



## Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication Peer Review Comments and Final Applicant Scores 2024 RFA

Application Details	
Contact Person: Nicholas Spera	Contact email: nspera@isaacschool.org
Application type: Expansion	Approved Budget: \$736,214
Grades Served: 4 - 8	New Seats created: 56
Application Status:	

The following are condensed Peer Reviewer comments and scores for Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication's (ISAAC) application for the Great Schools for Connecticut Charter School Program, encompassing Sections 1 through 7 of the scoring rubric. The complete rubric can be found on the GSCT website in the Request for Applications [\(RFA\) Guide](#). Please refer to Appendix 3 of the RFA for a complete overview of the scoring rubric.

---

### SECTION ONE Board Capacity and Governance Structure

A competent, trained governing board is essential to the success of a public charter school. Describe how your school has developed a strong governing board with a diverse set of skills. Be sure to include how board members understand their roles and responsibilities and have developed a transition plan and ongoing professional development to maintain board strength going forward.

**Subsection 1:** *Describe the composition (size, roles, committees) and selection process for the governing board.* {Comments below}

- Board member bios and resumes are provided.
- Board training related to policies/laws is provided by Shipman and Goodwin, the board attorneys. The firm also "will suggest specific training for hot-button issues facing other boards throughout the country." Board has a designated governance committee
- The applicant has a board with many of the diverse skills, knowledge, and abilities essential to overseeing a successful school. However, some important skills are not evident, such as law, real estate, and finance. The application stated that the Board's governing committee seeks to fill skill gaps when recruiting new board members (p. 3), but did not explain the process. However, the process of board selection was addressed during the interview. It was not clear in the application if the board has currently

identified any gaps or has plans to fill them. However, the applicant discussed previous gaps and how the board added members to fill those gaps.

- The proposal explains that the current board has a vast array of experience in the fields of finance, management, development, human resources, education law, safety and security, politics, elected officials, and education leadership at the elementary, secondary, and higher education levels.

**Subsection 2:** *The board has established clear policies and procedures that guide its oversight of the school.* {Comments below}

- Board policies are included or referenced as publicly available on school website.
- The applicant provided evidence that the board has established clear policies and procedures that guide its oversight of the school. A comprehensive set of board roles and responsibilities is included (p. 4 and 45, Section 1, Appendix 2). Compliance with Open Meetings and Open Records Laws are not specifically identified, but requirements for compliance are included in the board bylaws (p. 39, Section 1, Appendix 1, Article XII Meetings).
- The applicant stated that the board's governance committee engages in an annual review of policies, and an annual completion of a Conflict-of-Interest form is required by all board members (p. 5). However, some concerns arose. The applicant's bylaws require that "one and only one Director shall be a state-certified teacher employed by the Corporation (Teacher Director)" (p. 33, Section 1, Appendix 1, Article IV Board of Director). It is unclear how the board addresses the potential conflict of interest with one director voting on policies and procedures that may directly impact his/her employment and life at the school. Additionally, the Conflict of Interest policy specifically states that "This policy does not override
- ISAAC's requirement to have teachers employed by ISAAC on its governing council" (p. 37, Section 1, Appendix 1, Article IX Conflict of Interest and Nepotism), which makes it clear that the school is aware of the potential conflict of interest. Further, the bylaws clearly state "one and only one teacher," but it appears that the parent representative on the board is also a teacher at the school (p. 103, 202, 242, 259). During the interview, the applicant was asked about how conflicts of interest are addressed. The applicant provided a clear and appropriate information about how this is handled by the board.
- The proposal states that the Board of Directors has established clear policies and procedures that guide its oversight of the school. A comprehensive set of Board of Directors roles and responsibilities are included in the Board Bylaws and in Board policies that are accessible for public view on the school's website.

**Subsection 3:** *Applicant provides resume of board members, personnel occupying key leadership positions, governing council members.* {Comments below}

- Resumes are included.

Board training is described but not formally evidenced in application packet, but was discussed in interview. Clear criteria and procedures for selecting officers and members for the board is included.

- The applicant provided resumes of board members and personnel occupying key school leadership positions. The applicant described the training plan for board members (p. 5), but did not provide

clear evidence. Adequate information about board training was provided during the interview. The applicant clearly stated that no member or employee of governing council has financial interest in the school's assets (real or personal) (p. 6).

- Every member of the Board of Directors is required to engage in comprehensive Board training which is developed and provided by the Board's Attorney. The training includes the following topics: Board Roles and Responsibilities, Budget and Finance: A Closer Look, Policy: A Closer Look, Code of Conduct, Roles of Chairperson and Committees, and Board Meeting Essentials. The vast array of skills and expertise of the Board of Directors and key members of the Leadership Team are highlighted in the bios and resumes that are included in the Appendix.

