



**Albuquerque Public Schools
Office of Innovation and School Choice**

**2021 New Charter School Application Kit
Part B. Executive Summary**

Part B: Executive Summary

This section should be three to four pages long and address, in a narrative form, the following points:

- Your proposed school's name and a description of the charter school's projected students, including key demographic data (academic performance, home languages, special populations), based on the local community or the school district in whose geographic boundaries the charter school applies to operate
- Where the charter school's projected students are most likely being educated currently and why they are expected to choose the proposed charter school for their future educational needs
- Evidence that there is a community need for a school of this nature in the local community or the school district in whose geographic boundaries the charter school applies to operate. Note: NMSA 1978 § 22-8B-6(L)(5) provides, "[a] chartering authority may approve, approve with conditions or deny an application. A chartering authority may deny an application if...the application is otherwise contrary to the best interests of the charter school's projected students, the local community or the school district in whose geographic boundaries the charter school applies to operate." Evidence of community need is required. Specific data and evidence is required in the application itself. Therefore, specific statistical information does not need to be provided here.
- The significant innovative and unique programmatic features the school will implement to accomplish its mission (non-traditional school year, longer school day, partner organizations, etc.)
- How you project that the school will be more effective than the schools currently serving the charter school's projected students, or the founder(s)' plans to improve student achievement and exceed the academic performance of these existing public schools in the local community or the school district in whose geographic boundaries the charter school applies to operate. Provide a brief summary of any data you have to support this assumption.
- How the school will fulfill the economic needs of Albuquerque
- How the school will support increased access to choice in Albuquerque
- The founders of the proposed school, their background, and expertise
- If different from the list provided above, the founding governing board

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To complete the following form, click on the text box and begin to type.

New Charter Application Executive Summary		
Proposed School Name and mission: Our proposed school name is United Community Academy (UCA). UCA's mission is to inspire a love of learning through indigenized ways of being, cross-racial solidarity, and place-based learning so that students are academically successful, secure in their identity, and emotionally and physically well.		
Projected Student Population: UCA will serve students in Albuquerque's International District. Roughly corresponding with the 87108 zip code, the International District is a four-square-mile neighborhood bordered by San Mateo and Wyoming to the East and West, and Lomas and Kirtland Airforce Base to the North and South. Projected student demographics are based on averages of enrollment data from four area elementary schools, Emerson, La Mesa, Wherry, and Whittier Elementary and APS averages:		
Demographics	Area School Average	APS Average
Hispanic	76.2%	66%
Caucasian/White	5.7%	21%
American Indian or Native American	7%	5%
African American/Black	7.2%	3%
Asian	2.5%	2%
Multiracial	3.7%	3.6%
Reading Proficiency	15%	30%
Math Proficiency	13%	20%

Economically Disadvantaged	99%	68%
English Language Learners	49%	17%
Students with Disabilities	18%	19%
Homeless Students	8%	

According to 2019 American Community Survey 5-Yr Estimates, 16.2% of the population in the 87108 zip code is foreign born population in this zip code, nearly double that in Albuquerque overall, at 8.9%, and an estimated 50% of children aged 5-17 speak a language other than English at home. The poverty rate is nearly 35% (up to 42% in some areas), also nearly double the rate in New Mexico at 19%, and over half the children in this zip code live in poverty.

Where Projected Student Population is Being Educated and Why They Are Expected to Choose UCA:

UCA’s projected student population is most likely being educated at the four elementary schools listed above, as well as in area preschool and daycare centers. UCA sent out a community-designed survey to key partners to estimate the likely number of children they can reach through their trusted relationships with local families. Based on survey responses, enthusiastic letters of support from numerous community partners who will actively join us in recruiting students, and an initial estimate of over 400 potentially interested families from our partners, we anticipate strong interest among International District families in enrolling in our school due to three key factors: Our embeddedness in the community and strong long-term relationships; our culturally affirming and relevant school and curriculum design that is directly responsive to community composition and need; and the diversity and quality of our staff.

Evidence of Community Need: The story of the International District is deeply intertwined with the story of New Mexico— and events on the national and world stage. Once sustained by the thriving economic activity surrounding Central Avenue, the federal interstate system and I-40 displaced traffic and subsequently the neighborhood went from vibrant to largely vacant. But not for long; the housing vacancies made the area ideal for the resettlement of refugees, beginning with Vietnamese and Laotian refugees in the Vietnam War era, followed by El Salvadorans and other Central Americans, African refugees from Burundi and Congo and other nations, Iraqi and Afghani refugees.

Today the International District is a dynamic, diverse and growing neighborhood of multi- racial, ethnic and lingual populations and “more than 27 languages can be heard on its streets and playgrounds” (Keller, 2014). But the neighborhood remains chronically underserved. Housing conditions are poor and there is a marked absence of green spaces. With high scores for all New Mexico Department of Health risk factors determined to be detrimental to child well-being, in 2018 the International District was assessed as the worst area in the state for children. These factors are

directly related to a lack of power and not a deficit in the cultures and communities who live in the International District. UCA will begin the process of supporting children and families to get a sense of their own power.

