



Montana Board of Public Education

Public Charter School Application

June 2024

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INTRODUCTION

HB 549 (2023), now codified in Title 20, Chapter 6, Part 8 of Montana Code Annotated, authorized the establishment of public charter schools in Montana and tasked the Montana Board of Public Education as the sole entity authorized to enter into public charter contracts with a governing board. There are two types of public charter schools – those operating under an existing local school board and those operating as a new school district under a separate governing board. This Public Charter School Application is for both options.

A public charter school means a public school that has autonomy over decisions including, but not limited to, matters concerning finance, personnel, scheduling, curriculum, and instruction as defined in a public charter contract. Public charter schools are governed by a local school board, or in the case of a governing board other than a local school board, by the governing board of the public charter school district of which the public charter school is a part. Public charter schools are established and operated under the terms of a public charter contract and allow parents to choose to enroll their children. Public charter schools must admit students based on a lottery if more students apply for admission than can be accommodated.

Public charter schools provide a program of education that may include any or all grades from kindergarten through grade 12 and vocational education programs and operate in pursuit of a specific set of educational objectives as defined in its public charter contract.

The evaluation of your application will focus on whether implementing the proposals in your application will lead to the academic, organizational, and financial performance you are promising in exchange for potential broad flexibility from Montana’s education standards. The evaluation will also determine whether:

- There is an established need for the proposed public charter school;
- The proposed public charter school meets the needs of all its students;
- The proposed public charter school is of the highest academic quality;
- The proposed public charter school will provide a healthy learning environment and positive school climate;
- The proposed governing board demonstrates the capacity to implement the plan outlined in the application with fidelity; and
- The proposed public charter school will provide an educational opportunity to students that they would not otherwise receive at the traditional school they are zoned to attend.

SUBMISSION PROCEDURES

To facilitate the Montana Board of Public Education’s review of public charter school applications, applicants must submit the application to bpe@mt.gov between the dates of October 28 and November 1, 2024, with a deadline of November 1, 2024 at 5PM. All submission materials must be submitted in a single electronic submission. Multiple attachments will not be accepted in the submission. The Board will review the public charter school application, and if determined complete, will facilitate an interview, and take public comment on the application in November. Final approval of the application will take place at the January 2025 Board of Public Education meeting. Please note the timeline on the Board’s webpage under the Public Charter School tab.

We recognize that this application may not provide the space to fully respond to each of the questions in the application. Please provide a brief, direct response to each question, with reference to attachments, appendices, and weblinks to lengthier handbooks, policies, and additional information. Please make sure to clearly state where any corresponding responses are located within the application and limit application pages to 26, plus any attachments and letters of support.

Please note that submitting a public charter school application does not guarantee approval and that a public charter school contract will be granted. Failure to adhere to any requirements may lead to an incomplete application that is rejected before consideration. In addition, complete applications that are not strong enough to guarantee a successful public charter school implementation will be recommended for denial.

PUBLIC CHARTER APPLICATION COVER PAGE

Check One: New Public Charter under existing local school board New Public Charter District

Name of Public Charter School Big Horn Academy

Local school district in which the public charter school will be physically located: _____

Hardin High School LE:1189

Contact Information for the Governing Board Chair

Contact Person: Jodeen Marston Chairman
Name **Title**

Contact Address: 401 Park Road Hardin, MT 59034

Telephone Number: (406) 665-7218

E-mail Address: jodeen.marston@hardin.k12.mt.us

Contact Information for the Person Completing this Application

Contact Person: Tobin Novasio Superintendent
Name **Title**

Contact Address: 401 Park Road Hardin, MT 59034

Telephone Number: (406)665-9304

E-mail Address: tobin.novasio@hardin.k12.mt.us

Local Board of Trustee Evidence

Check One: Approved by existing local school board Refused approval by existing local school board

Provide copy of local school board minutes as evidence.

See Accompanying Documents

PUBLIC CHARTER APPLICATION

Name of Public Charter School: Big Horn Academy

Provide an executive summary with the general purpose and rationale for the creation of the public charter school, and explain how the proposed public charter school is different from a program that you could operate or are currently operating without the public charter designation.

Opening Date: August 2025 Public Charter Term Length: Fall 2025 - Spring 2030

Grades to be served: 7-12

Minimum Enrollment Per Year: 80

Planned Enrollment Per Year: 100

Maximum Enrollment Per Year: 100

During the proposed public charter 5-year term, indicate the specific grade-level programs that you plan to serve:

Check all that apply: Elementary Program Middle Grades Program High School Program

For each year of the public charter term, estimate the number of students the public charter school plans to serve in each grade:

	Elementary						Middle		High School				Total	
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		12
Year 1										20	20	20	20	80
Year 2								10	10	20	20	20	20	100
Year 3								10	10	20	20	20	20	100
Year 4								10	10	20	20	20	20	100
Year 5								10	10	20	20	20	20	100

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

See Submission Procedures

1. State the public charter school’s mission and vision and describe why this initiative is important to the community it will serve.

