress for K-3rd grade will be measured and monitored using Core Phonics Survey, iStation Reading Composite, and the Spalding Spelling & Fluency Assessment. K-3rd grade students testing below grade level in reading at the beginning of the school year will be offered additional support through Title 1 services or after-school reading programs. The Academy uses the ISAT to measure Language Arts growth for 4th through 8th grade.

Mathematics: Math progress for K-3rd grade is measured and monitored using iReady Math Composite and ISAT (3rd grade). The ISAT and iReady composite assessments measure Math growth in 4th through 8th grades. The Academy's mission and vision require a direct instruction learning environment, with a spiraling curriculum that reviews previously taught material to reinforce retention. This goal aligns with our vision and mission by challenging the use of research-based effective teaching techniques.

Grant Project Goal #3: The Academy will provide a safe, caring learning environment for students, parents, and staff.

The Board of Directors of The Academy is committed to operating a safe, caring performance-based charter school in the Pocatello area. Our philosophy is that when there is a low threat and academic content is highly challenging, accelerated learning takes place. We expect 90% of our students to report feeling safe as measured by average daily attendance (95%+), as well as through local and state school environment surveys to students, parents, and staff. This goal directly aligns to a cornerstone of our mission statement: "(to) nurture student confidence and achievement with a safe, character-building teaching method."

Grant Project Goal #4: The Academy will provide an enriched curriculum for all students in 2nd through 8th grades

Academy students are well-grounded in the core curriculum (reading, writing, math, science, and social studies) and traditionally score above state proficiency scores. We will continue to exceed the state proficiency and growth standards in Math and ELA. Students in 2nd through 8th grades receive an enriched curriculum that includes Spanish, Computer Science & Literacy, Music Practice & Theory, and Physical Education. This curricular enrichment aligns with our

vision that “all students share in an increased opportunity for expanded learning through fine arts, foreign language, and technology programs.”

B. Educational Philosophy, Instructional Practices, and Curriculum

Educational Philosophy: The Academy Charter School’s philosophy is that when there is low threat and content is highly challenging, accelerated learning occurs. We believe that all children are capable of more than we imagine and that we unlock their potential through high expectations, a rigorous, fast-paced curriculum, and dynamic character education.

Instructional Practices: The Harbor School Method is the structured foundation of our instructional practices. This method is an integrated model designed to educate children to be capable graduates ready to contribute to a democratic society. The Harbor Method is an instructional approach that provides students with a coherent learning system from grade to grade. It is a synthesis of multiple instructional strategies that are well-documented for their effects on learning. Instruction of concepts and skills is frequent and integrated into multiple contexts. Concepts and skills are not taught in isolation but incorporated throughout the day. Teachers motivate students through instructional design and high expectations. Students develop a learning-ready posture through intentional instruction on attention. The Harbor Method does not separate the development of character in children from the development of academic skills. Harbor-based schools utilize the curriculum for reading, language arts, and math, including the Idaho State Standards as a foundation.

The positive effects of direct instruction have been consistently documented over five decades and is the preferred teaching method at the Academy. Teachers skillfully scaffold student learning, building on their success from year to year and increasing the cognitive demand.

Instruction is fast-paced to develop the targeted knowledge or skill and the ability to focus and attend.

Math Instruction: The hallmark instructional strategy of the Harbor Method is the Student Concept Board. Concept boards encourage student participation and reinforce essential and accelerated curriculum objectives. Teachers display daily concepts on class whiteboards to introduce simple ideas, which are then expanded and reviewed throughout the day. Students respond by engaging in oral recitation and joining in choral response. This group participation provides a safe environment for students to learn in and helps teachers monitor each child's progress and provide immediate feedback.

Teachers assess students' math skills through timed tests and teach with math manipulatives to deepen students' understanding. Teachers often incorporate these manipulatives in other instructional activities where they fit. Grade levels have daily number challenges to strengthen the problem-solving component of math. These challenges connect math to real-life situations, which is vital to the Academy philosophy.

Reading Instruction: Academy educators provide explicit and systematic instruction and must be well-versed in current pedagogical research findings. Teachers use the Spalding Method to teach the mechanics and linguistic characteristics because this method's successful results have been well-documented.

Vocabulary Instruction: Vocabulary development is a crucial component of The Academy Charter School. Students learn words from numerous sources, including the literature used at each grade level, 110 Words to Pass the SAT and ACT, and ISAT vocabulary lists. Students learn words in the context of daily teaching and through "whole-body learning," which uses

recitation, dramatization, and choral speaking. Teachers integrate new vocabulary into writing, speaking, and real-life contexts.

