

DCSD Staff Recommendation on Charter School Application



Recommendation: The recommendation from DCSD Staff is to **Deny** the 2023 Charter School application of Alexandria School of Innovation (ASI) in all four proposed locations.

Overall Recommendation Guidance

- The proposed budgets for ASI are dependent on Notices of Claim that have been reported as “submitted” but have not been “approved.”
- The DCSD Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) has not identified land parcels in the applications as surplus, therefore this land is not available for charter schools.
- There are extremely low (3) letters of intent that have been submitted and/or collected (unverified).
- There is no clear alignment in the proposed educational programming to the Colorado Academic Standards.
- The proposed Governance structure is not at arms-length. There is no evidence of a school Board of Directors, or a viable Charter Management Organization (CMO).
- The financial viability of the school is dependent on a claim made to the Colorado School District Self-Insurance Pool (CSDSIP).
- Financial gaps in the budget are identified, and these do not allow for the proposed schools to be successful.
- No current support from the community has been identified.
- No current parent involvement has been identified, and parents are not involved in the design phase of the schools.
- The school application only included one person, and there were no others represented in any meeting, presentation, or interview.

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Evaluation

Evidence of Support
<p>Provide details on the student population to be served, how the founding committee has reached out to parents of targeted students, how many parents have expressed interest in the school by submitting letters of intent to enroll, and what community organizations, colleges and universities, nonprofits, and local groups are in support of the school as evidenced through letters of support.</p>
<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The applicant has previous ties to the community and history and experience developing education programs in Douglas County (STEM School Highlands Ranch) <p>Concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Letters of support have not been supplied in alignment with questions on the application.• The applicant states that they will not get letters of support from the community until the charter is approved. Many of the proposed programs or areas of focus won't be possible without these partnerships.• There appear to be no current letters of support, but it was indicated that once the school is given charter approval they will gather them. Relying on past letters with a new application does not provide the indication of support needed to determine viability of the school and enrollment.• The applicant states in the application, and also in the capacity interview, that support from the community is there, but intents to enroll will only be collected after the application is approved.• When additional information was requested, the applicant stated that they have 3 letters of intent for ASI, but provided no more detail
Financial Plan/Budget
<p>Provide structured evidence of the systems and procedures in place to ensure the school and Board follow sound financial practices to make sure their school is financially stable and funds are appropriately used to support the mission and vision of the school. Additionally, provide a summary of the 5-year school budget that includes a description of the school start-up plan, services and specific programming for both the academic and non-academic program, and any other areas of service that are unique to the school model.</p>

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Strengths:

- The applicant acknowledges financial practices and financial transparency requirements. All aspects of the accounting operation will be completed by the Charter Management Organization (CMO).
- Selection of the auditor is the responsibility of the Charter School Board.
- Financial policies and procedures are developed in an appendix.
- The budget is balanced in Year 1 should ASI have success with the Notice of Claim from DCSD through CDSIP.
- Budget template reflects an understanding of school finance and grant funds available to schools.

Concerns:

- The budget narrative is not clearly reflected in the budget template, and there are a number of contradictions. Revenue sources of Colorado Charter Schools Program (CCSP) start up grant and Perkins Grant are potentially incorrectly included in the budget and are not guaranteed sources of revenue. If not received, the school risks a negative net income. When asked about contingencies during the interview, the notice of claims funds were identified to resolve all shortages or grant funds that may not be received.
- Applicant has not provided confidence that different scenarios have been considered, or that contingency plans established.
- The contract for special needs (\$800k from Crystal Valley, \$1M at Ridgeway and Sterling Ranch) paid from ASI to JDI is unclear. It is still unclear, even after requesting additional information, as to what is provided to ASI from JDI for these funds, and it is not included in the draft partnership agreement.
- While an audit requirement is noted, there is no budget for an accounting firm to complete the audit.
- The 2.5% of revenue fee to the CMO (outside service provider for bookkeeping services) may be financially insufficient to cover all necessary services detailed in the draft agreement with CMO.
- There is no contingency for facility needs if the Notices of Claim (NOC) funding is not received.
- Facility details, like size and layout, are not included in the narrative nor the budget template. This prevents proper review of facility related budget aspects such as maintenance, custodial, snow removal, fire/security, electricity, water.
- Several staff areas are not included in the budget, ELD, Nurse, Paraprofessionals.
- Projected enrollment and growth figures do not reflect historical growth in Douglas County and there are no letters of intent to support the opening enrollment at each location.
- Revenue sources do not contain details, and may not be secured (other Local, Other State).
- The budget questions could not be appropriately addressed due to no representation by the individual who built the budget at the capacity interview.

