

# PUBLIC CHARTER APPLICATION

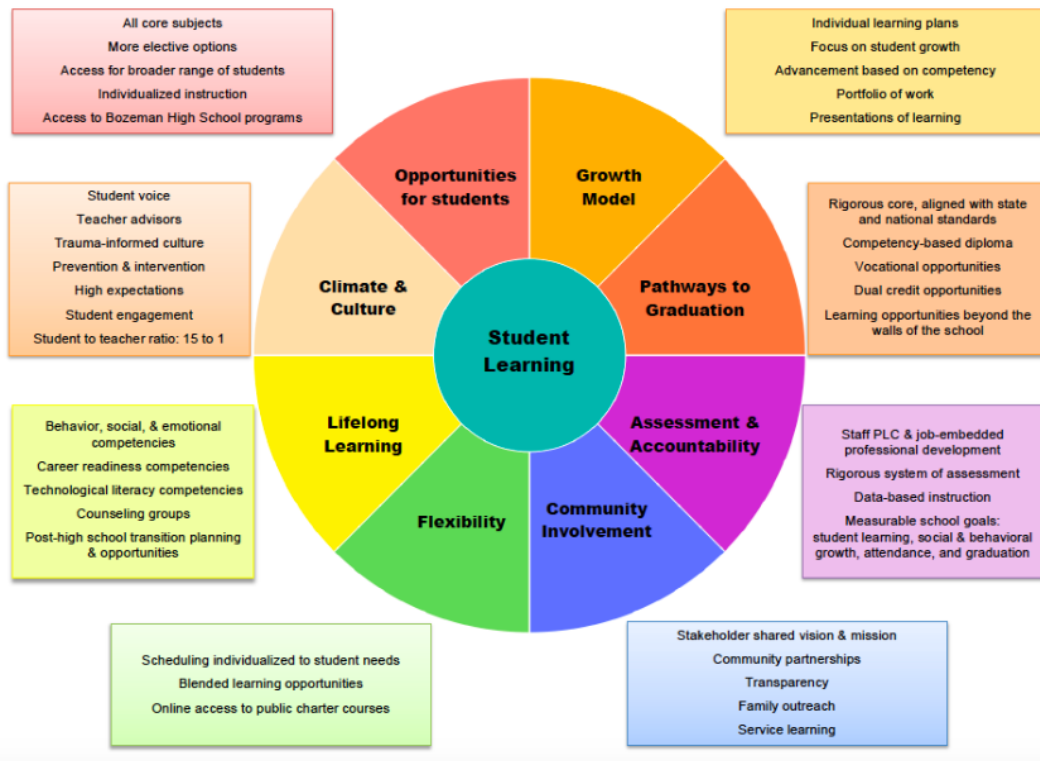
Name of Public Charter School: Bridger Charter Academy (BCA)

Provide an executive summary with the general purpose and rationale for the creation of the public charter school.

Bridger Charter Academy (BCA) has operated as a Montana Board of Public Education approved charter program consistent with ARM 10.55.604(11) since its inception in 2016. Bozeman Public Schools has worked through the renewal process on multiple occasions, and currently Bridger Charter Academy is approved through June 30, 2024.

Bozeman Public Schools wishes to submit the Bridger Charter Academy for consideration as a public charter school under the control of the Bozeman Public Schools Board of Trustees consistent with the process established in HB549.

The graphic below summarizes the Bridger Charter Academy program as outlined in the original charter application:



The following three specific goal areas that were stipulated in the the original charter program application still define the Bridger Charter Academy today and serve as the foundational goals for this application:

1. *Competency/Proficiency-Based Education*: Bridger will implement a competency-based pathway to graduation. A generally accepted definition of a competency based system is one that creates flexibility by allowing students to progress as they demonstrate proficiency with academic content and skills, regardless of time, place, or pace of learning.
2. *Assessment & Accountability*: In order to ensure learners graduate College and Career ready, Bridger will implement a system of assessment in order to monitor individual learner growth and achievement, evaluate the quality and efficacy of the program, and provide transparency to all stakeholders.
3. *Climate & Culture*: Bridger will create a safe, supportive, engaging and healthy school environment that promotes collegial relationships among students, parents/guardians, and staff.