## **SECTION ONE OVERVIEW: *Board Capacity and Governance Structure Overall Comments***

- No additional comments from any reviewers

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 1	
Peer Reviewer 1	14
Peer Reviewer 2	13
Peer Reviewer 3	15
<b>Aggregate Score for Section 1</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>14</b>

## **SECTION TWO School Leadership and Management**

Describe the intended leadership structure of the proposed school. A strong leadership and staffing plan are essential to ensure high-quality implementation and sustainability of a new school.

**Subsection 1:** *The leadership and administrative roles at the school are well-defined, and comprehensively cover the broad set of responsibilities required of charter school leadership.* {Comments below}

- Applicant described several senior leaders with years of experience. A current teacher has been identified to assume the Director of Elementary role, a new position to support the expansion plan. In some cases, roles and reporting lines are not clear. For example, according to the organization chart, three 5th grade teachers, IT, data and nursing staff all report to the Director of Elementary Education. Evaluation of executive director by board was described. Evaluation of administrators follows the ISSAC Performance and Evaluation Plan
- The applicant provided evidence that the leadership and administrative roles at the school are well-defined, and comprehensively cover the broad set of responsibilities required of charter school leadership (p. 90, Section 2, Appendix 6). A complete organizational and management plan for the school was provided that included a clear division of roles and management responsibilities.
- The applicant stated that the board will evaluate the executive director (ED) and the ED will evaluate the school leadership team (p. 6). However, the protocols and processes for evaluation were not clearly described. This was sufficiently addressed during the interview. Additionally, the applicant stated that if the school leader is not performing at an expected level, the board and ED will meet to discuss next steps (p. 7). Although the applicant described how performance concerns have been

addressed in the past, it is not apparent that the school has a protocol in place to address performance concerns. The applicant described how the school has designed its leadership team to ensure sufficient expertise and experience to manage charter school- specific compliance, operations, finance, and legal matters (p. 3, 7).

- The Superintendent's role is maintained by the Executive Director, the only Executive Director in Connecticut with a Superintendent certification. As per state law and Board Policy, the Executive Director is the sole employee evaluated annually by the Board of Directors. In addition to the Executive Director, other typical central office positions include the Director of Finance, Director of Facilities and Maintenance, Director of Information Technology, and the Human Resources Director who also serves as the Associate Principal and Title IX Coordinator. The Board of Directors is only responsible for the evaluation of the Executive Director
- As per Board Policy. Moreover, the Executive Director conducts all evaluations of the school's leadership team.

**Subsection 2:** *The school demonstrates sufficient leadership and governance capability to implement and sustain the new school or expansion projects outlined in this application. {Comments below}*

- Director of Elementary Education resume (of current teacher) indicates several years of relevant teaching experience. She will be new to instructional leadership.
- Risks described in include hiring and retaining high-quality teachers. PD and culture are noted as mitigating strategies.
- The applicant has demonstrated sufficient leadership and governance capability to implement and sustain the expansion project outlined in this application.
- In the application the applicant stated recognition of the interplay of various elements that are key risk factors (p. 7), but did not clearly and sufficiently identify these material operational challenges / key risk factors other than the importance of hiring and retaining successful urban teachers (p. 8). However, this was addressed during the interview and the applicant provided clear and specific information regarding anticipated challenges and plans to mitigate them. Detailed plans for minimizing teacher turnover and maximizing retention were provided (p. 8).
- The applicant described a qualified leadership team that demonstrates the ability to operate soundly, strategically and in ways that staff and stakeholders can understand and follow (p. 7). The leadership team includes a school leader who will be the Director of Elementary Education for the expansion school and a complete resume was included as part of the application (p. 277).
- The proposal has identified a Director of Elementary Education. She is a current sixth grade science teacher but comes with extensive knowledge and experience of upper elementary having worked in upper elementary for over a decade. Moreover, the proposal notes teacher turnover to be a challenge for the school and provides several strategies to mitigate that challenge. The applicant's leadership team has emphasized creating strategic operating plans that are clear and support our educators' professional growth and their well-being and retention.

## **SECTION TWO OVERVIEW: *School Leadership and Management Overall Comments***

- Ask for more clarification on organizational chart in terms of how Director of Elementary Education will function. Is there a written job description?

- Narrative indicates adding 4th in 2025 and 5th in 2026, but org chart only shows 3 5th teachers. And are there any other staff members supporting these students - e.g. SWD, EL?

