

Charter School Renewal Application 2022

Charter Renewal Application #000734

American Academy

Location Code: 0215

Submitted To:

Douglas County Colorado
Choice Programming
Douglas County School District

620 Wilcox St.
Castle Rock, CO 80104
Phone: 720-433-1238

Submitted By:

Steve Colella

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GENERAL

A. School Information

School Type: **Elementary / Middle**
 Grade Levels: **[K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8]**
 School District: **Douglas County, Colorado**
 Neighborhood / Community:
 Organization Type:
 Sponsoring Entity: **Non-profit Organization**
 Address: **6971 Mira Vista Lane , Castle Pines, CO 80108**
 Phone: **720-292-5200**
 Fax: **303-660-5550**
 Web Site: **<https://cp.aak8.org/apps/pages/cp-campusconnect>**
 Calendar Type: **- 180 instructional days**
 Educational Service Provider: **(None)**

B. Primary Contact Person

Name: **Steve Colella**
 Mailing Address:
 Mobile Phone: **303-815-0139**
 Alternate Phone:
 Email: **scolella@aak8.org**
 Current Employer: **American Academy**

C. Attendance Projections

Grade Level	Year 1 Enrollment		Year 2 Enrollment		Year 3 Enrollment		Year 4 Enrollment		Year 5 Enrollment	
	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.
K	288	298	288	298	288	298	288	288	288	298
1	302	312	302	312	302	312	302	312	302	312
2	302	312	302	312	302	312	302	312	302	312
3	302	312	302	312	302	312	302	312	302	312
4	302	312	302	312	302	312	302	312	302	312
5	278	288	278	288	278	288	278	288	278	288
6	251	261	251	261	251	261	251	261	251	261
7	242	252	242	252	242	252	242	252	242	252
8	242	252	242	252	242	252	242	252	242	252
Total	2509	2599	2509	2599	2509	2599	2509	2589	2509	2599

D. Board Members

Name	Title	Contact Information	Current Employer
Bostick, Tami	Director Of Academics	P: M: E: tbostick@aak8.org	
Colella, Steve	Executive Director	P: M: 303-815-0139 E: scolella@aak8.org	American Academy
Holland, Shaylee	President	P: M: E: sholland@aak8.org	
Inman, Chris	Board Member	P: M: E: cinman@aak8.org	
Losinger, Jodi	Board Treasurer	P: M: E: jlosinger@aak8.org	
Rausch, Alison	Board Member	P: M: E: arausch@aak8.org	
Slovensky, Michelle	Board Secretary	P: M: E: mslovensky@aak8.org	
Smith, Nicole	Board Member	P: M: E: nsmith@aak8.org	
Wan, Kay	Vice President	P: M: E: kwan@aak8.org	

Basic School Information & Required Attachments

1. Basic School Information

American Academy

Total Enrollment for SY 22-23: 2,763 Total (2,512 @ K-8; 251 @ KindiePrep)

and % Free or Reduced Price Lunch Students: 66 (2.6%)

and % Special Ed Students: 148 (6%)

and % ELD Students: 102 (4%)

Mission:

American Academy will achieve academic excellence through a challenging, sequenced curriculum that emphasizes science, technology, engineering, arts, and math to provide our children with the tools to become the leaders of tomorrow. Together, our students, faculty, parents, and community will cultivate character, civic responsibility, and intellectual development.

Attachments

Section 1: Basic School Information

– No Attachments –

2. Required Attachments (may add as link to a Google Drive)

Please see various responsive documents attached.

Attachments

Section 2: Required Attachments (may add as link to a Google Drive)

2.1	AA Finances	Colella, Steve, 9/1/22 5:01 PM	XLSX / 25.999 KB
2.2	Additional narrative for 3, 7, 8 of this Section	Colella, Steve, 9/1/22 4:44 PM	PDF / 32.799 KB
2.3	2021-22 UIP	Colella, Steve, 8/30/22 4:38 PM	PDF / 209.96 KB
2.4	AA Cash Flow Forecast	Colella, Steve, 8/30/22 4:04 PM	XLSX / 22.271 KB
2.5	Student Survey	Colella, Steve, 8/30/22 3:55 PM	PDF / 83.814 KB
2.6	Parent Survey	Colella, Steve, 8/30/22 3:54 PM	PDF / 673.28 KB

2.7	Staff Survey	Colella, Steve, 8/30/22 3:54 PM	PDF / 253.059 KB
2.8	3 Year SPF	Colella, Steve, 8/30/22 3:49 PM	PDF / 300.778 KB
2.9	2019 SPF	Colella, Steve, 8/30/22 3:46 PM	PDF / 300.882 KB

1. Mission and Key Design Elements

1.1.1 Mission & Key Design Elements

a) State the school's vision and mission.