See Accompanying Documents

2. Identify the targeted student population and the community the public charter school proposes to serve.

See Accompanying Documents

3. Describe plans and timelines for student recruitment and enrollment, including lottery procedures.

See Accompanying Documents

4. Describe the public charter school's academic program, specifically focusing on why it is innovative in your school district. Include plans to formally assess student achievement on an annual basis.
See Accompanying Documents
5. Describe any variances to existing standards that the public charter school requires to enhance educational opportunities.
See Accompanying Documents
6. Describe the instructional design, including the type of learning environment, class size and structure, curriculum overview, and teaching methods.
See Accompanying Documents
7. Describe plans for identifying and successfully serving students with disabilities, students who are English Language Learners, students who are academically challenged, and gifted students, including compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
See Accompanying Documents
8. Describe student discipline policies, including those for special education students.
See Accompanying Documents

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

See Submission Procedures

9. Describe the public charter school's organizational chart that clearly presents the proposed organizational structure, including lines of authority and reporting between the governing board, staff, related bodies such as advisory bodies or parent and teacher councils, and external organizations that will play a role in managing the public charter school.
See Accompanying Documents
10. Describe the roles and responsibilities of the governing board, the proposed leadership management team, and other entities shown in the organizational chart.
See Accompanying Documents
11. Provide a staffing chart for the public charter school's first year and a staffing plan for the term of the public charter school.
See Accompanying Documents
12. Detail the public charter school startup plan, identifying tasks, timelines, and responsible individuals.
See Accompanying Documents
13. Describe the plans for recruiting and developing school leadership and staff.
See Accompanying Documents

14. Describe the proposed leadership and teacher employment policies, including performance evaluation plans.

See Accompanying Documents

15. State the proposed governing bylaws.

See Accompanying Documents

16. Explain any partnerships or contractual relationships central to the operations and mission of the public charter school.

See Accompanying Documents

17. Provide the proposed calendar and sample daily schedule.

See Accompanying Documents

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

See Submission Procedures

18. Describe plans for providing transportation, food service, and all other significant operational or ancillary services.

See Accompanying Documents

19. Describe cocurricular and extracurricular programs and how the programs will be funded and delivered.

See Accompanying Documents

20. Describe the proposed financial plan and policies, including financial controls and audit requirements.

See Accompanying Documents

21. Describe the insurance coverage that will be obtained.

See Accompanying Documents

22. Describe the startup and five-year budgets with clearly stated assumptions.

See Accompanying Documents

23. Describe the startup and first year cash flow projections with clearly stated assumptions.

See Accompanying Documents

24. Describe anticipated fundraising contributions and evidence, if applicable.

See Accompanying Documents

25. Describe the facilities plan, including backup or contingency plans.

See Accompanying Documents

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND NEED

See Submission Procedures

26. Describe the specific evidence of significant community support.

See Accompanying Documents

27. Describe the opportunities and expectations for parent involvement.

See Accompanying Documents

NOT AN EXISTING LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD? COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION

See Submission Procedures

1. Provide specific evidence that the applicant has sought from the local school board the creation of a school or program of the located school district serving the mission and vision of the proposed public charter school.

Not Applicable

2. Provide specific evidence that the local school board declined to create the school or program and declined to submit a proposal for the creation of a public charter school to the Board of Public Education.

Not Applicable

3. Provide a legal description of the property of the existing school district from which the boundaries of the public charter school district are proposed to be formed.

Not Applicable

4. Share background information on the initial governing board members and, if identified, the proposed school leadership and management team.

Not Applicable

Questions? Contact bpe@mt.gov

Montana Public Charter School Application
Hardin Public Schools - Districts 17H and 1
Big Horn Academy

Executive Summary

Hardin Public Schools serve the majority of students in Big Horn County; a county roughly the same size as the state of Delaware which is traditionally the second most impoverished county in Montana and where the life expectancy is a decade less than the national average. We are a Community Eligibility district in terms of the school lunch program due to our high preponderance of childhood poverty, almost 90% of our students are Native American, and students can travel over 100 miles per day to attend school. These are all factors that can contribute statistically to academic challenges.

Any educator can expound on the benefits of high school graduation for both the individual and the community; including financial and well-being benefits as well as increased opportunities throughout a lifetime. The data from the 2023-24 school year available from the Montana Office of Public Instruction show Hardin High School with a cohort Graduation Rate of 58.4%; significantly lower than the state average of 85.6%. Hardin High School has been identified by OPI as a "Comprehensive Support" School and we are working collaboratively with them to improve our student outcomes. Simply stated, this is not acceptable and we as a school district and community have to take a long hard look at the underlying reasons for this statistic as well as developing programs to better engage and educate our students. This proposal for creating a public charter school, the Big Horn Academy, is part of our efforts to address this need; we believe it is an opportunity to accelerate positive outcomes for our students by better meeting their individual needs.

Hardin High School currently has an effective alternative program that we believe that we can expand on and improve if granted public charter status. We hope to add more flexibility for scheduling to better meet students' needs, specifically evening classes. We want to add additional counseling as many of the students identified for the program are dealing with challenges in their personal lives; we also plan to provide additional support to the students' families to create a stronger support system. We want to open the program to middle school students on a limited basis as the middle school does not currently have an effective program for students needing additional support, additional challenge, or alternative instruction. Finally, we want to expand the integration of cultural expectations and heritage into our every day work, helping build a sense of belonging and empowerment for our students.

In the Spring of 2024, Hardin School district went through the portrait of a graduate process to identify what all stakeholders in the Hardin High School community would like to see a graduate Hardin possess. These six competencies are:

- Critical Thinking
- Adaptability
- Empathy
- Perseverance
- Integrity
- Communicator

Keep these six core competencies in mind as well as how The Big Horn Academy would create opportunities for students to possess these skills by the time they graduate. Our goal is to provide our students with these competencies our stakeholders prioritized; in a school which will give more students, including those who have not been successful in a more traditional classroom setting, the opportunity to reach the important milestone that is high school graduation.

Academic Program

1. State the public charter school's mission and vision and describe why this initiative is important to the community it will serve:

School Mission and Vision

Mission:

Creating a community of learners who value trust, respect, and social responsibility.

Vision:

To be a leading alternative high school where students thrive academically, emotionally, and socially, equipped with the skills and confidence to succeed in a diverse and changing world.