Historically, the majority of the youth in the juvenile justice system are referred from three zip codes in Bernalillo County including 87108 and the International District. The juvenile justice system “has come to view youth from these areas as repeat offenders who have little chance of escaping the “revolving door” of the juvenile justice system” and more youth were detained on warrants from zip code 87108, than youth in any other zip code (Bernalillo County Juvenile Detention Utilization Survey, 2012). This data highlights the deficit perception of the families in this community, that UCA will counter with the school culture, curriculum and policies.

Black and Native American students are represented in area elementary schools at twice the rate of the APS student average, with higher percentages of Latino students and EL learners, and an average percentage of under 6% for Caucasian students. Research shows that having a teacher of color and culturally affirming curriculum improves outcomes for students of color, but the percentage of Caucasian teachers in area elementary schools ranges from 44-60% and none of the schools have an Indigenized curriculum. All these factors combined speak to multiple systems failures including local schools that have struggled to meet the need and are failing in academic proficiency and EL progress, with marked inequities between White students and students of color in achievement data.

Innovative and Unique Programmatic Features: UCA is a truly **community-designed school** specifically to meet the unique needs and strengths of children and families in the International District of Albuquerque. Equity is not an additive at UCA, it is at the heart of our mission so that all students feel that they are seen, valued, and uplifted alongside their peers. From the writing of our charter, to our restorative disciplinary procedures, and even in our calendar, we are consciously inviting community participation in building a school where diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities can thrive. The writing of the charter application with the community was a unique experience for everyone concerned, which has resulted in a charter we know the community wants. We also know that the school will continue to be community-driven, which will allow for innovation and creativity to thrive at the school moving forward. As the first school to offer an **Indigenized Reggio Emilia** approach, we are trusting in each child’s innate intelligence, resilience, and curiosity, in the context of a participatory and relational model of education where the whole child can unfold as they explore the various identities that make up their communities and their own inner selves. Through our unique, early **Ethnic Studies** curricula, we recognize, integrate, and honor the cultures and histories of all the children and families we will serve. The centrality of our **Food as Medicine** curriculum expresses those cultures and histories through both the ritual and nutrition of food. Lastly, **Restorative Justice** practices are woven throughout the school, from interactions with families, policies, staff development, to a culture of the school, that includes daily circle with students at the beginning of each day.

Effectiveness Relative to Other Area Schools: UCA expects to be more effective than other area elementary schools currently serving students in the International District through three core differences that distinguish our vision: 1) A community and place-based design; 2) A holistic approach that prioritizes cultural belonging, relationships, and wellness; and 3) An innovative educational philosophy, including pedagogical methods, and assessments.

1. **Community:** UCA was first conceived when youth in the International District initiated a conversation with the NM Dream Team, which organizes and trains immigrant youth and educators on campuses across the state, to consider starting a school in the neighborhood to address their community's needs. The focus shifted to a more multi-ethnic, cross-racial perspective after a one year listening and learning process. This is when the UNM Community Engagement Center was brought in as founding members and started working in partnership with the NACA Inspired Schools Network (NISN). The founding members began a two-year process of listening and learning to individual leaders, community organizations, elected officials and youth from the Asian, Black, Indigenous and immigrant communities in the International District. Through meetings, focus groups, community gatherings, NISN convenings, surveys, and information sessions hosted by community-based organizations, the design team developed and presented our vision for the school and adjusted and refined that vision as they learned directly from the community what kind of learning environment would best support students and families.
2. **Belonging and wellness:** Belonging has a different meaning for and relevance to the academic outcomes of racial and ethnic minority and immigrant students for whom feeling secure in and accepted for their cultural and/or racial identity is a key to success. This all aligns with the most recent research and insights on serving diverse student populations and New Mexico state policy following the Yazzie-Martinez ruling. Our holistic approach to student belonging and wellness is especially critical in the International District and is supported by a strong body of research linking culturally affirming and relevant education to increased feelings of belonging to improve academic achievement. The direct connection between academic success and social, emotional, cultural and physical wellness is often underestimated. We are centering this knowledge and our mission driven assessments and Wellness Wheel will help us document the connections.
3. **Philosophy, method, and assessments:** UCA does not recognize the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the children we will serve to be "a problem" that our school will "solve." In fact, in alignment with the Reggio Emilia philosophy, we believe that children are co-investigators and collaborators in "constructing" and reflecting upon their own learning processes. This will nurture their intrinsic motivation to learn and develop a love of learning. Experiential and collaborative learning has been shown to increase critical and creative thinking skills while increasing self-esteem in students. UCA adheres to all required APS and state assessments to ensure our learners are on track, however many of our assessments are collaborative as well. In addition to surveys, questionnaires, and other tools, the Reggio Emilia method emphasizes learning and assessment as a process of exchange between students, their teachers, and their families, with rigorous documentation procedures

compiled in student portfolios. This requires teachers to see themselves as researchers who are continuously improving and learning based on data. Children will use UCA’s Wellness Wheel for self-assessment, directly communicating their learning experiences and wellness needs to their family members and their teachers.