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 2	
Peer Reviewer 1	8
Peer Reviewer 2	9
Peer Reviewer 3	10
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>9</b>

---

### SECTION THREE

#### Student Demand and Community/Local/Family Support

The school must demonstrate that a Community Needs Analysis has been completed in planning for the new school / expansion / replication. This includes demonstrated presence of community demand, and that the proposed new school / expansion / replication is in tune with community needs and priorities, and how management intends to engage with parents / families / community to enhance access and equity for at-risk populations.

**Subsection 1:** *School vision and design communicates high standards for student success.*  
{Comments below}

- Applicant argues that offering grades 4 and 5 will allow the school to intervene earlier. However, traditional district grade bands appear to be K-5/6-8, which would require families to choose a new elementary school that does not offer the full elementary experience.

The applicant describes community interest for the current 6-8 grades (219 students on a waitlist) and noted that "33 of 36 seats" for 4th grade were filled within two weeks, with current students' siblings. The ED shared that 28 students have been registered for 4th grade so far.

- The applicant provided clear evidence of community support and demand (p. 10) and described how the school will positively impact the community by raising student achievement (p. 11). It is clear that the proposed expansion school is in tune with community needs and priorities.
- The proposal shows that there is demand for the school. The applicant's enrollment for their existing model of sixth through eighth grade is 282 students with 219 students on a waitlist for admission. Their instructional and curriculum design is based on, not only the Common Core Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, and the Connecticut Social Studies Framework, but also on data from their formative assessments such as AimsWeb, SBAC and NGSS. The proposal also demonstrates improvement for student achievement that their students have achieved in English Language Arts and Mathematics.

**Subsection 2:** *Enrollment forecast is well articulated, clear data, rationale for enrollment growth (includes grades and ages of students to be served, clear picture of community demand for school).*  
{Comments below}

- For the near term, the applicant provided evidence that the "projected incoming students would look like our current students because they are siblings to students that attend ISSAC."
- 32 projected incoming students with 71.9% of them coming from New London; 90.6% of them are Hispanic or Black. The applicant also noted an interest in outreaching to student in rural areas. Although it might be the case that, as the applicant argues, "increasing our rural student population our students would benefit from being exposed to different backgrounds and experiences," evidence was not provided to demonstrate rural students and their families would choose ISSAC.
- Admissions policy is included.

Strategies to engage families were included - open houses, tours, translation, partnerships, attractive and relevant learning experiences. Beyond families that are already members of the ISSAC community, more evidence of interest is not included, other than speakers at a hearing who expressed support for an elementary school (vs. only 4th & 5th?). Examples may include survey responses, signatures, letters, etc. During the interview, ED argued that "if we build it, they will come" and referenced his prior experience starting a new high school. Additional evidence of current interest in families was not provided.

- Enrollment forecast is well articulated with clear data, and rationale for enrollment growth (includes grades and ages of students to be served, clear picture of community demand for school)
- The applicant provided a clear and specific analysis of the proposed school's projected student demographics based on existing demographics (p. 12). The applicant clearly described plans to ensure Access and Equity for an at-risk and diverse student population, including a general description of proposed strategies to recruit, admit, and enroll a diverse student body. However, the marketing and recruitment strategies lacked details. For example, the applicant stated partnerships with community organizations and collaboration with local community organizations, businesses, and civic groups (p. 13), but didn't identify any of the specific partner organizations, businesses, or groups. This was asked about during the interview, but the additional information did not provide clarity.
- The applicant did not describe the impact of the proposed charter school on the racial and socio-economic diversity of public schools and school districts from which children would be drawn to attend the charter school. This was also asked about during the interview; however, the applicant addressed the demographics of the school rather than the impact of enrollment on surrounding schools and districts.
- The applicant included a clear admission policy (p. 120) compliant with C.G.S §10-66bb(d)(8). The applicant provided a clear description of how the school will identify, engage and accommodate families from various backgrounds by implementing a variety of strategies to increase access to the school in person and virtually, and a variety of strategies for communication (p. 14).
- The proposal clearly articulates an enrollment forecast, description of potential students served and the need for growth. For example, the proposal communicates the demographics of the students served, such as 17.2 % English learners; 17.9 % students with disabilities; and 71 % free and reduced lunch. The projected demographics are anticipated to be similar to the current student body. That applicant aims to offer a fourth and fifth grade to their local and surrounding communities. They argue that local urban elementary schools around them continue to close due to budget cuts, teacher shortages, and schools that fail to meet code. Plus, the proposal states that the applicant's charter states that 50% of students must come from New London while the other 50% of students come from all other surrounding districts. This aspect of the charter ensures that our population remains

diverse. With the new school, the applicant aims to attract more rural students. The school will provide transportation options to lower barriers to enrollment.