Trust and Respect in Action

Trust:

- We trust students to take ownership of their learning and make informed decisions.
- Teachers trust students to engage in meaningful classroom discussions and assignments.
- Trust in open and honest communication among students, staff, and families.

Respect:

- Respect for diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences within our school community.
- Respect for school property, resources, and the learning environment.
- Respectful behavior towards peers, teachers, and staff at all times.

Big Horn Academy (BHA) is dedicated to preparing students for life after graduation, whether they choose to continue their education, enter the workforce, or serve in the military. BHA is for students in the Hardin Public School system that are at-risk of not graduating and need an alternative environment to earn their high school diploma. Our approach is one of partnership with parents. We are dedicated to collaborating closely with them to craft individualized plans that cater to the unique needs of their children, setting them on a path to success.

2. Identify the targeted student population and the community the public charter school proposes to serve:

Academy Program

The Academy Program is a specialized program for freshman through senior students who meet specific eligibility criteria. The overall goal of the Academy Program is to prevent students from dropping out of school. This program provides a different track for success. Smaller class sizes, project-based learning, field trips, and credit recovery options are among the possibilities for success outside of the traditional school program. Students whose behavior (attendance, work completion, anxiety, previous alternative school placement, or other behaviors) disrupts their school success may be candidates for an alternative high school program. The student's primary focus is gaining the skills they need to become successful in a real-world setting.

BHA students are fully eligible for extracurricular activities and clubs. Some elective courses are available to students in this program. Eligibility criteria will be based on prior academic performance and teacher recommendation.

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The ideal candidate for BHA would be a student that poses one or more of the following qualities:

- At risk, twice exceptional students who don't function well in the regular academic setting.
- Students who may be credit deficient.
- Students who possess average to above average academic promise but struggle with certain academic or social constructs such as those found in a typical middle or high school setting.
- Students who may be socially maladjusted
- Students who may be Struggling with anxiety
- Students with and IEP whose primary disability category is labeled "emotional disturbance"
- First time mothers

We would like to open limited opportunities for 7th and 8th graders who we believe would benefit from the Academy; our goal would be to keep these students engaged and progressing towards graduation rather than disengaging and beginning the process of dropping out. Ultimately, another long term goal is to open a satellite campus in Crow Agency, MT. This would provide similar opportunities to those students in the Hardin community. Because Big Horn county is so large, having another location for students would be helpful in reducing the travel barrier for students in our outlying areas.

3. Describe plans and timelines for student recruitment and enrollment, including lottery procedures.

Enrollment to Big Horn Academy will be on a first come first served basis using an application process. Parents and students may request placement within this program. Class size is limited and students will be placed on a waiting list once capacity is reached. Students on the waiting list will be prioritized using the attached flowchart. If classes are not full, students will then be placed into a lottery system:

Students will be assigned a number beginning at number one, and a random drawing from the numbers will be conducted before school starts. An additional 10% will be drawn for a waitlist to be called upon should other students decline to enroll after being selected. Once a student is enrolled, they will not have to go through the lottery process again. If seats are open, out of district students will have the opportunity to attend.

A student needs to submit a completed application and referral packet from her/his counselor to the Academy screening team for review. The Academy screening team will review applications submitted by the student who wishes to enroll in the Alternative High School Program. Membership of the team will consist of the Academy Principal, a school counselor, and a teacher. (Appendix C - Student Application, Appendix D - Acceptance Flow Chart)

Open Application

- Any student **attending Hardin High School** may apply for enrollment at Big Horn Academy at any time during the year. The application will be sent to the screening team for review.
- **Hardin Middle School** students will be referred to the Academy by their Principal and Counselor and screened by the screening team for fit.
- Student's home school will be the last school where they were enrolled.
- The screening team will consider applicants with extenuating circumstances for immediate placement.
- Incomplete applications will not be screened.

Items that will be considered in enrollment

- Maturity Level
- Willingness to change
- Previous placement in a treatment program for drugs/alcohol/mental health
- Homeless
- Group Home Students
- Students willingness to earn their way into the program
- Previous school behaviors
- Extenuating circumstances
- Attendance
- Grades

Hardin High School reserves the right to refuse to admit expelled students into the School District. **Big Horn Academy** is a “**school of choice**” designed for students who want to earn a high school diploma by participating in a rigorous and relevant educational experience preparing them for their adult roles and responsibilities in the 21st Century.

Big Horn Academy offers all students:

- Smaller student body
- Smaller student-to-teacher ratio
- More one-to-one help
- Family atmosphere
- A focus on Social Emotional supports
- Integrated cultural components

4. Describe the public charter school's academic program, specifically focusing on why it is innovative in your school district. Include plans to formally assess student achievement on an annual basis.

The Big Horn Academy's academic program is designed to be both flexible and personalized, addressing the diverse learning needs of high school students. It is innovative within the district for several reasons:

1. **Blended Learning Model:** If successful, Big Horn Academy would offer a blend of in-person and online learning, which would allow students to access coursework in a flexible way. This is particularly beneficial for students who need non-traditional school schedules due to personal, health, or family-related challenges. This model promotes self-paced learning while maintaining accountability through regular meetings with teachers.
2. **Individualized Learning Plans:** If successful, the program would emphasize individualized student support through personalized learning plans, which would be tailored to each student's academic needs, strengths, and challenges. This would help students progress at their own pace while still meeting the district's academic standards.
3. **Behavior Intervention Integration:** The integration of behavior intervention within the daily schedule is another innovative aspect. Students, as part of their individualized behavior plans, begin and end their day with check-ins, promoting accountability and helping them transition into a structured learning environment. The behavior intervention model, combined with the restorative justice approach, supports social-emotional growth alongside academic success.
4. **Innovative Master Scheduling:** The Big Horn Academy's master schedule is designed with flexibility in mind, offering a variety of core subjects such as Math, Science, English, and History while also ensuring there are credit recovery opportunities available during each period. This structure ensures that students have opportunities for focused learning as well as time for independent work.
5. **Other Opportunities:** BHA endeavors to:
 - a. Expand cultural ties with the Crow Tribe and Northern Cheyenne Tribe.
 - b. Create parent coaching for all parents
 - c. Employee two full time school counselors
 - d. Allow all teen mothers to bring their children to school (dropout prevention)
 - e. Reduce transportation barriers, up to individually picking students up from their residency
 - f. Employee a student welfare specialist to engage with families and help support their basic needs
 - g. Provide daily emotional check in/checkout for all students
 - h. Allow students to graduate with 20 credits (MCA 20-7-1303-Educational Disruption)
 - i. Create a satellite campus in Crow Agency, MT and in the Hardin Middle School
 - j. Expand Asynchronous learning platform

- k. Create a “Night School” for students that may have to stay home to take care of siblings or are required to have a job during the day to provide for their families
- l. Assist parents/guardians with completing their Hi-Set

Formal Assessment Plans

To formally assess student achievement on an annual basis, Big Horn Academy plans to implement a comprehensive evaluation process that includes:

- **State-Mandated Assessments:** All students will participate in standardized testing required by the state to assess proficiency in core subject areas such as Math, English, and Science.
- **Performance-Based Assessments:** In addition to standardized tests, students will engage in assessments that measure their ability to apply academic concepts in real-world scenarios. This will allow for a more holistic view of student learning.
- **Individualized Progress Tracking:** Each student’s progress will be tracked through learning plans, with frequent evaluations to assess growth in meeting both academic and behavioral goals.
- **Self Assessment Senior Project:** The overarching goal of the Big Horn Academy would be to be a leading alternative high school where students thrive academically, emotionally, and socially, equipped with the skills and confidence to succeed in a diverse and changing world. Being self-aware is one of the biggest factors in being successful in this goal. Students would create a project in whatever media they would prefer showcasing their growth from their 9th grade year to their 12th grade year.

This comprehensive and flexible academic program, which focuses on individualized learning and integration of behavior supports, would set Big Horn Academy apart as an innovative option within the district.

5. Describe any variances to existing standards that the public charter school requires to enhance educational opportunities.

The BHA does not require any variances at this time. They will ensure that all students meet the Montana requirements for graduation as outlined in 10.55.905 of the Administrative Rules of Montana.

6. Describe the instructional design, including the type of learning environment, class size and structure, curriculum overview and teaching methods.

Learning environment: Big Horn Academy’s instructional design prioritizes a flexible, personalized learning experience within a supportive, structured environment. Here’s a breakdown of the key components:

Learning Environment

We understand that all students learn best in different ways and at different paces; our goal at the BHA is to meet these individual needs. The learning environment at the Big Horn Academy would be a blend of traditional classroom settings and online instruction with an infused family environment. This hybrid model supports students who thrive with both in-person engagement and the flexibility of remote learning.

Class Size and Structure

Class sizes at the Big Horn Academy would be kept relatively small, ensuring more individualized attention for students. Each class will have 20 students or less, allowing teachers to engage more deeply with each learner's unique needs. The schedule that each student follows will be based upon their specific needs. They may need to take care of siblings or their own children and need flexibility in their own school day. The BHA will work with students and provide a schedule that is best for them.

- **Master Schedule Structure:** The daily schedule is organized into five class periods with core subjects (e.g., Math, English, Science, History) offered once per day, alongside dedicated study hall periods each hour and social-emotional learning classes at the end of each day. This structure ensures students have both academic focus time, independent work time and would be getting their social-emotional needs met.
- **Behavior Intervention:** Some students would follow individualized behavior plans that include structured transitions from the Behavior Intervention areas into class periods. This offers additional support for students with behavioral needs, ensuring they stay on track.

Curriculum Overview

Currently we are one of Montana's biggest users of the Montana Digital Academy's online blended learning platform. This ensures a vetted curriculum along with an infused IEFA curriculum. This also gives students the flexibility to complete work if they missed school.

The curriculum is designed to meet the educational standards set by the district and state while also allowing room for personalization. Core subjects include:

- **English (1-4):** Courses focus on reading, writing, literature, and communication skills, progressing from foundational concepts in English 1 to advanced analytical skills in English 4.
- **Math (1-3):** Sequential math courses, including personal finance, aim to build students' quantitative reasoning and problem-solving abilities.
- **Science:** Biology and Life Science courses emphasize hands-on learning and inquiry-based instruction, with an emphasis on critical thinking.
- **Social Studies:** U.S. History, Government, Global Studies, and Geography help students understand civic responsibilities and global perspectives.
- **Physical Education and Health:** Students are encouraged to maintain physical wellness and gain health knowledge.
- **Social-Emotional Class:** Each student will be enrolled in a social-emotional class, providing them whole-group instruction in a smaller group setting.

In addition to core subjects, the program incorporates personalized learning pathways that focus on students' strengths and areas for growth.

Teaching Methods

The Big Horn Academy uses a combination of traditional and innovative teaching methods:

- **Blended Learning:** Teachers use online platforms to complement in-person instruction, allowing students to progress at their own pace. This method supports differentiated

learning, ensuring that students who need additional support receive it, while more advanced learners can move ahead.