Writing Instruction: There are essential skills that contribute to the development of competent speakers and writers. Teachers use the Shurley Method to teach the mechanics and the linguistic characteristics of their language. The Harbor Method utilizes the Shurley Method because the successful results of this method have been well-documented. The Shurley Method gives students a grammatical foundation to be excellent writers and speakers. The understanding of the parts of speech is integrated into reading, writing and not practiced in isolation.

Curriculum

In keeping with The Academy Charter School's mission to prepare students to pursue any subject area, we recognize that such preparation is more than the assimilation of facts.

Proficiency in a discipline means that the student is a capable practitioner and has a sufficient foundation to pursue advanced study. The Academy emphasizes both the acquisition and application of knowledge.

The Academy Public Charter School curriculum contains both traditional academic subjects and additional language areas that make the Academy Charter unique. The Idaho State Department of Education's Standards and Benchmarks serves as the starting point enhanced with unifying themes and other creative methods. The subjects that comprise the curriculum are listed and briefly discussed below. The traditional core curriculum areas of language, arts, math, science, social studies remain strongly emphasized. The Academy Public Charter School will provide

solid preparation in the fundamental academic skills of reading, writing, mathematics, and science.

Language Arts: Students study language and literature by reading aloud, learning grammar, writing mechanics, vocabulary, and spelling instruction. The curriculum is literature-based.

Comprehension skills, grammar, and vocabulary integrate with the literature program.

Dramatization and memorization of accelerated vocabulary is a motivational aspect of the language arts experience. Student writing assignments align with student learning goals by using personal journal entries and creative, expository essays. Communication skills include speaking and writing.

Science & Health: The science curriculum is designed as a multi-year sequence, emphasizing hands-on experimentation and functional knowledge of scientific phenomena. This process approach lets students experience the excitement of science so they can better understand facts and concepts. Kindergarten through third-grade students will focus on the basic science process skills of observing, inferring, measuring, communicating, classifying, and predicting.

Fourth through eighth-grade students will add the integrated science process skills of identifying variables, constructing tables of data, constructing graphs, describing relationships between variables, acquiring and processing data, creating hypotheses, and designing investigations. As students progress through the curriculum, they deepen and extend their understanding of the basic principles of sciences through various scientific media and the development of subject-appropriate vocabulary skills. Students will study the earth, life, and physical sciences.

Math: The Academy Math program uses a fast-paced, direct teaching environment. In Kindergarten through 4th grades, students learn critical numeracy skills such as basic operations, properties of numbers, and estimations. From 5th through 8th grades, basic numeracy skills lead to Algebra, Geometry, and Statistics. The Academy structured its Math curriculum as a spiraling curriculum in which there is an iterative revisiting of topics, subjects, or themes throughout the course. A spiral curriculum is not simply the repetition of a topic taught. It also requires the deepening of it, with each successive encounter building on the previous one. With this approach, students as young as 1st grade are introduced, for example, to basic Algebra concepts and vocabulary.

Social Studies & Community Service: Each year, students learn good citizenship by being kind and respectful to others. Each grade level has developmentally appropriate service opportunities. In Social Studies, the primary grades (K-3rd) focus on Geography. The fourth-grade social studies curriculum focuses on the history and the geography of Idaho. In the 5th grade, students begin studying United States History (from its founding to the civil war era). Their capstone project is a multimedia State report presented to the class. Students learn public presentation and basic research skills (finding, verifying, and citing sources, avoiding copyright infringements). Sixth grade American History continues with the Civil War and through present-day current events. World History (Ancient Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Medieval Civilizations) and classical perspectives are taught in 7th grade. In 8th grade, students focus on the Constitution, the American Government system, and Economics. There is increased emphasis on community service in eighth grades as students apply their understanding to their

contributions to the world around them. We will seek out ways for the students to discover and experience responsibilities and rights as members of our democratic community.

Computer Literacy/Technology: At the Academy, we teach all students computer literacy in preparation for High School, College, and the working world. From Kindergarten through 2nd grade, students learn basic computer terminology, the parts and functions of a computer, and how to use the equipment properly. Educational computer games reinforce early reading and math concepts taught in the classroom and develop keyboarding skills. From 3rd grade through 8th grade, students use office software (Microsoft and Google Documents) through an iterative spiraling approach, similar to how math is taught, by revisiting and building upon topics, subjects, or themes from basic to advanced levels. Students learn internet safety, social media etiquette, Computer History, advanced terminology, and an introduction to coding and computer science.