American Academy's mission is stated above. We envision every individual child having a full and fair opportunity to access our curriculum and programming. We have three buildings across a 10-mile area and work very hard to be one school which means we look to maintain a reasonable consistency across our programming and campuses.

b) Describe the school's educational philosophy.

Consistent with our mission, through setting high academic and behavioral expectations for every child, a developmentally appropriate Core Knowledge curriculum and STEAM focus, manners & character programming, and a strong partnership with our parents, American Academy offers children and their families from all over the world a strong educational foundation for high school and beyond.

c) What are the school's key design elements? Emphasize the unique and innovative features of the educational program.

Aside from the elements stated in 1.1b above, [our flexible ability group model](#) for literacy and math from grades K-8 is one of American Academy's "calling cards." This model entails employing additional teachers for those content areas in each of the grades to allow our students to grow and progress in a more individualized environment with the goal of, at minimum, having every child at grade level before the end of the school year. This model also allows students who are advanced in these subject areas to continue advancing at a healthy pace.

Per our site:

"Ability groups are not permanent -- they are designed to change as students themselves grow and change, so students may move from one ability group to another from year to year. Sometimes they are ready for more challenge. Sometimes they are ready for more challenge in one subject while still requiring support in another, and sometimes we discover through multiple assessments and evaluations that they need more support in multiple subjects. Though changes to ability grouping are not typically made mid-school year, we do use a continuing [schedule of assessments](#) and other evaluation data points throughout the year to validate student ability group placement."

Our character and manners programming also provides a significant layer of learning for each student. Students are recognized on a weekly and trimester basis for showing strong character, e.g, compassion, responsibility, and integrity.

In addition, we also are very out loud about building resiliency with our students and ensuring that, for example, bullying is not only a disciplinary matter for the student who is doing the bullying but can be appropriately dealt with and overcome by the student being bullied.

Attachments

Section 1: 1.1 Mission & Key Design Elements

– No Attachments –

2.1.2 Curriculum

a) Describe the school's curriculum and how it is aligned to the state standards.

Please see curriculum discussion above. In many areas, Core Knowledge well aligns with state standards as evidenced by American Academy's overall performance on Colorado Measures of Academic Success and, relatedly, iReady.

b) Describe the school's process and rationale for reviewing and revising the curriculum as needed.

We thoughtfully review what we do and how we do it at American Academy and ensure that we receive broad-based feedback and well communicate any changes that we make. Our change in math curriculum for SY 19-20 is a good example of this.

A few years ago, we ended our long-standing and successful affiliation with Saxon Math because its textbooks had stopped being updated and, relatedly, there were no opportunities for professional development for the curriculum as the publisher had stopped offering it. After many months of our principals researching and assessing other options and meetings with staff, American Academy chose GoMath.

Upon implementing the curriculum, we held periodic meetings with parents to assess their views of what they were seeing at home (mostly positive) along with continuously gaining feedback from staff (more of a mixed bag as new implementations usually is). We continue to solicit this feedback from parents, staff, and leadership to improve, and we actually have by all available data, anecdotal and otherwise.

c) Social Emotional Learning Curriculum and implementation.

Aside from a variety of in class conversation/instruction, American Academy [provides a variety of resources](#) to develop students' social-emotional growth. American Academy's [approach to bullying](#) is part of this as is our Responsive Classroom and related curriculum, Emergenetics programming starting in Grade 5, and our small group conducted by our counselors at each of our campuses, among other efforts.

Attachments

Section 2: 1.2 Curriculum

– No Attachments –

3.1.3 Assessment

a) Describe the school's assessment systems and how they are used to improve instructional

effectiveness and student learning.

Beyond usual qualitative assessments of students by our professionals on a routine basis, American Academy's full range of more formalized assessments can be found [here](#).