- **Behavioral Integration:** For students following behavior intervention plans, teachers incorporate behavior expectations directly into the instructional process. Students are supported in transitioning from behavior intervention into the academic environment smoothly, reinforcing positive behaviors while learning.
- **Restorative Practices:** Restorative justice circles, with norms like “no name-calling,” help foster a positive classroom culture. Students are encouraged to participate in open dialogues, resolving conflicts and building a respectful community.
- **Individualized Support:** Students are regularly assessed through their individualized learning plans, and teachers provide targeted instruction based on these assessments. Regular check-ins, such as the weekly meetings with a school counselor to ensure that learning remains aligned with students' goals.

Summary

Big Horn Academy’s instructional design focuses on a personalized, flexible approach, combining small class sizes, a hybrid learning environment, and behavioral support. The blend of traditional curriculum with innovative teaching methods fosters an inclusive and dynamic learning experience that meets the diverse needs of the students.

7. Describe plans for identifying and successfully serving students with disabilities, students who are English Language Learners, students who are academically challenged, and gifted students, including compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

The Big Horn Academy is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students, including those with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELLs), academically challenged students, and gifted students. The school has developed comprehensive plans to identify and serve these diverse learners while ensuring compliance with state and federal laws, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). One of the key components of our program is an individualized learning plan for ALL students.

1. Identifying and Serving Students with Disabilities

The Big Horn Academy follows a structured process to identify and support students with disabilities:

- **Identification Process:** The school uses a combination of academic screenings, teacher observations, and parent referrals to identify students who may have disabilities. Once a concern is raised, the school convenes a multidisciplinary team to evaluate the student's needs and determine eligibility for special education services.
- **Individualized Education Plans (IEPs):** For students who qualify under IDEA, the school develops an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that outlines specific goals, accommodations, modifications, and related services. These may include speech therapy, occupational therapy, or counseling services, depending on the student's needs. The IEP team, which includes teachers, parents, and specialists, regularly reviews progress and adjusts plans as necessary. **One of Big Horn Academy’s goals is to serve students with the primary disability category of Emotional Disturbance.**

- **504 Plans:** For students with disabilities who do not require an IEP but still need accommodations to access the general education curriculum, Big Horn Academy creates 504 Plans. These plans provide necessary accommodations, such as extended test time, modified assignments, or physical accessibility measures.
- **Inclusion and Support Services:** Whenever possible, students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment, meaning they are included in general education classrooms with appropriate supports. Special education teachers collaborate with general education staff to co-teach or provide push-in or pull-out services to ensure students receive the necessary assistance while participating in the mainstream curriculum.

2. English Language Learners (ELLs)

Big Horn Academy employs a multi-tiered approach to identify and support ELL students:

- **Identification:** Upon enrollment, all students complete a Home Language Survey to determine if a language other than English is spoken at home. If a student is identified as a potential ELL, they are assessed using a state-approved English language proficiency test.
- **ELL Instruction:** ELL students receive tailored English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction designed to improve their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Instruction is differentiated based on proficiency levels and may be delivered through small group instruction, pull-out services, or co-teaching with a general education teacher.
- **Integration and Monitoring:** ELL students participate in the general education classroom with appropriate language support. Big Horn Academy ensures that content is accessible to ELL students by incorporating visual aids, scaffolding, and modified assignments. ELL students are monitored regularly to track their progress and adjust instructional strategies as needed.
- **Cultural Responsiveness:** Teachers undergo professional development in culturally responsive teaching to ensure that ELL students feel respected, valued, and understood in the learning environment.

3. Academically Challenged Students

Big Horn Academy's commitment to equity extends to students who are academically challenged. The school employs targeted interventions to ensure these students succeed:

- **Response to Intervention (RTI):** The RTI model is used to identify and support students who are struggling academically. Tier 1 involves high-quality instruction in the general education classroom. For students who require additional help, Tier 2 offers targeted small group interventions. If a student continues to struggle, Tier 3 provides more intensive, individualized support.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Teachers differentiate instruction by modifying content, process, and product based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This allows academically challenged students to engage with the curriculum at their level.
- **Tutoring and Academic Support:** Big Horn Academy offers tutoring services, study hall periods, and small group instruction to provide struggling students with additional support. Personalized learning plans help monitor progress and ensure students receive the assistance they need to improve.

- **Behavioral Support for Academically Challenged Students:** For students with behavioral challenges, like those following the behavior intervention model, academic and behavioral supports are integrated. This allows students to address both academic difficulties and behavioral needs in a cohesive plan.

4. Gifted Students

The Big Horn Academy provides an enriched learning experience for gifted students, ensuring they are challenged and engaged:

- **Identification:** Gifted students are identified through teacher referrals, standardized test scores, and other assessments. Once identified, the school creates a plan to meet the student's advanced academic needs.
- **Advanced Curriculum and Enrichment:** Gifted students have access to an accelerated curriculum that may include advanced coursework, independent study projects, or dual enrollment in college-level courses. Project-based learning (PBL) allows gifted students to explore complex problems and think critically.
- **Differentiation for Gifted Learners:** Teachers differentiate instruction by offering more challenging content and opportunities for gifted students to work on advanced topics. Gifted students can also participate in small group enrichment activities to develop their higher-order thinking skills.
- **Mentorship and Independent Study:** Gifted students may engage in independent study projects or mentorship opportunities, where they can explore topics of interest with guidance from teachers or experts in the field.

5. Compliance with Laws and Regulations

Big Horn Academy ensures full compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, including:

- **IDEA and IEP Requirements:** The school adheres to all legal requirements under IDEA, ensuring that students with disabilities receive appropriate services. Annual IEP reviews, parental involvement, and access to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) are guaranteed.
- **504 Plan Compliance:** Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act mandates that students with disabilities have equal access to education. The school creates and implements 504 Plans to meet these legal standards.
- **ELL Laws:** Compliance with ESSA ensures that ELL students receive equitable language instruction and access to the general curriculum.
- **State Guidelines for Gifted Education:** The school follows state guidelines for identifying and supporting gifted students, providing an enriched learning environment and appropriate challenges.