Middle Grades Opportunity: We recognize that the junior high/middle school years are critical to a child's self-esteem and social development. We will construct a school building for the 6th through 8th grades within our school charter boundaries. We will be able to better focus on their unique developmental needs and provide an environment different from traditional junior high/middle school settings to create a learning atmosphere where students experience less stress more learning.

Foreign Language: Foreign language study is an integral and distinguishing aspect of the Academy Charter curriculum. We provide instruction in Spanish Language beginning in 2nd grade. Students learn to listen and understand the Spanish language through authentic dialogue. Students progressively learn to build comprehensible responses that lead them to

express likes and dislikes, family, home life, and other details about their surroundings.

Students will learn to write grammatically correct sentences and paragraphs in Spanish. Many Academy students successfully skip Spanish 1 in high school and go directly to Spanish 2.

Music: Research shows that Musical training helps students develop language and reasoning skills, have higher self-esteem and lower anxiety, and improve spatial intelligence. Students at the Academy attend music classes up to 5 times weekly in 30-minute increments. These classes teach music history, theory, and singing. Students sing and play in front of their class peers and perform at school concerts.

C. Teaching and Learning: Most teachers use indirect methods used to teach critical thinking skills. They assume that students will automatically learn to reason just by “*thinking.*”

Educational researchers have pointed out that learning how to think critically is not an automatic byproduct of studying certain subjects or simply asking to think about a topic.

Teachers provide students with opportunities to identify examples of a skill, or products of its use, before being expected to learn it. Skills are systematically and explicitly introduced.

Students need repeated practice over an extended period with corrective feedback before true mastery occurs. An overwhelming preponderance of educational research over the past 50 years indicates that direct instruction is an excellent method to teach students information, facts, and fundamental skills. Under the umbrella of direct instruction, there is an assortment of discrete instructional practices that will give students the tools and opportunity to work hard and successfully achieve their potential.

The Subject Matter Method presumes that an educated learner needs to know clearly defined skills and concepts best learned in an organized, sequential fashion. Traditionally, this approach

has been predominantly lecture-based. At the Academy, we have added computer-based learning to increase this method's efficiency and provide the opportunity for repeated practice.

The Inquiry & Problem-Solving Method suggests that learning occurs when individuals think critically and solve problems. This method's predominant premise is that it is essential to know how to retrieve and use the information, not just to have instant recall and possession of data.

The Individualized Learning Method attempts to personalize the learning process by allowing students to develop personal learning goals. The reasons for learning become one's curiosity and the personal applicability of the information learned.

The Discussion Method encourages learning through sharing information and teaches concepts within a group, with the thinking process playing an important role. Teachers recognize each learner's level of understanding and respond in the most helpful way to the learner.

A significant benefit for Academy students is the number of times they have to learn any given concept. The general principle which our teachers impress upon students is, "*If you don't get it today, maybe you'll get it tomorrow, but only if you try.*" This learning advantage reduces student anxiety and desperation if they don't learn a concept or skill quickly enough.

There are other learning opportunities afforded to The Academy students. Some are familiar, some are novel, but all are grounded in educational research and strive to make learning relevant, purposeful, and engaging.

Problem-solving groups apply the knowledge they have acquired and practice new skills by tackling real-world problems and problems stimulated to model the current work-world. Peer teaching provides opportunities to become educators and reinforce knowledge and mastery through public presentations.

The Academy's Charter School believes that all children can learn, but not in the same way or equally well from the same sources. We recognize that children are variously gifted. We base this observation on Howard Gardner of Harvard's work, who identified various intelligence types of ways that people learn. These include linguistic, mathematical/logical, intrapersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, and musical. Music, PE, Science, Foreign Language, and Computer literacy classes allow students to learn using each of these intelligences.

The quality and quantity of learning correlate with the quality and quantity of teaching. Three key elements distinguish the Academy Charter school:

1. Faculty and staff who decide to work at the Academy commit to adopting the beliefs that ground the school's philosophy.
2. Faculty and staff prepare to meet clear expectations by using specific curriculum and teaching strategies. Student management practices support the intellectual and social, emotional, and character development of children.
3. Faculty and staff understand the importance of instructional fidelity, which means using the curriculum and instructional practices consistently and accurately to achieve program coherence.