To highlight a few, American Academy students in grades 3-8 take the Colorado Measures of Academic Achievement test every year and, every trimester, take iReady testing in literacy and math.

iReady results, among other quantitative and qualitative measures, along with teacher and learning support staff input are used to assess students' ability group each trimester. As discussed above, our flexible ability grouping allows students to move in and out of ability groups year-over-year (and, at times, mid-year) depending on how they are progressing. Academic progress is the primary driver of where students are placed but, in some instances, other factors may militate in favor of keeping or changing a student's grouping.

b) Describe how the school uses other data (qualitative and quantitative) to evaluate the effectiveness of the academic program.

Between CMAS, iReady, our other formal assessments (all discussed above) and "here is what I am seeing" feedback from staff and parents that we routinely get by word of mouth and annually on our surveys, American Academy uses a wealth of data to build upon and improve its success.

American Academy leadership meets formally on an annual basis at our 3 day "retreat" to discuss bigger picture items of what has gone well and what we can work on. We use our staff, student, and parent survey results from that school year to substantially inform that conversation.

Likewise, our leadership team meets on a monthly basis to have that same conversation albeit on a more granular basis. In addition, our leadership team meets with their respective teams routinely to work through short- and longer-term challenges based on feedback from that team, parents, and students.

Attachments

Section 3: 1.3 Assessment

– No Attachments –

4.1.4 Organizational Capacity

i) Process and system for decision-making;

Per [AA's organizational chart](#), the Executive Director of Schools (EDS) runs the day-to-day operation of the school and is ultimately responsible for all decisions made at each building.

In order to facilitate a highly functional and practical decision-making structure, the EDS oversees a Chief Academic Officer (CAO) and the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) who, together, make up the executive leadership team. The CAO and CFO oversee the academic staff and portions of the operations staff respectively.

In addition to the CAO and CFO, the EDS directly supervises the Student Support Services, Communications, and Human Resources departments along with the Office Manager at each of our buildings. This organization provides the EDS with a productive diversity of supervision which provides a well-rounded view of the overall organization.

The EDS is supervised by the Board of Directors (BOD) as its sole employee. The BOD sets out big picture goals for the EDS consistent with the American Academy’s mission and values. The EDS is tasked with executing on these bigger picture goals.

ii) Process and system for evaluating school leaders;

Every school leader, including the EDS, is evaluated annually. We value constant feedback and the principle of no surprises—every staff member should know what their evaluation will say before they receive it.

iii) Process and system for evaluating and coaching teachers; and

As above, everyone receives a formal evaluation each year. Teachers are evaluated by their respective principals (each of our buildings has a discreet elementary and middle school principal).

In addition, every academic grade level at each building has a designated “Lead” and “Mentor” teacher who receive additional compensation for these designations since they help principals lead and coach their respective levels. This structure is replicated across the organization and helps us to grow future American Academy leaders as well.

iv) Process and system for staff professional development.

We hold five multi-level professional development days per school year, not including beginning of the school year meetings. Each department holds its own and, periodically, teachers from our three buildings come together to discuss curriculum and pedagogy for their respective grade levels. The latter helps us to ensure the “reasonable consistency” discussed above.

As needed (per quantitative and qualitative data), we conduct professional development with teachers regarding our curriculum.

Attachments

Section 4: 1.4 Organizational Capacity

– No Attachments –

2. School Climate & Culture

1.2.1 School Climate & Culture

i) How the school's overall learning environment aligns with its educational program.

(Evidence may include, for example, student led organizations, student achievements and recognition, adult learning communities, levels of disciplinary referrals, class and staff attendance, and participation in school events and activities);

A culture of learning, scholarship, and high expectations flows from our mission statement.

Daily, we hold students to high expectations of behavior through the presence of our Deans, who handle discipline primarily and who also help ensure that classroom teachers, Instructional Assistants, and all other staff understand our expectation that every student act in an appropriate manner. In doing so, we help to ensure that students can learn in a productive environment.

In addition, our hallways at each building are replete with character and manners posters as are our morning announcements on a weekly basis, at least. Also, every trimester, each building at each level holds a "Character Awards" which is an all-level assembly where certain students are recognized for their acts reflecting our character traits. Teachers prepare certificates with detailed narratives for the students we recognize, and their parents are invited to attend which the students only realize once they receive their reward at the assembly.