Fulfilling Economic Needs: Economic needs are most often understood as material needs. When children in the International District are supported, experience their minds, cultures, and histories being recognized and celebrated, they are more likely to feel confident, creative, and stay—and succeed— in school. This supports future economic success for them and their families, contributing to the overall economic activity in the city and in the state. Further, given the large population of immigrants and students of color we will serve, it is worth noting the critical role these entrepreneurial communities have played in New Mexico’s economy despite the low investment the state has made in the schools that serve them; ninety-nine percent of New Mexico’s businesses are small businesses and 20% of these businesses are self-employed minorities (U.S. SBA, 2021). But there are other ways to look at economic needs. The Nobel prize winning economist Amartya Sen, for instance, defined economic development in terms of the development of distinct freedoms and each individual’s capability for accessing them. The legacies of colonialism and/or longstanding historic inequities have suppressed the unique capabilities of so many children in New Mexico by virtue of their racial, ethnic, or cultural identities. UCA cannot undo these legacies alone. But by collaborating with families, community-based organizations, NISN, APS, NMPED, NM Highlands University, and the University of New Mexico, we can nurture and inspire the innate freedom of every child, and the self-determination of their communities, which may be the greatest wealth that any school can offer.

Increasing Access to Choice: UCA increases “access to choice” not only in terms of giving International District families the opportunity to choose a school that reflects their needs and values but by increasing the agency that families will have in impacting programming at the school. Community feedback has already helped us develop our vision and approach, from our curriculum, to our restorative justice policies, to our organizational structure, and governing board practices. Student and family decision making and choice will continue to play a daily role in how children learn in every classroom and in charting the future of the school. It is also worth noting that immigrant serving organizations in the International District are coming together to strategize the ways in which UCA can be seen as an option for the families.

Founding Team and Proposed Governing Board:

Names	Role on Team	Qualifications
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<p>Kiran Katira</p>	<p>Founder Interim Head of School</p>	<p>Ms. Katira received her Ph.D. in Educational Thought and Socio-Cultural Studies at the University of New Mexico. She is an NISN Fellow and on several Boards, including Dorn Charter School, NM Dream Team and NM Asian Family Center. For twenty three years she has worked with community organizers and leaders through the University of New Mexico's Community Engagement Center. Kiran is a national trainer with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, where she conducts undoing racism workshops across the nation. She teaches university courses on anti-racist education, peace and justice, and critical multicultural education.</p>
<p>Eli Cuna</p>	<p>Founding Board Member</p>	<p>Ms. Cuna is the Statewide Census Coordinator for the Center for Civic Policy (CCP) and Senior Advisor for the New Mexico Dream Team (NMDT)—a nonprofit organization she co-founded. She has also worked as an Ethnographic Research Associate at the Center for Study of Urban Poverty at UCLA, and holds two B.A. degrees and an M.P.A from the University of New Mexico.</p>
<p>Kay Bounkeua</p>	<p>Founding Board Member</p>	<p>Ms. Bounkeua previously served as the Executive Director of the New Mexico Asian Family Center, and currently works as the New Mexico Deputy Director for the Wilderness Society. She is the inaugural board chair for Albuquerque’s Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, and is a current W.K. Kellogg Foundation Community Leadership Network fellow. Ms. Bounkeua holds a Master of Public Health degree from the University of Michigan’s School of Public Health.</p>
<p>Ebony Booth</p>	<p>Founding Board Member</p>	<p>Ms. Booth is the Founding Director of Burque Noir, a multi-media showcase for Black performing and visual artists in Albuquerque, and leads the Honeysuckle Creatives consultancy, specializing in creative engagement strategies, project management, and event design that centers people of color.</p>
<p>Aimeé Gonzalez Estrada</p>	<p>Founding Board Member</p>	<p>Ms. Estrada has extensive experience practicing law as Deputy General Counsel for Titan Development. Most recently, Aimeé was selected as a W.K. Kellogg Foundation Community Leadership Network fellow. Aimeé obtained a Bachelor of Arts in International Business and Economics, with honors, from New Mexico State University, and her Juris Doctor from the University of New Mexico School of Law.</p>

Theresa Watson	Founding Board Member	<p>Ms. Watson is a program manager for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. She supports the place-based strategic programming functions at the foundation while acting as a key resource in the compilation, organization, utilization and communication of information and knowledge. Ms. Watson received her MBA from the University of New Mexico, Anderson School of Management and her bachelor’s degree in diversity and ethnic studies from the University of New Mexico. She also studied Mexican social movements at the Universidad Autónoma Meropolitana-Xochomilco and carries a certification from the Anderson School of Management as a Lean Practitioner.</p>
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