D. Student Academic Achievement Standards: Our goal is for our students to meet or exceed the minimum requirements for all state-mandated testing. The Academy curriculum aligns with the Idaho Content Standards and emphasizes developing social and academic skills, personal and social responsibility, expanding and integrating knowledge, communication, thinking, and reasoning. Assessment data, gathered by the Leadership Team and Curriculum teams, measure

the school program's effectiveness and identify potential schoolwide corrective actions. The Problem-solving team also uses it to identify specific needs for individual students.

The Academy Public Charter School uses a problem-solving team to carry out the *Response to Intervention*(RTI) process. The Problem-Solving Team uses benchmarking and progress monitoring data to follow individual student achievement. This data adjusts classroom instruction and designs interventions for students who miss the target scores. Data is analyzed using AIMSweb NIM, LNF, LSF, R-CBM, M-COMPCORE Phonics, Spalding Spelling Assessment, and the M-CAP. The AIMSweb tests are administered weekly to students who are receiving interventions. Other students are tested in the fall, winter, and spring to monitor progress.

E. Student Demand & Community/Local Support: The Academy Inc. (LEA # 460) opened in 2006 as a K-8 school with 240 students. By 2009 school enrollment was at capacity with a waiting list of approximately 200 students each year. In 2015 we moved into a new facility, changed the school name to Connor Academy, and increased enrollment capacity to 550 students. Since 2015 we have maintained a lottery waiting list of roughly 300 students.

Marketing, Branding, Community Outreach: The primary Connor Academy attendance area is the Pocatello/Chubbuck area (although we also have students from neighboring areas such as Inkom and the Fort Hall Reservation). For the past ten years, using word-of-mouth advertising, Connor Academy has maintained a balanced enrollment closely reflecting the Pocatello/Chubbuck community's demographics. However, in the last two years, we have seen an unexplained *decrease* in enrollment among economically disadvantaged students. Because of this recent shift, we want to take a more intentional marketing approach to ensure that all subgroups have equitable access to our school program throughout our attendance area.

Enrollment Goals: An Advertising/Marketing Committee comprised of select staff, parents, and community members, will find new and effective ways to promote our school to under-represented groups and ensure that all have an equal opportunity to apply for enrollment. Advertising methods under consideration include Social Media, Radio commercials, bilingual documentation, open houses, neighborhood flyers, and Billboards. \$10,000 is budgeted for marketing, recruitment, and outreach. Reaching out more directly to different communities aligns with the Academy school mission to provide “all students an increased opportunity for expanded learning.”

Connor Academy has worked hard to be a valuable, high-profile part of the community. Drivers Training classes and community sports teams rent the building after school hours, and the police department uses the facility for active-shooter and other specialized, multi-agency training.

The superintendent has been an active member of the *Chubbuck Neighborhood Action Committee* and the *Pocatello-Chubbuck Chamber of Commerce*. Each month the superintendent invites a different business or community organization to announce Academy Citizen of the Month Recipients through a pre-recorded video seen by the school the following day.

Connor Academy is known as a safe school with a rigorous curriculum and well-behaved students. It has a stable, well-trained Board of Directors and has had the same administrator for over a decade. Financially the school is on solid footing, and teacher turnover has been extremely low. Academically, Connor Academy does well, especially in math, where our state test scores put us among the top 10 highest scoring districts in Idaho.

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We anticipate higher demand for enrollment at Connor Academy because of the aforementioned and projected growth trends. We feel that we have the resources, expertise, community support, and experience to successfully address this challenge by adding additional tracks for K-8 students. Our plan is not only to increase our enrollment capacity but increase the quality of our program.

Parent Involvement: Connor Academy Public Charter School is committed to ensuring that parents of students who attend its program are involved in their children’s education. Parents attend an orientation before the start of each school year where important policies are reviewed with the school’s mission and philosophy. Essential procedures and guidelines are shared. Following the orientation, there is an open house where parents and children can meet their new teachers. Parents complete surveys during the school year addressing school safety, their perception of the learning environment, and overall satisfaction with school staff. Parents are encouraged to volunteer 3 hours/month and have lunch with their children once a month. All parents must pass a background check before volunteering in the school.