In summary, Big Horn Academy is dedicated to identifying and successfully serving students across a wide spectrum of needs, ensuring that each student receives individualized, equitable support while complying with all legal requirements.

8. Describe student discipline policies, including those for special education students.

At Big Horn Academy, we believe that discipline and conflict resolution are essential components of creating a safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environment where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Our approach to discipline is grounded in restorative practices, proactive interventions, and collaborative problem-solving to foster personal responsibility, accountability, empathy, and positive behavioral change among students.

Discipline Philosophy and Principles:

1. Restorative Justice:

- We emphasize restorative justice practices that focus on repairing harm, restoring relationships, and promoting healing and growth rather than punitive measures.
- Restorative approaches involve dialogue, empathy, understanding, and active participation of all parties involved in addressing and resolving conflicts, incidents, or misconduct in a constructive and respectful manner.

2. Positive Behavior Support:

- We employ a positive behavior support framework that emphasizes proactive strategies, reinforcement of desired behaviors, and teaching of social skills to prevent and reduce challenging behaviors.
- Positive behavior support involves clear expectations, consistent reinforcement, meaningful consequences, and individualized interventions tailored to students' needs, strengths, and areas for growth.

3. Collaborative Problem-Solving:

- We promote collaborative problem-solving and decision-making processes involving students, educators, counselors, parents/guardians, and other stakeholders to address disciplinary issues, conflicts, and challenges.
- Collaborative approaches encourage open communication, active listening, empathy, mutual respect, shared responsibility, and creative problem-solving to identify underlying causes, explore solutions, and implement effective interventions and support strategies.

Disciplinary Procedures and Interventions:

1. Behavioral Expectations and Code of Conduct:

- We establish clear behavioral expectations, rules, guidelines, and a code of conduct that reflect our school values, principles, and standards of behavior.

- Students are expected to adhere to the code of conduct, respect school rules, demonstrate responsible behavior, and make positive choices in all school-related activities and interactions.

2. Progressive Discipline:

- We implement a progressive discipline approach that involves a range of interventions, consequences, and support services tailored to the nature, severity, and frequency of the behavior, the student's age, developmental level, and individual needs.
- Progressive discipline may include verbal warnings, reflective discussions, written reflections, counseling, behavior contracts, restitution, community service, loss of privileges, temporary removal from class or activity, restorative circles, mediation, and referrals to support services or external agencies when necessary.

Progressive Discipline Behavior Matrix

At Big Horn Academy, we employ a progressive discipline approach that emphasizes proactive strategies, restorative practices, and collaborative problem-solving to address and resolve behavioral issues, promote positive behavior, and foster personal growth and accountability among students. The Behavior Matrix (Appendix E) outlines the range of behaviors, interventions, consequences, and support strategies aligned with our progressive discipline framework.

School Governance

9. Describe the public charter school's organizational chart that clearly presents the proposed organizational structure, including lines of authority and reporting between the governing board, staff, related bodies such as advisory bodies or parent and teacher councils, and external organizations that will play a role in managing the public charter school.

The Hardin Public Schools Board of Trustees (17H and 1) will be the governing body of the Big Horn Academy.

Oversight of the school will be provided by the school administrator under the direction of the Superintendent and the Big Horn Academy Principal.

To ensure transparency and accountability, semester reports will be presented to the Board of Trustees by students and staff, detailing the ongoing activities and progress within the school. This practice allows the Board to stay informed about the developments and achievements taking place at the Big Horn Academy. At least one school board meeting will be held at the Big Horn Academy each year.

Furthermore, fostering a strong partnership with the school community is a key priority. A dedicated parent advisory committee will convene on a monthly basis to engage with the principal, exchange ideas, and discuss the educational experiences and needs of our students.

This collaborative approach ensures that the school's direction is informed by the perspectives and aspirations of our students' families.

Recognizing the significance of students' voices in shaping their educational experience, a student advisory committee will be established to provide a platform for our students to express their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions. This initiative will empower our students to actively participate in enhancing the learning environment.

In addition to these community-oriented approaches, we understand that preparing our students for the future goes beyond the classroom. Therefore, we are committed to building partnerships with businesses and external organizations. These partnerships will offer students real-world exposure, internships, and valuable insights, ensuring they are well-prepared to thrive in the ever-changing landscape of tomorrow.

Together, through collaborative leadership, transparent reporting, active engagement, and strategic partnerships, we will create an environment that equips our students for success and empowers them to shape their futures.

10. Describe the roles and responsibilities of the governing board, the proposed leadership management team, and other entities shown in the organizational chart.

The school board will serve as the governing body, responsible for setting the overall strategic direction and policies of the Big Horn Academy.

To ensure effective day-to-day operations, a principal will be assigned to the Big Horn Academy, the principal will play a pivotal role in the school's administration, overseeing the daily activities and functioning of the BHA.

11. Provide a staffing chart for the public charter school's first year and a staffing plan for the term of the public charter school.

The Big Horn Academy will be staffed by teachers certified through the Montana Office of Public Instruction. We understand that the students in the school would benefit from smaller sizes. This will be a goal as we staff the school for not only the first year, but also subsequent school years as well.