In addition, for the last few years, we have brought in an outside speaker to discuss resiliency in the face of, for example, bullying and/or when life gets uncomfortable for a variety of reasons. The presenter, Brooks Gibbs, provides avenues for kids to absorb poor behavior in a productive way and without falling prey to a victim mentality.

Otherwise, we maintain a robust set of after-school offerings through our unique extra-curricular programming. We allow staff to take their own interests and assess whether a potential market of kids/parents exists to join an after-school program. This has allowed American Academy to not only offer traditional after school programming (e.g., performing arts & sports) but also Minecraft, chess, Pokémon, Dinosaur Camp, among many others. This model also allows our staff to earn extra money commensurate with the market that they tap into.

Otherwise, each of our middle schools have student councils whose members are elected on an annual basis. They work closely with our middle principals and PTOs in providing feedback on school culture from the student body's perspective.

ii) How the school supports the social and emotional health of its students; and

Every one of our campuses has at least two mental health staff assigned to them to provide support in the variety of ways that K-8 students need. See also above the discussion above about our character programming, resilience, and ensuring our behavioral standards are upheld which helps us ensure a healthy environment.

iii) How the school supports staff in creating a classroom environment conducive to student

learning.

As discussed, the culture we've created in terms of academic and behavior expectations for kids facilitates an environment of student learning. In addition, and as discussed, our culture of growing staff, mentoring, and authentic and predictable evaluation maximizes our staff's "buy in" to their work with us. This all inures to the benefit of student learning.

iv) Provide and discuss TLCC survey data.

We do not participate in TLCC. We do send out annual staff surveys, the responses for which are anonymous. We have provided this data for last school year.

In summary, pay is the biggest concern for staff and it likely always will be. American Academy administration continues to do all that it can to provide competitive compensation to include managing taxpayer funds very well and allowing the large bulk of its revenue to pour into its people by way of salary, benefits, and bonuses. Otherwise, staff have indicated it is well treated and are happy with their leadership up the organizational chain.

v) Security

Since SY 19-20, we have had two School Resource Officers for our three campuses. One for both of our Parker campuses and the other for our campus in Castle Pines. Since 19-20, we have asked Parker PD for a second SRO in Parker (and third overall) and they will provide it as soon as their staffing shortage abates. Parker PD has been a great partner in this regard.

Otherwise, American Academy routinely trains for lockdown/secure events with DCSD, maintains a Watch DOGS program, holds internal security audits every year, and has upgraded its security apparatus based on these audits with its own general fund along with money from the 2018 bond.

The audits occur at each building and include the building's SRO and other law enforcement, office manager, operations manager, facilities assistant, the CFO, and EDS. Taken together, we get a very good picture of current state along with possibilities for improving our safety apparatus.

American Academy staff is well aware of privacy protections through annual trainings on the same.

Attachments

Section 1: 2.1 School Climate & Culture

– No Attachments –

2.2.2 Family & Community Engagement

Explain how the school promotes family and community involvement. Be sure to include:

i) Specific examples;

Parents choice into American Academy and are therefore well vested to begin with. Our engagement starts even before they come to us by virtue of the information we have on our website and the six prospective parent meetings we hold throughout the year.

Otherwise, we hold beginning of year new parent and back to school events, routinely point out the importance of parent engagement at home and/or at school, and welcome a number of parent volunteers throughout the school year into our building. In addition, we welcome parents into our lunch rooms to have lunch with their kids whenever we and they can.

In addition, we hold monthly School Accountability Committee meetings along with Board of Directors' meetings that are published on our website for any parent who would like to participate in either or both. In fact, we have expanded our SAC by 5 members over the last few years to reflect the increased parent interest.

We are typically timely with our responses to parents (within 48 hours), hold annual parent surveys the responses to which are anonymous, and this year, we will start holding a 3 times per year "Ask Me Anything with the EDS" for parents and staff. The latter is a continuation of periodic and direct parent access to the EDS throughout American Academy's history.