**Subsection 3:** *Demonstrates significant planning and effort, can provide examples of strategies to meaningfully engage current and prospective families and community members (including current or former teachers and other educators) in implementation and operation of the school. {Comments below}*

- Applicant included several examples engagement within the school - of PTO monthly meetings with leaders, several board members with education backgrounds, teachers can contribute ideas, write curriculum within professional learning communities

Evidence of engaging prospective families and community members beyond current families was not included.

- The applicant did not demonstrate significant planning and effort with specific examples of strategies to meaningfully engage current and prospective families and community members (including current or former teachers and other educators) in implementation and operation of school.
- The applicant described strategies to engage teachers in providing feedback on the school's instructional model through curriculum writing and revisions, PLCs, and sub-committee meetings (p. 15). The applicant also described a variety of channels through which the school communicates with stakeholders such as newsletters, emails, social media, and the school website. The applicant stated that collaboration with the PTO ensures that parent voices are heard in the decision-making process, but the applicant did not explain in the application how this happens, how often, or provide specific examples. However, during the interview, the applicant provided specific examples of how the school collects and uses feedback from students, parents, and community members in the operation of the school.
- The applicant ensures that the school makes publicly available to parents' information about educational options and the school's state report card on the school's website (p. 15).
- The applicant has developed multiple strategies to ensure broad-based participation from the community, parents, and teachers in developing and providing feedback on their instructional models. Among these strategies, the applicant has prioritized establishing clear and consistent communication channels, such as newsletters, emails, social media, and the school website, to keep all stakeholders informed and engaged in any instructional changes that may be happening. They are continually revising and updating their website to ensure that it provides the most up-to-date information for their families. This includes their curriculum, Vision of a Graduate, course selections, and their Connecticut State School Report Card.

**Subsection 4:** *Applicant details comprehensive approach to achieving / sustaining equitable access, including mitigating barriers, including practices around discipline, transport, enrollment and retention that could impede access to their programs. {Comments below}*

- Formal section response for 3.4 was not included in application.

- The applicant did describe mitigating barriers, including in practices around, transport and enrollment, but not related to retention or discipline.
- The applicant did not fully detail a comprehensive approach to achieving / sustaining equitable access, including mitigating barriers, and in practices around discipline, transport, enrollment and retention that could impede access to their programs. Although the applicant addressed issues surrounding enrollment and transportation, the applicant did not address discipline practices or retention.
- The comprehensive approach to achievement is built upon the success that the applicant has found with their sixth through eighth grade students. Their commitment to equitable access is conveyed through many strategies. They are focused on having an inclusive marketing and outreach program. They consistently reach out to diverse communities to inform families about the school's programs and opportunities. To support these endeavors, they provide communication materials in multiple languages to reach non-English-speaking families, and also provide translation services as needed. Furthermore, the applicant focuses on building partnerships with community organizations to increase their outreach.

**Subsection 5:** *Applicant outlines transportation plan for students (meeting requirements of C.G.S 10-66ff(f)) (page 11/27) {Comments below}*

- Formal section response for 3.5 was not included in application;

The applicant is requesting to purchase 2 vans, at 100K each, to offer a new transportation option from rural hubs to ISSAC, but only for 4th and 5th graders, and only seating 13 students each. This may pose challenges to families who have several students, across grades, enrolled in the school, and these students will quickly age out within one or two years and need to find alternative modes of transportation.

The applicant also offered limited evidence of interest from families living in rural areas.

- The applicant outlined transportation plans for students that include the purchase of vans and the use of transportation hubs (p. 13).
- The proposal states that transportation is guaranteed to students in the New London school district. Other towns may elect to provide transportation. The applicant seeks to incorporate a transportation system that would attract and provide a solution to students in rural geographic areas. The ideology of this transportation system was developed in 2013 by the current Executive Director at his previous choice school district. To attract and accept rural students to his high school, he created two transportation hubs in rural communities. This transportation system resulted in more than a 600% increase in applications from these targeted rural communities at his previous choice school district. However, while the proposal wants to provide transportation for 4th and 5th grade students, it is not clear how the applicant will address the fact that older siblings may need transportation as well. This is a challenge that the proposal surfaces.

### **SECTION THREE OVERVIEW: *Student Demand and Community/Local/Family Support Comments***

- Evidence of demand in the short term includes siblings of current students already enrolled, but there are outstanding questions about the long term interest of other families, particularly those living in rural areas.



Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 3	
Peer Reviewer 1	15
Peer Reviewer 2	18
Peer Reviewer 3	24
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>19</b>

---

## SECTION FOUR

### Instructional Practices, Student Academic Achievement

Fully describe the design of the academic program (including specialized focus, if any) of the school. Provide data that justifies / supports the school's mission and overall goals, providing a brief description of key instructional and curriculum design elements and how these will be leveraged to meet the school's performance objectives and community needs. Be sure to include data / references supporting the instructional and curriculum design and how these align to state and federal requirements.