F. Effectively Serving All Students: At Connor Academy, we “teach to the high.” This approach encourages academic rigor and accelerated progress. As implemented at the Academy, the Harbor School Method has been shown to minimize student misconduct and maximize student learning. Nevertheless, we recognize that some students will require additional support to be successful.

Special Education/504: Connor Academy employs two full-time special education teachers. One serves as the director. The Special education department also employs four part-time aides and hires other 1:1 aides as dictated by the terms of student IEPs. The Special Education

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Director provides an annual inservice to all teachers to update them on best research methods for assisting special needs students and moral obligations, and legal requirements.

Special Education Services provides individualized accommodations to any student whose needs are not fully met, as outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Connor Academy Public Charter School problem-solving team (Special education teacher, Title 1 Coordinator, administrator, grade level teacher) meets regularly to consider potential interventions and strategies for struggling students. All legal evaluation and eligibility requirements are followed. Students on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or Section 504 plans are placed in General Education classes for most of the school day. Students receive special education services as supplemental to their classroom-based experiences. Students spend most of their time in their grade level class, supported by educational assistants who work closely with the special education teacher and classroom teacher to personalize the expectations according to their IEP. Students enrolling in Connor Academy with pre-existing IEPs, or 504 plans are given all necessary accommodations to support their school success.

English Language Learners: School registration forms include a State-approved Home Language Survey. If a survey indicates that a student may be an English Language learner, they are tested with a state-approved (currently the WIDA ACCESS) English language proficiency test within 30 days of registration or two weeks of entry into the school. Students are identified as English Language learners based on test results. Personal English Language Learning plans are developed for qualifying students through the problem-solving team. Direct teaching instruction at Connor Academy aligns closely with the successful Specially Designed Academic

Instruction in English (SDAIE) strategies. These include: analyzing material from the point of view of students with limited English proficiency, activating students' background knowledge, presenting material and lessons orally and increasing the use of visuals, graphic organizers, manipulative and hands-on-learning experiences, reinforcing the learning of speech along with content and curriculum, and regularly assessing and monitoring student progress.

Professional development is given to administrators and teachers specific to meeting the needs of EL students through in-service training each year. Training is designed to increase collaboration among general education teachers, the Title I teacher, and Special Education teacher to create and adjust the model of providing instruction, intervention, and support to students to allow them to meet their language acquisition goals and participate as entirely as possible in the general education curriculum.

Other Special Needs Student Services: Gifted and Talented (GATE), EL, Economically Disadvantaged, Section 504, and IDEA students have special needs. Connor Academy provides for those special needs through educational experiences in the regular classroom and special classes, workshops, or field trips. Students with disabilities will be placed in the *Least Restrictive Environment* as defined by their IEP teams. Services enabling each student to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education are provided according to their IEP.

Students who are economically disadvantaged and struggling can receive supplemental English instruction through the Title 1 program and an after-school reading program. Title 1 instruction provides pull-out services at times determined by the problem-solving team that will benefit the student.

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Struggling students are supported by the problem-solving team, school administration, and part-time aides. Administration and Special education teachers have been trained in nonviolent Crisis Prevention Intervention. The superintendent is a certified guidance counselor. However, as part of this planned expansion, a full-time counselor will be hired to increase accessibility to students for behavioral support.

Nutrition: Connor Academy does not currently participate in the National School Lunch Program. Students bring their lunch and can purchase cold milk. The cafeteria staff provides additional food (milk, a sandwich, fruit, and other healthy snacks) to students upon request or as needed. With the new expansion, we will have a kitchen constructed to prepare and serve meals on-site. Using the experience of other successful Idaho charter schools, we will hire a consultant to help with the National School Lunch Program application so it can be approved and available when expansion starts. Based on budgets from similar sized schools, we anticipate that 30% of our students will receive free lunch. An annual budget of \$136,000 should cover food service revenue and costs.

We will seek Federal Program support to offer a free/reduced lunch that meets federal guidelines. It is hoped this will increase the number of economically disadvantaged students seeking enrollment.

Transportation: Because of its centralized location and proximity to the freeway and major streets, those living even in Pocatello or Chubbuck's furthest neighborhoods can drive to the Connor in 15 minutes. Thus, most parents drive their children to school or participate in a parent carpool network. Five years ago, an Academy Parent Committee arranged with PRT (Pocatello Regional Transit) to have a bus stop placed in front of the school. The PRT also

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provides two charter busses for our students that pick up and drop off students at pre-arranged locations. The school will purchase season bus passes for qualifying students that can be used any day of the week. Approximately 60 students use the PRT busses daily.