Finally, we are pro-active with and responsive to our local neighborhood associations and businesses if/when, for example, traffic issues arise and our facilities are rented to a variety of outside local entities to include churches and volleyball and soccer clubs, among others.

ii) Evidence of how plans have been realized; and

See discussion above and below.

iii) Plans to improve the school's partnerships with families and community.

Continue to be transparent and timely with our communications with parents through open meetings, surveys, and sound communication practices. In addition, maintain regular contact with our local government and business partners.

b) Describe the various partnerships the school has developed with educational institutions and/or

community organizations. Be sure to include:

i) How these relationships promote and help achieve the school's mission; and

As referenced above, we have great working relationships with our local police and governmental entities. For example, our SROs are, among other things, volleyball coaches, YES teachers, carpool attendants, and present at recess.

At our Motsenbocker and Lincoln Meadows' campuses, we have worked with Parker PD and the Town of Parker to help abate traffic concerns, to include at Motsenbocker providing staff for a crosswalk that stretches from the east side of our campus to the neighborhood via a public street.

Our local politicians routinely show up to our morning carpool on the first day of school and are always available to problem solve when a joint matter comes up (e.g., the response to STEM shooting and resulting parent meetings, crosswalk installation at our Castle Pines campus in partnership with the City of Castle Pines).

ii) How they align with the school's education program.

Parents and students routinely see American Academy staff engage in a healthy relationship with other governmental entities either by omission or commission which leads to a stable environment that is conducive to executing our overall program.

Attachments

Section 2: 2.2 Family & Community Engagement

– No Attachments –

3. Board Governance

1.3.1 Board Capacity

a) Provide evidence that the board governs the school effectively. Be sure to include the following in your response:

i) Evidence that the board has the appropriate skills (legal, financial, educational, community, etc.) and experience to govern the school effectively;

The biographies of our Board members are available [here](#). Three board members have sat on the American Academy board for over 8 years, two for over 4 years, and two for two years. Each Director brings thoughtful perspectives to Board governance and, more importantly, all of them are laser-focused on doing the right thing for kids.

ii) Information on the board's priorities for recruitment of additional members and how the board recruits and selects new board members;

The Board utilizes the SAC as a training ground for its membership. As discussed above, the SAC has been expanded over the years to make sure it is both representative of our overall school community and to inform members as to the various complexities of being a public school in the State of Colorado and in Douglas County.

To the extent that we have needed to hold elections over the years (e.g., last year, two existing Board members ran unopposed), we have seated Board members who were well aware of the complexities and proprieties of the role. This process has resulted in a stable, highly functioning Board of Directors.

iii) Evidence that the board sets school goals aligned to the mission;

Every year, the Board revisits and publishes [its strategic plan](#) and, otherwise, holds an [open meeting virtually every month, the notice for which is published on our website](#). Our website maintains meeting agendas to include approved minutes.

iv) Evidence that the board regularly monitors progress relative to its priorities;

As stated above, the Board meets every month in an open, public meeting to discuss administration's progress on the Board's priorities. These agendas are published on our website to include meeting minutes.

v) Evidence that the board has adequate numbers and regularly has a quorum, according to its bylaws; and

See (iv) above.

vi) Evidence that the board evaluates the school leader(s), school business administrator, and/or management organization on an annual basis and holds these individuals

accountable for meeting specified goals.

We believe annual evaluations constitute a best practice. EDS evaluations occur on an annual basis and administration, staff evaluations occur annually as well.

Attachments

Section 1: 3.1 Board Capacity

– No Attachments –

4. Access & Equity

1.4.1 Special Education

a) Describe the steps the school takes to identify students in need of Special Education services.

For the last two school years, American Academy has piloted a SPED identification program in its pre-school, the only charter pre-school in Douglas County to do so. While staffing challenges have come up this year (as referenced above), we continue to service students as best as we can.

Otherwise, in our K-8, staff works with parents to identify students with special education needs through our [Multi-Tiered System Supports \(MTSS\) process](#).

b) Describe the special educational programs and range of services the school provides for identified students.

American Academy provides all services for students with mild-moderate needs. We staff speech language pathologists, interventionists, learning specialists, a school psychologist, a social worker, an occupational therapist, and educational assistants for every one of our buildings.

We also maintain Gifted & Talented and English Language Learner programming for students with or without special education needs.

c) Submit a copy of the school's written Rtl or MTSS procedures.