Include a description of why this educational model was chosen and how students will be assessed, how assessment practices are aligned to state standards and state assessment requirements.

**Subsection 1:** *Explains key design elements for the proposed educational model (has clear plan for ongoing development, improvement of curriculum).* {Comments below}

- The applicant response generally describes a "core" curriculum that is aligned to standards. The school's website notes it "leverages:"
  - STEMscopes for science, technology, engineering and math, as well as Eureka Math.
  - Wit & Wisdom for English language arts, along with additional phonics instruction in the lower grades.
  - The response offers evidence of performance improvements on SBAC 48% ELA, 31% math and some "growth towards goals" on AimsWeb, following an 3 year overhaul of curriculum.
  - Social Studies class is focused on writing, with McGraw Hill Impact Social Studies
- The applicant clearly identified the schools' approach to curriculum development (p. 15), but did not specifically identify curriculum materials. The applicant stated that the curriculum is supported with textbooks, workbooks, and other learning tools (p. 16), but these were not explicitly identified. During the interview, the applicant described how the primary curriculum is developed and aligned with state standards. The applicant provided a detailed description of the core academic curriculum, including ELA, Math, and Science (p.16-17). However, the applicant stated that humanities is part of the school's core curriculum (p. 16), but did not clearly describe that curriculum. This was discussed during the interview and the applicant clarified that the Humanities curriculum is written to align with state standards.
- The applicant provided evidence that the chosen approach is likely to improve students' academic performance by including data from previous implementation within similar student demographic (p. 17-18).
- The applicant did not clearly explain key design elements for the proposed educational model. It is not clear what innovative or unique elements set this school apart from other public schools. Although the applicant discussed elements of the educational model (such as electives, Dragon Time, and advisory), a comprehensive overview of the unique and innovative key design elements of

the school are still not clear. Additionally, the applicant mentions the flexible seating classroom (p. 11, 15, 16, 19), but does not explain what this is. This was clarified with specific examples during the interview.

- The proposal provides an extensive description of the curriculum and instructional model. This model is based on the success that the applicant has achieved with their middle school students. This includes providing time for teachers to write and adapt curricular units.

**Subsection 2:** *Describes how the choice of curriculum will help the school meet Connecticut's required school performance standards for charter schools.* {Comments below}

- The response offers evidence of performance improvements on SBAC 48% ELA, 31% math and some "growth towards goals" on AimsWeb, following an 3 year overhaul of curriculum.

SPI scores have climbed to "65.5 and our ranking move to 562/978 of all schools. This current 65.5 SPI has placed us higher than our projected score for 2028.

- The applicant provided evidence that the choice of curriculum will help the school meet CT's required school performance standards for charter schools. However, the applicant did not clearly articulate how the chosen curriculum enables the charter school to meet the CSDE accountability standards for academic achievement and growth. During the interview, the applicant described how the primary curriculum is developed and aligned with state standards.
- The proposal makes clear the process in which they will develop and adapt their curriculum starting with fourth grade. This process has been tested and successful for their middle school students. Through their experience in the past, the applicant has seen their students' scores increase on state-wide testing and district assessments. They have also seen their Connecticut Accountability SPI Rankings increase. However, the proposal does not make clear the process of choosing their curriculum.

**Subsection 3:** *Describes instructional techniques / methods that will facilitate high quality teaching and learning, and how these are appropriate for all students (including educationally disadvantaged students).* {Comments below}

- Vision of a graduate
  - Accountable talk
  - Think, pair, share, write
  - Protocols such as "Give One, Get One, Move On", Concentric circles, and Four Corners
  - Differentiation - flexible groupings, tiered instruction and assignments, or providing choices when completing a unit task
  - Culturally responsive teaching strategies trainings
- The applicant described instructional techniques and methods that will facilitate high quality teaching and learning, such as Accountable Talk, differentiated learning, and culturally responsive teaching (p. 18). The discussion would be enhanced if evidence of effectiveness, such as a research base, was provided.
- The applicant did not clearly describe how these strategies are appropriate for all students specifically addressing students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

- The proposal provides examples of instructional practices that convey their focus on rigorous instruction and differentiation. For example, the proposal names protocols that will be employed, classroom discussion techniques and Accountable Talk to communicate how they intend to support instruction.