Staff	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	5th year
Teachers (SpEd shared w/HS)	4 FTE	5 FTE	5 FTE	6 FTE	6 FTE
Counselor	1 FTE	1.5 FTE	1.5 FTE	2 FTE	2 FTE

Administrator	.66 FTE	.66 FTE	.66 FTE	1 FTE	1 FTE
Attendance Clerk/Secretary	1 FTE	1 FTE	1 FTE	1 FTE	1 FTE
Custodian/ Maintenance	1 FTE	1 FTE	1 FTE	1 FTE	1 FTE

12. Detail the public charter school startup plan, identifying tasks, timelines, and responsible individuals.

We have already identified the students who will be part of the Big Horn Academy’s initial cohort. We will continue to identify potential students who are a good fit for BHA and provide them with an individual plan of what they need to do to graduate including potential middle school students. There will also be communication to students that have already dropped out and provide them with the information about this new opportunity in the hopes that they will enroll and continue on their educational path. We will also continue to make families and the community aware of the opportunities afforded students at the Big Horn Academy.

13. Describe the plans for recruiting and developing school leadership and staff.

The Big Horn Academy already has a principal assigned; this is an administrator with a strong background in our community, restorative justice, and social emotional learning. This administrator also serves as our director of behavioral interventions, giving him a working knowledge of our overall student needs as a district. We will provide targeted and relevant training to staff members working in the school. Our hope is that this will become a school that staff will aspire to work in.

14. Describe the proposed leadership and teacher employment policies, including performance evaluation plans.

We will follow all current employment policies utilized in Hardin Public Schools. Evaluations will follow the same procedures currently being used. Any flexibilities needed for staff scheduling will be negotiated with the local units of the Montana Federation of Public Employees.

15. State the proposed governing bylaws.

The Big Horn Academy will follow the policies and procedures of Hardin Public Schools. The board of trustees will adopt any specific policies needed to maximize the impact of the BHA.

16. Explain any partnerships or contractual relationships central to the operations and mission of the public charter school.

In general, the Big Horn Academy will adhere to the mission and vision of Hardin Public Schools. The specific school mission is: *Creating a community of learners who value trust, respect, and social responsibility.* The school vision is: *To be a leading alternative high school*

where students thrive academically, emotionally, and socially, equipped with the skills and confidence to succeed in a diverse and changing world.

We plan on expanding many of our existing partnerships into specific programs in the BHA; this is likely to include One Health, the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Tribal Education Departments, the Crow Tribal Health Department, and the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leadership Council.

17. Provide the proposed calendar and sample daily schedule.

The school year will coincide with that of the other Hardin Public Schools. However, students may be on a flexible five period day plus a daily SEL advisory period. Flexible meaning, they may start their day at 8:15 am and end at 3:35 pm or start later and end later. Some students may only spend a portion of that time in school and the rest of their time could be spent utilizing online learning, internships or work based experience. The schedule students follow will be based upon their own needs as they may need to take care of siblings or their own children and need flexibility in their school day. The BHA will work with students and provide a schedule that is best for their needs.

Business Operations

18. Describe plans for providing transportation, food service, and all other significant operational or ancillary services.

The Big Horn Academy will utilize the existing Hardin School services to provide transportation, food service and other needed services for students.

19. Describe co-curricular and extracurricular programs and how the programs will be funded and delivered.

Students will also be allowed to participate in established activities, programs and clubs in Hardin High School. We will also encourage Big Horn Academy students to create clubs of their own based on student interest and/or specific to their needs.

20. Describe the proposed financial plan and policies, including financial controls and audit requirements.

A yearly budget will be finalized and adopted by the Hardin Board of Trustees adhering to state law and board policy. As is the case with the other district schools this budget will be under control of the Hardin Business Manager and District Superintendents and will follow audit requirements as outlined in state law.

21. Describe the insurance coverage that will be obtained.

The Big Horn Academy will be covered under the same Property and Liability insurance policy as the rest of our school district.

22. Describe the startup and five-year budgets with clearly stated assumptions.

Big Horn Academy - Projected Five Year Budget					
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Anticipated Revenue					
.8 HS Basic Entitlement (+3%/yr)	\$291,520.00	\$300,266.00	\$309,274.00	\$318,552.00	\$328,109.00
.8 JH Basic Entitlement (+3%/yr)		\$100,088.00	\$103,090.00	\$106,183.00	\$109,369.00
Anticipated Enrollment	80	100	100	100	100
.8 ANB (+3%/yr)		\$548,240.00	\$705,859.00	\$727,035.00	\$748,846.00
Quality Educator Payment (+3%/yr)		\$21,413.00	\$27,086.00	\$27,899.00	\$36,116.00
American Indian Achievement Gap (+3%/yr)		\$18,504.00	\$23,850.00	\$24,566.00	\$25,302.00
Data for Achievement (+3%/yr)		\$1,978.00	\$2,575.00	\$2,652.00	\$2,732.00
Indian Education for All (+3%/yr)		\$2,090.00	\$2,691.00	\$2,772.00	\$2,855.00
SPED Allowable Cost (Est.)		\$18,000.00	\$22,000.00	\$22,000.00	\$22,000.00
TOTAL	\$291,520.00	\$1,010,579.00	\$1,196,425.00	\$1,231,659.00	\$1,275,329.00
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Anticipated Costs					
Teachers (+5%/yr) - Avg. + Ins.	\$310,336.00	\$407,314.00	\$427,680.00	\$538,876.00	\$565,820.00
Counselors (+5%/yr) - Avg. + Ins.	\$77,582.00	\$122,192.00	\$128,301.00	\$179,622.00	\$188,603.00
Principal (+5%/yr)	\$75,900.00	\$79,695.00	\$83,680.00	\$133,127.00	\$139,783.00
Secretary (+5%/yr)	\$38,490.00	\$40,415.00	\$42,435.00	\$44,557.00	\$46,785.00
Custodian (+5%/yr)	\$35,360.00	\$37,128.00	\$38,984.00	\$40,934.00	\$42,981.00
Supplies/Tech/MTDA (+5%/yr)	\$25,000.00	\$26,250.00	\$27,563.00	\$28,941.00	\$30,388.00
SUBTOTAL	\$562,668.00	\$712,994.00	\$748,643.00	\$966,057.00	\$1,014,360.00
Miscellaneous (+5%)	\$28,133.00	\$35,650.00	\$37,432.00	\$48,303.00	\$50,718.00
TOTAL	\$590,801.00	\$748,644.00	\$786,075.00	\$1,014,360.00	\$1,065,078.00
NET	-\$299,281.00	\$261,935.00	\$410,350.00	\$217,299.00	\$210,251.00