Educational Plan

Show an educational program detailing an effective, well thought out, research-based educational program that aligns with the school's mission, goals, and the student population, along with the state standards of Colorado. Additionally, define the Curriculum and program alignment, instructional

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strategies, structures and supports for specials and electives, and professional learning requirements of the school.

Strengths:

- Core Knowledge is a recognized and evidence based curriculum.
- The schoolwide focus on customer service culture is a strength and names models of industry best practice.
- The plan indicates that teachers will engage in backwards planning as part of their instructional work.
- Technology will be integrated into the curriculum to enhance learning and provide hands-on experiences.
- The applicant states that they will hire a special education coordinator type of administrator to oversee programming across the schools.

Concerns:

- There is no implementation plan for HS offerings, only an extensive list of courses that could potentially be offered. Offering this broad menu of courses would not be feasible with projected enrollment and budget.
- This section is presented more as a summary than an answer to the requirements by DCSD and does not provide enough information to adequately assess.
- Implementation of the educational program is not addressed, only a high level overview of what the school plans to focus on in its program. No clear information on how assessments will be used to drive instruction and there are significant concerns on the associated staff requirements for the content proposed.
- No questions regarding the educational program for the school could be answered during the capacity interview, and if they were addressed at all, it was that "they will comply".
- The applicant is unclear about how they will create a culturally responsive welcoming environment that affords equal access to a rigorous curriculum.
- As there was no one at the capacity interview that could speak with experience on the implementation of the Colorado Academic Standards, it is difficult to assess the strength or weakness of that implementation plan. Other than stating that the school will be in compliance, it was difficult to get a clear picture of what this implementation would look like at ASI.
- There seems to be no hard data around student projections for subgroups, including ELD Students.
- There is significant professional development listed with seemingly little detail of how the time for all of the professional development would occur within teacher contract hours and still meet student instructional time.
- Securing staff with the requisite credentials and training to offer and teach the CTE, CE, and AP courses is not accounted for in the professional development plan or the budget.
- It is unclear what specific actions would be taken to implement an iMTSS and RtI plan. There is mention of a proposed plan, but details are insufficient.
- The application does not include any details regarding the evaluation and identification processes for students who may require Special Education services, English Language

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Development Service, and/or Gifted Education Services. Details that are provided are generally non-compliant and/or outdated.

- The application does not provide a clear schedule outlining service provision for any students with unique needs.
- It was stated in the interview that students would have time after school to get additional help. Intervention must be built into the school day.
- Training for SPED, EL, ML, and GT students was not included in the professional development plan.
- The list of required PD is significant, with seemingly little detail of how the time for all of the professional development would occur within teacher contract hours and still meet student instructional time.
- Applicant has stated they intend to apply for the non-automatic state waiver 22-32-110 (1)(n)(1), C.R.S. Local board duties concerning school calendar in Section O which is in direct conflict with the statement the school will follow DCSD's calendar and schedules in this section.
- The calendar and professional development plan does not account for reasonable time necessary to assess students, analyze performance data, onboard and train teachers in school culture and the multiple technological resources, and adjust previously designed curriculum to meet the needs of students.
- There is a discrepancy between the application and Capacity Interview. It is unclear if students with disabilities will be allowed to enroll in ASI. Concerns with sharing Special Education staffing across campuses considering the targeted population served.
- The application states the use of flexible and diagnostic assessments for special education students; however, there are no details or specifics regarding these assessments.