**Subsection 4:** *Clear plan for monitoring and assessing student and teacher performance (including how school will use classroom and standardized assessments to determine needs of students and differentiate instruction. {Comments below}*

- Student learning:
  - Edulastic mid-unit and end-of-unit assessments
  - End-of-unit project that assesses student understanding on the overall unit
  - Interim assessment blocks (IABs) multiple times a year.
  - AimsWeb, multiple times a year.
- Teacher practice:
  - Scheduled and impromptu observations that are followed up with feedback and reflective meetings
  - Professional Learning Communities and the grade-level teams where they meet regularly to reflect on their teaching practices, lessons, and assessments.
  - TEAM mentor for new teachers, an instructional coach, a curriculum coach, or an administrator
- The applicant provided a clear plan for monitoring student performance using a variety of curriculum based and standardized assessments to determine students' needs. The applicant also described a variety of strategies for monitoring teacher performance through routine observations (p. 19).
- The applicant did not specifically describe how the school will use classroom and standardized assessments results to differentiate instruction. However, this was clarified during the interview.
- In the current sixth grade through eighth grade model, the applicant has an already established plan for monitoring and assessing not only student performance but also teacher performance. Each curricular unit that is written includes mid-unit and end-of-unit assessments that their students take on Edulastic, an online assessment platform. This allows them to mimic state required high stake assessments so their students become familiar with the way they will look. In addition to professional development, each teacher is placed on a routine observation rotation where they take part in scheduled and impromptu observations that are followed up with feedback and reflective meetings.

**Subsection 5:** *Consistent with the definition of a charter school in ESEA §4310, the school can justify how key elements have been chosen to utilize autonomies and flexibilities granted to charter schools under state statutes to create programs that meet the unique needs of the school's anticipated demographic. {Comments below}*

- No comments from Reviewer 1
- The applicant did not clearly justify how key elements have been chosen to utilize autonomies and flexibilities granted to charter schools under state statutes to create programs that meet the unique needs of the schools anticipated demographic. Key elements remain unclear, and the school's specific use of autonomies and flexibilities was not thoroughly explained.

- Consistent with ESEA §4310, the applicant admits students based on a lottery, does not charge tuition, and is a school to which parents choose to send their children. The school operates independently of the school district and, through the development of their diverse board of directors, has been able to develop a STEAM school.

#### **SECTION FOUR OVERVIEW: *Instructional Practices, Student Academic Achievement Comments***

- How will the school prepare and support the new Director of Elementary with teacher coaching and evaluation?

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 4	
Peer Reviewer 1	18
Peer Reviewer 2	18
Peer Reviewer 3	24
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>20</b>

---

#### **SECTION FIVE Financial Management and Monitoring**

Describe how the school intends to achieve financial stability and viability through implementation of proposed activities, keeping in mind federal guidelines around Allowable Costs. Refer to 2CFR 200 as the guiding document for a comprehensive understanding of allowable costs, non-regulatory guidance, and the Allowable Cost Guide when constructing a school budget. In this section explain the school's plan to be strategic, compliant and a responsible fiduciary of federal funds. All proposed expenditures and grant-supported activities will need to align with at least one of the SMART Goals applicant indicates in Section 6 (SMART Goals).

**Subsection 1:** *Budget Template and Narrative: Are complete and demonstrate clear understanding of allowable, allocable costs. Implementation and planning periods are broken out clearly (planning period not to exceed 18 months). School provides three-year CSP grant budget with justification for activities, complete descriptions of activities and expenditures. School provides five-year school operating budget in addition to CSP grant budget to show that there will be financial sustainability after the CSP grant period ends.*  
{Comments below}

- In budget under 2025, including look back for 2024 costs:
  - 5 new classrooms will be outfitted (narrative notes computer lab will be relocated for the permanent placement of one of the 4th grade classrooms)
  - summer planning for 3 4th/5th teachers
  - summer prep for 5 4th and 5th grade teachers
- In narrative:
  - We must create entirely new curricula, new classrooms, and new school processes to accommodate this younger cohort. This work will occur now, in the summer of 2024, for 4th grade and next summer, summer 2025, for 5th grade.
  - Two page summary of 5 year budget is included, with additional column for CSP to demonstrate balance after CSP grant period ends

- The applicant provided a CSP budget template and narrative that are complete and demonstrate clear understanding of allowable, allocable costs. Implementation and planning periods are broken out clearly. All CSP grant budget expenditures include complete descriptions of and justification for activities and expenditures (p. 21 and Budget Narrative).

The school provided a five-year school operating budget in addition to CSP grant budget to show that there will be financial sustainability after the CSP grant period ends.

- The proposal's budget is clearly communicated. The costs appear to be allowable and commensurate with the intended impact of the proposed school.