23. Describe the startup and first year cash flow projections with clearly stated assumptions.

We recognize that there will only be basic entitlement funding the first year. The remaining funding will flow through the general fund. Because of the focus on reducing our dropout rate, district funds will be supplemented with federal Impact Aid and Title funds as needed.

24. Describe anticipated fundraising contributions and evidence, if applicable.

We will explore grant funding opportunities with both existing and new partners as needed.

25. Describe the facilities plan, including backup or contingency plans.

Our district recently completed construction of a 12,000 square foot building with four classrooms, office space and common areas that is located on our campus but separated physically from both Hardin High and Middle Schools. This space will be utilized for the Big Horn Academy.

Community Support and Need

26. Describe the specific evidence of significant community support.

As stated in the Executive Summary, we currently have a graduation rate below 60%, improving this metric will have a positive impact on all aspects of our community. Several letters of support are included in Appendix G.

The Hardin Trustees voted unanimously in favor of this application at the board meeting held October 8, 2024 (Appendix F). The Big Horn Academy meets the goals and objectives outlined in both our District Goals and Portrait of a Graduate (Appendix A and B) adopted by trustees as the guiding documents of our system.

27. Describe the opportunities and expectations for parent involvement.

Active parental involvement in their child's education is not just important but a heartfelt desire for us. This commitment becomes even more pronounced when we're working with students who have faced challenges and may be at risk of dropping out. In such cases, we recognize the vital role parents play in their child's academic journey.

Our approach is one of partnership with parents. Parents are expected to stay actively involved in their child's educational journey, participate in planning and meetings, uphold behavioral agreements, and encourage attendance and accountability. These expectations help establish a partnership between home and school, essential for supporting students' unique needs and ensuring their academic and behavioral growth at Big Horn Academy.

Furthermore, if a parent has their own aspiration to earn a high school diploma, we are equally committed to supporting their educational goals. We will guide them towards our Adult Education Program, where they can embark on their own journey to accomplish this significant milestone.

In essence, our commitment extends beyond the students to their families, ensuring that together, we create a supportive and empowering educational environment that paves the way for both academic success and personal growth. Living up to our vision of "Creating a **community** of learners who value trust, respect, and social responsibility."

Big Horn Academy offers parent advisory meetings every month; these meetings provide an essential forum for collaboration between families and school staff, ensuring parents have a voice in shaping the educational experience and resources available to their children. These meetings are opportunities for parents to engage in open dialogue, provide feedback, and stay informed on key decisions, program updates, and upcoming initiatives within the Academy.

Key Features of Big Horn Academy's Parent Advisory Meetings:

1. **Open Communication and Feedback** Parents can openly discuss any concerns, share insights, and provide feedback on the Academy's programs, policies, and overall student support. This two-way communication helps the school understand and respond to parent perspectives and needs.
2. **Updates on Academic and Behavioral Programs** During these meetings, staff members provide updates on curriculum, behavior support programs, and any new initiatives being introduced. This includes information on academic programs, behavior interventions, restorative practices, and individualized support plans, allowing parents to better understand how their children's needs are being met.
3. **Policy and Program Development Input** Parents play an advisory role by offering input on school policies and program development, helping tailor Big Horn Academy's approach to the unique needs of its students. This includes contributing to the development of behavioral expectations, online learning agreements, and reviewing academic support initiatives.
4. **Focus on Parent-School Partnerships** These meetings also emphasize ways to strengthen the partnership between parents and the school. Strategies for supporting student success at home, staying engaged with school communication, and reinforcing behavioral expectations like the behavior matrix are common topics.
5. **Decision-Making on Specialized Programs** For specialized programs, such as online learning extensions or behavior intervention adjustments, Parent Advisory Meetings offer a platform for collective input. This ensures transparency and gives parents a role in shaping options that align with their child's academic and personal development goals.
6. **Networking and Community Building** These meetings also allow parents to connect with one another, creating a supportive community that shares similar challenges and goals. This network of support can be a valuable resource for families navigating the alternative education landscape.

Expectations for Parent Participation

Parents are encouraged to attend these meetings regularly, as their insights and support are invaluable to creating a responsive, inclusive environment at Big Horn Academy. The school values consistent participation to ensure decisions are informed by the community's needs and that programs align with both parent and student expectations.

Attachments:

Appendix A - Portrait of a Graduate

[Hardin Portrait of a Graduate - Crow Language](#)

Appendix B - Board Goals

[24/25 Hardin School Board Goals](#)

Appendix C - Student Application

[Hardin Alternative Education Application](#)

Appendix D - Acceptance Flow Chart

[Big Horn Academy Acceptance Flowchart](#)

Appendix E - Behavior Matrix

[Hardin Academy Behavior Matrix](#)

Appendix F - Board Minutes

[Hardin School Board - October 8, 2024 Regular Meeting Minutes](#) - *Item 3E*

Appendix G - Letters of Support

[Big Horn Academy - Community Letters of Support](#)