The BCA combines four key elements that are interrelated into the instructional model:



The Summit Learning Platform serves as the backbone of the program and monitors and tracks student progress as well as the mentoring components of the program:



**Opening Date:** Bridger Charter Academy (BCA) is currently operational and serving students in Bozeman Public Schools.

**Public Charter Term Length:** Five years consistent with HB549

**Grades to be served:** 9-12

**Minimum Enrollment Per Year:** 40

**Planned Enrollment Per Year:** 80-100 students, consistent with historical enrollment

**Maximum Enrollment Per Year:** BCA is scalable with no hard cap on enrollment

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

Yr	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
1										20-25	20-25	20-25	20-25	80-100
2										20-25	20-25	20-25	20-25	80-100
3										20-25	20-25	20-25	20-25	80-100
4										20-25	20-25	20-25	20-25	80-100
5										20-25	20-25	20-25	20-25	80-100

**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.**

Although the Bridger Charter Academy has a separate and unique culture and identity, the program is closely tied to the mission and vision of Bozeman and Gallatin High School: *BHS/GHS exists to ensure ALL students learn at high levels so they can contribute to the world community.* Additionally, the BCA is closely tied to the core purpose of Bozeman Public Schools: *Bozeman Public Schools exist to provide an outstanding education that inspires and ensures high achievement so every student can succeed and make a difference in a rapidly changing world community.* BCA provides an innovative approach as an option for high school students within Bozeman Public Schools.

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

The Bridger Charter Academy is available to all students at Bozeman and Gallatin High School. Students may attend BCA for one or more periods during the school day. There are no full-time

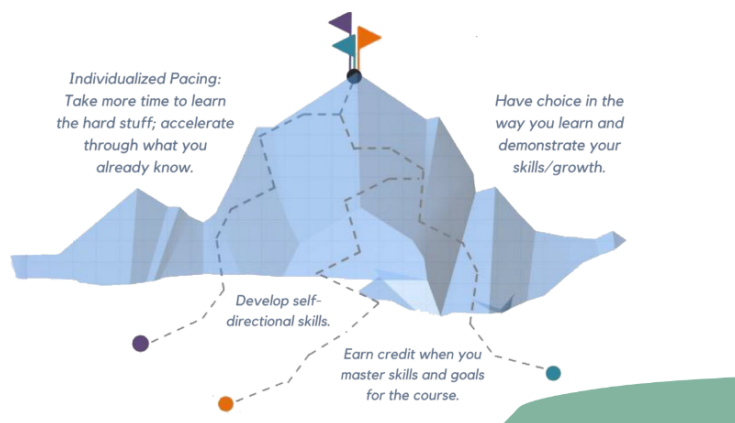
BCA students as the program doesn't cover all of the courses required for graduation within Bozeman Public Schools. There isn't a "typical" BCA student or type of BCA student which is part of what makes the program so unique and successful. Students find their way into BCA based upon the competency-based approach, the assessment structure, and/or the climate and culture pieces.

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

Information about the Bridger Charter Academy is shared with all incoming high school students during the registration process. Course availability is handled consistent with all courses at BHS/GHS, with course caps in place and auto-scheduling to provide equitable access.

**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.**

Proficiency/Competency-Based Learning is the key distinction between the BCA and the vast majority of classes offered within Bozeman and Gallatin High Schools:



The BCA combines four key elements that are interrelated into the instructional model:



The Summit Learning Platform serves as the technology backbone of the program and monitors and tracks student progress as well as the mentoring components of the program:



In addition to the Summit Learning Platform, the Bridger Charter Academy is included in the accountability structures tied to the District's [Long Range Strategic Plan](#) (LRSP). This includes site-based goal setting and action plans tied to District goals, as well as board luncheon structures and transparency with the community via the [LRSP Annual Report](#).

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

The original launch of BCA as a charter program was tied to a variance for credit attainment based upon proficiency, however, that variance is now available to all MT public schools in rule. The District is now seeking with this application under HB549 variance requests for ARM 10.55.710 Assignment of School Counseling Staff, ARM 10.55.709 Library Media Services, and ARM 10.55.705 Administrative Personnel: Assignment of School Administrators/Principals.

**ARM 10.55.710 ASSIGNMENT OF SCHOOL COUNSELING STAFF (1)** A minimum equivalent of one full-time counselor for each 400 elementary (K-8) students shall be provided. The counselor/student ratio shall be prorated.

- A. The BCA implements a comprehensive school counseling program designed to meet standards and is educationally sound by implementing the BSD7 Board adopted ASCA Mindsets and Behavior Standards. Core and supplemental materials aligned with the standards are used in the BCA, similar to their use in other District schools. Assessment of the standards will include the use of the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), completed during the same benchmark assessment window as other District schools. Additionally, the mentoring component of the program ensures that BCA staff are meeting regularly with students 1:1. That mentor/mentee relationship and goal setting is documented within the Summit platform and is above and beyond the student:teacher relationship building that occurs within standard classes at BHS/GHS.
- B. Current enrollment in the BCA allows the district to “employ or contract with a licensed and endorsed school counselor or Class 6 specialist.” The District intends to utilize the existing counseling FTE at Bozeman High School for that purpose. If enrollment in the BCA were to rise above 126 students the District seeks to assign counseling staff at the following prorated ratios:

- .2 FTE when enrollment is between 126-159 students
- .4 FTE when enrollment is between 160-239 students
- .6 FTE when enrollment is between 240-319 students
- .8 FTE when enrollment is between 320-399 students
- 1.0 FTE when enrollment is 400 students.