**Subsection 2:** *Applicant demonstrates understanding that charters have a high degree of autonomy over budget, operations, personnel decisions (e.g. by making requests in the budget that are allowable but diverge from the suggested subgrant structure in Table 2 of the RFA (Size and Structure of Subgrants)). {Comments below}*

- summer planning period, purchase of vans
- The applicant demonstrated understanding that charters have high degree of autonomy by making requests in budget that are allowable but diverge from the suggested subgrant structure in Table 2 of the RFA - Size and Structure of Subgrants.
- The budget demonstrates that the applicant has an understanding that charters have high degree of autonomy over budget, operations, and personnel decisions. This is demonstrated through the allocation and request for funds.

**Subsection 3:** *Applicant completes annual reporting requirements to CSDE (including submission of financial audit, other required submissions). {Comments below}*

- No comments from Reviewer 1
- The applicant provided evidence of compliance with annual reporting requirements to CSDE by including three years of CSDE annual reports.
- The applicant adheres to the financial reporting expected of the funding.

**Subsection 4:** *Applicant submits a sound facilities plan that includes: Concrete location, a timeline for acquiring, developing, and / or remodeling as well as equipping the new school or expansion facility. If facility is not identified there is a viable plan for obtaining one to ensure timely opening / expansion of the school. {Comments below}*

- No comments from Reviewer 1
- The applicant submitted a detailed facilities plan that included plans for construction and financing. The applicant did not include a timeline for equipping the expansion facility, but discussed specific plans during the interview.
- The proposal includes a thorough facilities plan. This plan communicates the important components of the plan such as a concrete location and shows that the applicant has intentionally considered the facilities aspect of their new school.

**Subsection 5:** The budget contains the following:

- CMO fees, if any, and delineates how these will be paid
- Sufficient budgetary resources to fulfill program requirements for educationally disadvantaged, at-risk students.

Comments:

- No CMO
- The applicant noted specialized support to all student populations along with a robust Special Education effort (p. 24); however, the five year budget lacks specific detail to determine if sufficient budgetary resources are included to fulfill program requirements for educationally disadvantaged at-risk students.
- The budget contains the elements needed for this criterion.

**Subsection 6:** *Applicant has a plan to mitigate the risks associated with projected enrollment, and financial resources sufficient to adequately serve student population. {Comments below}*

- Waiting list of over 200 applicants (but this is in the past, for 6-8) did not fully describe mitigating risks related to projected enrollment beyond targeted marketing
- The applicant expressed confidence in meeting enrollment targets (p. 24), but did not describe a plan to mitigate risks in the event that projected enrollment goals are not met.
- The growth of the school is partially driven by the waitlist and need they have generated for their middle school. The CSP budget is written to support exclusively those items related to the initial start-up for the new expanded grades. The requested CSP funds are not embedded in normal operating costs and will not supplant any existing funding streams.

## **SECTION FIVE OVERVIEW: *Financial Management, Monitoring Overall Comments***

- Applicant did not provided evidence that 4-8 model aligns to the interest of families not currently involved in ISSAC.

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 5	
Peer Reviewer 1	26
Peer Reviewer 2	23
Peer Reviewer 3	30
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>26.3</b>

---

## SECTION SIX

### Grant Project Goals

Identify 3-5 SMART grant project goals. Justify each goal through its value in supporting the planning and implementation of the proposed school. All grant spending, including future budget revisions must fit clearly within your stated project goals. All proposed expenditures and grant-supported activities need to align with at least one of the SMART Goals outlined in your Project Narrative.

**Subsection 1:** *Each grant project goal is a quality goal, and the set of goals fulfill minimum requirements for content including:*

- *At least one project goal addresses how the school intends to achieve Connecticut's targets for school performance (School Performance Index) and academic growth (Smarter Balanced Growth) in Math and ELA*
- *A minimum of three project goals are clearly articulated with trackable time-bound measures and outcomes for each goal (at least one goal must address how to meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged students).*

Comments:

- SMART goals in narrative:
  - outperforming our host district, New London, on state-wide assessments in both ELA and mathematics
  - achieve Connecticut's targets for the School Performance Index. Our academic SMART goal will be measured by our 4th grade (in 2025) and 5th grade (in 2026) scores on the SBAC.
  - maintain a balanced school budget that is fiscally responsive to the needs of ISAAC. This will be measured through our end-of-year budget, and we feel confident that it will be easy to maintain as it is already supported within our established system.