Our process can be found at the link above (4.1a).

4.2 English Language Learners

a) Describe the steps the school takes to identify English Language Learners (ELL).

See 4.2 below.

b) Describe the programs and range of services the school provides for identified ELL Students.

Our ELL program description can be found [here](#).

Attachments

Section 1: 4.1 Special Education

– No Attachments –

2.4.2 English Language Learners

a) Describe the steps the school takes to identify English Language Learners (ELL).

Insert.

American Academy follows [District processes, state, and federal law and processes](#) for identifying English language Learners. This includes utilizing registration information, WIDA testing results, along with other quantitative and qualitative data that creates a full body of evidence.

b) Describe the programs and range of services the school provides for identified ELL

Students.

Our ELL program description can be found [here](#).

Attachments

Section 2: 4.2 English Language Learners

– No Attachments –

5. Fiscal Performance

1.5.1 Financial Framework

We are not aware of any ratios which we have not stayed within and/or not satisfied.

Attachments

Section 1: 5.1 Financial Framework

– No Attachments –

2.5.2 Financial Audit

Not applicable.

Attachments

Section 2: 5.2 Financial Audit

– No Attachments –

3.5.3 Budget Information

American Academy's budget should stay stable over the next five years in relation to the budget documents submitted above.

Attachments

Section 3: 5.3 Budget Information

3.1	Finances	Colella, Steve, 8/30/22 10:37 PM	XLSX / 32.208 KB
3.2	Cash Flow Forecast with Account Filter	Colella, Steve, 8/30/22 10:36 PM	XLSX / 22.271 KB

6. Five Year Planning

1.6.1 Enrollment

- a) We do not anticipate an increase in enrollment over the maximum set out above at our buildings over the next 5 years.
- b) We are not requesting an increase in enrollment at our buildings.

Attachments

Section 1: 6.1 Enrollment

– No Attachments –

2.6.2 Facility

We do not plan on expanding any of our existing buildings and plan to maintain them consistent with how we've done so over the last 5 years.

Attachments

Section 2: 6.2 Facility

– No Attachments –

3.6.3 Five Year Planning

As discussed previously, we are focused on improving our instruction and operations to maximize staff and student success. And as discussed above, we are looking to maintain and improve our buildings consistent with how we've done so in the last five years.

Attachments

Section 3: 6.3 Five Year Planning

– No Attachments –

Optional: Supplementary Information

1. Supplemental Body of Evidence

This will largely be dependent on the grade level and classroom visited. For example, a middle school STEM lesson will look very different than, say, a 3rd grade literacy lesson. Upon knowing what time and when DCSD staff will visit, we can far more easily describe what they should expect to see.

More generally, DCSD staff should expect an orderly classroom with students in proper uniform and behaving appropriately, being polite to staff and among themselves.

Attachments

Section 1: Supplemental Body of Evidence

– No Attachments –

2. COVID Response

For SY 20-21, American Academy offered a full-time in-school option along with a full-time remote option. Roughly 85% of our parents chose to send their kids to school full time while roughly 15% chose remote. At intervals during the year, we allowed parents to switch based upon their family's circumstances. We also accommodated vulnerable teachers in allowing them to remote teach and, otherwise, increased staff that year to accommodate our remote learning option as our remote learning was largely separate from our in person learning. Non-teaching staff were also accommodated if they had health concerns.

While we maintained a fair degree of consistency with what we normally do during that year, our overall program was certainly impacted. Academic and behavioral expectations became harder to maintain both for in person and remote learners given the demands on parents brought on by their own employer's needs and quarantining rules, American Academy adhering to quarantining rules and the resulting absences of staff and students, and the social-emotional impact on staff, parents, and students of living through the yo-yoing of these rules and procedures. Relatedly, and obviously, we were all impacted by society's dealing with a pandemic and all the ways that this manifested (e.g., traditional and social media reporting and interaction).

Our ability grouping will continue to help with learning loss. Per third grade iReady results in spring 2022, 77% of our students in math were at or above grade level while 91% were at or above grade level in literacy. These are marked improvements from spring 2021 which saw 69% at grade level for math and 83% for literacy. We also continue to monitor social-emotional effects on a case-by-case basis.

Attachments

Section 2: COVID Response

– No Attachments –