G. Staffing and Professional Development Plan:

Staffing Model: Teachers in grades K-3rd are allocated two 15-hour/week paraprofessional aides for assistance. Teachers in grades K-4th, where students are more mature and responsible, are given one 15-hour/week aide. Additional paraprofessional aides are provided based on exceptional circumstances.

Connor Academy classrooms provide ample learning space, so students do not feel crowded. Grade-level classrooms are 1024 square feet (200 square feet larger than the average classroom in Idaho). Specialized classrooms such as Music and Science are 1500 square feet, and PE classes are held in the gymnasium. Two 2500 square foot common areas extend space for activities where additional instructional space is desired. These common areas are equipped with technology from which teachers can access presentations from their classroom computers.

Hiring and Recruitment: Hiring great teachers is a difficult task at any time. It is especially challenging when districts across Idaho are experiencing a critical shortage of qualified teachers (from which great teachers are a smaller subset). The Academy has sought out the best practices and research for hiring teachers. The superintendent has made particular use of the book *"Hire Better Teachers Now: Using the Science of Selection to Find the Best Teachers for Your School"* from the Harvard Education Impact Series. Written by Rose, English, and Finney, the book outlines how to choose proper hiring criteria, construct effective application forms, effectively structured interviews, and predict performance through work samples. The results

of these efforts have been positive. Connor Academy has a very low turnover rate among teachers and, in a time when districts are having difficulty finding any qualified candidates, typically has ten or more applicants for each new position.

To fully staff the proposed expansion, the Academy will need to hire 14 additional teachers, 14 part-time paraprofessionals, and a school counselor. Since the most productive time for recruitment is in the spring, we will begin advertising in late February, attend teacher job fairs and advertise openings on social media.

Professional Development: The Academy addresses critical, ongoing professional development in a variety of ways. Daily time for collaboration between teacher teams is built into the Master Schedule. The school leadership team coordinates monthly department and staff meetings, while the administrator works with individual teachers on targeted improvement. The leadership team chooses training topics through anonymized data from end-of-year evaluations, school performance data, and occasional legislative mandates.

The school administrator and the individual teacher develop professional development plans based on the Danielson Framework. Connor Academy administrators visit every classroom, every day. This provides support not typically found in other schools and gives administrators an accurate understanding of teachers' challenges.

In addition to the school year's staff development activities, teachers meet the week before school for training, preparation, and parent orientation. For year one of the expansion, there will be a more intense two-week training before school starts for all new employees. This training will include a thorough review of the school's charter, curriculum, and highly effective

teaching methods. New teachers will also be assigned an experienced teacher mentor for their first two years at the Academy.

H. Financial Management and Monitoring Plan: Connor Academy's financial management and current financial position is solid and enviable in the charter school space. The school owns its building and is financed by Idaho Central Credit Union (ICCU) and Building Hope. Additional details can be found in the audited financial statements. Over time, despite lower per-pupil funding levels from the State of Idaho, Connor Academy has consistently produced annual surpluses and accumulated an unrestricted cash balance of over \$2.5 million. Three years ago, the Academy paid cash for the land parcels next to the school (10 acres) to reduce future expansion costs.

The State of Idaho has an advantageous financing enhancement program (AKA Moral Obligation Bonds) for charter schools that demonstrate financial and operational success. As a component of the proposed new facility construction, Piper Sandler, a national charter school bond financing underwriter, recently evaluated Connor Academy. The program's requirement for "days cash on hand," a measure of cash relative to a school's size, is a minimum of 60 days operating expenses. The Academy currently holds a day's cash on hand metric of over 200 days. In Piper Sandler's opinion, this financial position is extremely rare in the charter school sector and constitutes desired evidence of sound, long-term financial management.

The median day's cash on hand for investment-grade charter schools nationwide, in the bond markets, is approximately 150. Investment-grade charter schools are the most robust charter school credits nationwide. Connor Academy's financial position materially exceeds the median for the strongest charter schools in the nation.

CSP grant funds will be used primarily for one-time purchases necessary to open and operate the school. These purchases will include student/teacher desks and chairs, whiteboards, teacher computers, projectors, sound amplification systems, and student laptops in grade-level classrooms. These funds will also be used for curriculum and equipment purchases in the science lab, special learning needs center, physical education room, music/drama room, library, and the computer/technology lab.