These goal are not fully SMART

- not specific, time-bound: increase their applications of out of district students in 4th and 5th grade, directly supports our efforts to increase our reach to rural students and the purchasing of not only our vans but increased marketing.
- not specific, therefore achievable/relevant not clear: students in 4th and 5th grades will make improvement in collaboration skills by the end of the academic year, a collaboration rubric will be the means for which we measure success of our collaboration goal
- The applicant included four goals (p. 25). However, the goals are vague and not clearly specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Additionally, it is not clear how each of the goals specifically address the applicant's grant project. The applicant did not include at least one goal that specifically addresses meeting the needs of educationally disadvantaged students.
- The proposal provides six goals for the project. These goals are measurable, timebound, address math and ELA assessment performance as well as the needs for traditionally underserved students, who are the predominant students to be served by the school.

**Subsection 2:** *Clear alignment exists among project goals, and overall mission and goals of the school. Each goal should have a justified purpose that supports the charter school in reaching performance goals. All grant measures must be appropriately rigorous for the targeted student population and measured by standard assessments. {Comments below}*

- 2 goals are missing some aspects of SMART, therefore not clearly rigorous/relevant. how the improvement in student collaboration relates to the project goals is not fully articulated
- The applicant explained how the goals in the application align with the school's goals (p. 26). However, the CSP project goals are unclear, making this confusing.
- The goals are aligned with strategies and measures explicitly in the proposal. These goals are grounded in the school's core values and beliefs about learning.

#### **SECTION SIX OVERVIEW: SMART Goals / Grant Project Goals Overall Comments**

- No additional comments from any reviewers

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 6	
Peer Reviewer 1	6
Peer Reviewer 2	5
Peer Reviewer 3	10
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>7</b>

---

#### **SECTION SEVEN Grant Points**

Priority points may be awarded to applicants for the competitive priorities below. Applicants will have to provide supporting documentation to evidence that their project narrative in the grant application meets the criteria for priority point awards.

**Subsection 1:** *Two additional priority points may be awarded to applicants that demonstrate in their grant application how they will promote high-quality educator and community centered charter schools to support underserved students. {Comments below}*

- Applicant did not include a description of a proposed project developed in meaningful and ongoing engagement with current or former teachers and other educators, authentic assessment of community assets, or a timeline that includes key milestones during the school's planning, development, and implementation
- Through a partnership with a nearby school district, the applicant and the school district plan on organizing a formal process that allows for applicant to work with the teachers and administrators of the school district on science curriculum and instruction that has allowed them to place top 5 among all schools in Connecticut for Next Generation Sciences Standards test scores.

**Subsection 2:** *Two additional priority points may be awarded to applicants that articulate how they will collaborate with at least one traditional public school, or traditional public school district. {Comments below}*

- Applicant references a plan to collaborate with the Salem Public School PK-8, with the goal of implementing a strong, vertical science curriculum at ISSAC. However, a project plan that includes



roles and responsibilities, timelines and resources being contributed and evidence of participation were not included in application.

- The applicant described plans for a partnership with Salem Public Schools to share knowledge and best practices in science for grades 4-8 (p. 26).

The applicant provided the outline of a plan, but did not provide specific detail that included a timeline, roles and responsibilities, and resources of each member of the collaboration, and at least one measure to show how the success of this collaboration will be measured.

- The proposal shows that the students have high rates of poverty and students needing special education and/or English language learner support. A formative assessment approach allows the school to see the student's gains in academic performance in mathematics, reading, and writing as compared to students nationwide. A review of these results is acted on by the school's SRBI (Scientific Research-Based Intervention) Team and grade-level PLC teams track and incorporate interventions within the planning and instruction of lessons.

**Subsection 3:** *Two additional priority points may be awarded to applicants that articulate a plan to serve and intentionally meet the unique needs of students in rural geographic areas.* {Comments below}

- The intention to serve students living in rural areas was described, but the applicant did not fully articulate a plan to serve them and intentionally meet their unique needs, other than offering an alternative option for transportation (for a total of 26 4th or 5th grade students).
- The applicant has a clear and deliberate plan to serve and intentionally meet the unique needs of students in rural geographic areas.
- The proposal specifically addresses how the applicant seeks to attract students from rural surrounding areas. One of the ways that the applicant will seek to bring more of these students to school will be through transportation options.

**Subsection 4:** *Two additional priority points may be awarded to schools that provide a high-quality high school program.* {Comments below}

- Not applicable and no comments or scores from any reviewers

#### **SECTION SEVEN OVERVIEW: *Priority Points Overall Comments***

- The applicant did not include clear SMART goals in the required areas, which raises concerns about the applicant's knowledge in this area.

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 7	
Peer Reviewer 1	0
Peer Reviewer 2	4
Peer Reviewer 3	6
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>3.3</b>

---

**TOTAL SCORES**  
**Across all sections**

<b>Peer Reviewer Scores for all sections</b>	
Peer Reviewer 1	87
Peer Reviewer 2	90
Peer Reviewer 3	119
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>296</b>
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>98.7</b>