Parent and Community Involvement

Show a clearly defined target population, and evidence that demand for the program among the target population exceeds available space. Include the roles of parents/guardians, community members, and community organizations and the role they will play as part of the school community.

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Strengths:

- Newsletter to 3,000 targets was discussed via emailing list
- Applicant identifies the need for a volunteer coordinator
- Goal of annual survey and 80% satisfaction is an admirable goal

Concerns:

- Community meetings were proposed to happen after charter approval. It is unclear if recent community engagement for these 2023 applications have been held and to what degree.
- Letters of support from community partners are from 2018-19 application. The District is unable to evaluate and determine if this section met criteria without current, relevant letters and/or data.
- No steering committee was proposed beyond current and/or proposed staff members of Lighthouse on a Hill CMO.
- No parent or community representative on the steering committee is identified in this section's responses.
- Proposed volunteer coordinator responsibilities and duties are unclear (one part time for all schools).
- Proposed parent vs. non-parent make up of the steering committee is unbalanced, with parents representing a minority portion of the team.
- Applicant has made no definitive plans for student recruitment, and stated in the capacity interview they had not attempted to recruit students prior to the approval of the charter due to concerns with past events with a previous application submitted to DCSD. Not only is there no intentional plan to ensure access to diverse sets of students, but there is no plan to recruit any students.
- Sample Letters of Intent were asked for in the application, but were not uploaded in CHARTER.TOOLS software
 - The applicant response to this question simply states it has been done but does not demonstrate or share how or if this was done in any way
- No demonstration of engagement or outreach to at-risk and/or targeted population mentioned (other than the autistic/neurodivergent community)

Human Resources

Provide information on the school's employees and employment policies, and the relationship that will exist between the charter school and its employees. Additionally, if the proposed charter school intends to contract with an education service provider, such as a Charter Management Organization (CMO), or Education Management Organization (EMO), or any other type of school management or service provider.

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Strengths:

- The plan recognizes the need to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development, regular assessments of student learning, teacher performance, and school culture will be used to gather data and inform ongoing improvement efforts. Additionally, surveying teachers and administrators about their perceptions of the professional development program can provide valuable feedback on its impact and effectiveness.

Concerns:

- Job descriptions for staff were not provided in the application.
- There was not a clear process to hire a school leader identified. While there is a rubric for teachers, there was not a rubric for hiring for evaluating a highly qualified leader.
- It was stated that the school would offer competitive pay, without being able to describe the compensation plan
- There is no detailed plan for providing an alternative licensure program or specific plans around implementing professional development (time, resources, etc.)
- The information provided in this section is unrealistic given the current challenges with recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified teachers which is exacerbated by the amount of specific skill sets needed to teach at this school, specific to industry.
- While the school promises competitive pay, these numbers are assuming the school receives funding that is not currently guaranteed. The success of this school's educational program is highly dependent on the teachers and the skills of those teachers in their building.
- The process by which the initial Board was identified is not provided other than that they were involved in the STEM school over 10 years ago. There is significant concern about the purposeful omission of parent representatives on the board in the school's initial year (where parent voice is most critical) and then parents serving as a minority on the board thereafter. The applicant did not describe the process to appoint or elect the initial governing board.
- Of highest concern is the transition of the applicant as a board member to CEO of Lighthouse on a Hill CMO (LHOAH). This relationship appears to be a direct conflict of interest, and does not provide an arm's length relationship between the Board, their responsibilities to select the appropriate CMO for the school, and any financial interest in the transaction.
- The CMO stated here does not have a history of success, or a history at all working in this capacity.
- No summary of the performance data for the schools the education management provider is managing at the time of the application or has managed previously, was provided
- The CMO stated here does not have a history of success, or a history at all working in this capacity. No summary of the performance data for the schools the education management provider is managing at the time of the application or has managed previously, was provided given they don't exist.