I. Board Capacity and Governance Structure: The Academy Board of Directors is responsible for the school's governance, policies, and strategic direction and serves as a link to the community. A School's ability to carry out its mission depends heavily upon the strength of its governing board. An effective board provides strategic direction for the school, chooses and nurtures strong school leaders, and ensures its financial and legal soundness. The Academy Charter School Board has shown itself to be committed to the school's mission.

Board Selection Process: The Academy Charter School Board comprises eight members who serve 3-year terms. Four seats are elected, and four are appointed. When board terms expire, announces openings through public notices placed in the school. Additionally, board members seek to recruit new members from the community who have needed specialized expertise to accomplish board goals.

Board Composition: Board officers include Board Chair, Vice-chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. The Board reviews the school's progress and sets goals in Financial Stability, Facilities and Infrastructure, Safety and Security, Employee Commitment, Student Achievement and Opportunity, Technology, School Culture, and Future Planning annually. Each Board member is responsible for working with the superintendent to monitor progress in one or more of these

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areas. More than half of the board members (5 out of 8) are from outside the Connor Academy Parents community.

Board Training: All new board members have an orientation with the school administrator and an orientation meeting with the Board Chair. They are presented with a copy of “*An Introduction to Effective School Governance: Charter School Board University*” by Brian L. Carpenter, PH.D., and the National Charter Schools Institute. This book was part of a year-long board training and now serves as a primer for new board members and an authoritative reference for board behavior and activities. It covers areas such as Board Accountability, Governance versus Management, Priorities, Transparency, the Board-CEP Relationship, and Leading for the Future. Board members also participate in State School Board Training Conferences.

J. School Leadership & Management: The quality of a school, the quality of teaching, and parents’ confidence rest on the competence of the school’s leaders. Leadership has a profound effect on students’ conduct and achievement and the adults who contribute to their learning in the school setting. The Academy Charter School currently has two full-time administrators. The senior administrator will act as superintendent and building principal over the middle school building. The second administrator will serve as the K-5 building administrator and assume other duties assigned by the superintendent.

Although the superintendent is ultimately responsible for all aspects of Academy Educational and Operational Programs, he delegates specific responsibilities as appropriate. The *Title 1 Coordinator* oversees the early literacy program, including testing, monitoring, and compliance. The *Special Education director* ensures compliance with IDEA and coordinates with outside

agencies for special services such as speech, occupational and physical therapy. The Academy employs a full-time on-site *HR Manager/Registrar* and contracts with an outside accounting agency to strengthen financial powers' separation and assist with all back-office tasks. A site *Leadership committee* is assigned to work with the administration to plan and design staff development that aligns with the school community's school charter and needs. A *curriculum committee* cycles through the school's core curricula to assure that it aligns with the state standards and meets our students' and community's changing needs. Both committees depend on accurate data (ISAT data, parent, student, and teacher surveys) to make decisions.

The board evaluates the superintendent based on key indicators and progress towards completing board goals that the directors set at the beginning of each year. Goal areas include Finances, Facilities & Infrastructure Management, Safety & Security, Employee Commitment & Staff Development, Communication, Student Achievement & Opportunity, Technology, and School Culture. The superintendent evaluates the K-5 principal using the Idaho Framework.

Challenges & Risk Factors

Preserving Existing School Culture:

The first challenge facing this expansion will be to increase enrollment at a pace that will not dilute or disrupt the current school culture, which is critical to the school's success. This challenge was a factor six years ago when Connor Academy doubled enrollment by going to two tracks of K-8 classes. The Connor Academy Administration produced an "*Academy Essentials for Educators*" handbook to address this concern. All staff development classes and meetings focused that year focused on a safe learning environment. Given our previous successful experience adding another track, we believe that we do so again, perhaps at an accelerated

pace. The Leadership Committee is reviewing our past interventions to see if they can improve them.

Maintaining a Consistent, Rigorous Curriculum: All new teachers and support staff will need to have a thorough understanding of the Academy Charter. Connor Academy will address this challenge through teacher mentors, grade-level teams, closely monitored classroom observations, shared collaboration times, and targeted staff development.

Enriching School Program: It is one thing to duplicate a successful program. It is another to expand that successful program while improving it. We believe that having a separate middle school program will allow us to focus more on student's unique developmental needs and lead to an even more outstanding program. The challenge is to build upon the successful foundation students received at The Academy to provide a seamless transition between programs and produce a unique and relevant program that is not found elsewhere in the area.