ARM 10.55.709 LIBRARY MEDIA SERVICES (1) The school library shall be housed in a central location, and each school shall have a licensed and endorsed library media specialist.

- A. The BCA is housed within Bozeman High School and students have full access to the library materials and licensed and endorsed staff at BHS.
- B. Current enrollment in the BCA allows the district to “employ or contract with a licensed and endorsed media specialist.” The District intends to utilize the existing library FTE at Bozeman High School for that purpose. If enrollment in the BCA were to rise above 126 students the District seeks to assign a library media specialist at the following ratios:
  - .375 FTE when enrollment is between 126-250
  - .750 FTE when enrollment is between 251-500
  - 1.0 FTE when enrollment is between 501-750
  - 1.375 FTE when enrollment is between 751-1000

ARM 10.55.705 ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL: ASSIGNMENT OF SCHOOL

ADMINISTRATORS/PRINCIPALS (1) School systems with nine or fewer FTE licensed staff and without a licensed superintendent may use a supervising teacher and the services of the office of the county superintendent to satisfy principal requirements. (2) The assignment of licensed principals shall be based upon student enrollment and prorated as applicable. Principal assignments are as follows:

- A. The BCA is housed within Bozeman High School and benefits from the administrative staffing in place at BHS. Additionally, the BCA uses a “teacher leader” model and currently assigns a certified staff member at 0.4 FTE for that purpose.
- B. The District is seeking to assign principal FTE in the BCA at the following ratios:
  - 0.4 Certified Teacher Leader FTE instead of 0.25 licensed principal FTE when enrollment is fewer than 175 students
  - When enrollment is above 175 students the District will follow the ratios set forth in ARM 10.55.705

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

BCA is based on the philosophy that proficiency in rigorous standards is necessary for success. Project based learning is incorporated within all of the core subjects offered which are aligned with the BSD7 approved curriculum. BCA utilizes an online LMS (available via Summit Learning) which provides flexibility and accessibility as instruction is delivered in person while also providing BCA with the ability to gather and analyze student and instructional data. Subjects

currently offered in BCA include math, English, social studies, science, and health enhancement with the potential of adding future elective options. Additionally, the class sizes are capped at fifteen students in order to accommodate the additional functions built into BCA, such as mentoring.

- 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.**

Working in conjunction with Bozeman High School and Gallatin High School, Bridger will provide all related educational services (i.e. special education, 504, ELL) to serve the needs of all students who may be interested in enrolling in Bridger.

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

The Bridger Charter Academy (BCA) is a program within Bozeman Public Schools at the high school level, and all district discipline policies and high school student/parent handbooks applicable to high school students are in place for the BCA.

## 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.**

Upon successful designation as a public charter school via HB549 the Bridger Charter Academy would serve as a school within a school on the campus of Bozeman High School. The school would be added to the [District's organizational chart](#). The leadership structure would remain consistent with a designated "teacher leader" in the program, with administrative oversight by the Bozeman High School admin team. The Deputy Superintendent that oversees Bozeman High School would also oversee the BCA. The BSD7 Board of Trustees would have full authority over the charter school consistent with their authority over existing school sites within the District.

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

The Bridger Charter Academy would operate similarly to the other schools in the District with a guiding coalition of teacher leaders who work closely with building administration. In addition, BCA has a designated “teacher leader” who is the direct liaison with Bozeman High School building administration and parents in situations that arise within the program.

**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 Bridger Charter Academy is staffed by five teachers, one teacher leader, and one school counselor. BCA faculty members are Bozeman High School faculty members who are allocated a portion of their FTE for BCA courses and students. The following is a list of BCA faculty and their BHS and BCA FTE assignments for the 2023-24 school year:

- Lottie Rhyner, English, 1.0 BCA, 0.0 BHS
- Lexie Davis, social studies, 0.2 BCA, 0.8 BHS
- Courtney Leary, social studies, 0.6 BCA, 0.4 BHS
- Emily Hessler, math, 0.6 BCA, 0.4 BHS
- Sarah Powell, science, 0.8 BCA, 0.2 BHS (Ms. Powell's position includes 0.4 FTE allocated to the BCA teacher leader position.)
- RD Jenkinson, school counselor, 0.4 BCA, 0.6 BHS

BCA FTE is responsive to student needs as determined by the registration process. As BCA enrollment may increase or decrease each year, FTE allocation would adjust accordingly.

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

The Bridger Charter Academy is currently operational and has been serving students since 2016. The District is seeking formal designation as a charter school under HB549 and doesn’t intend to have any lapse in service during the transition from an established charter program to a charter school.

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

Teachers within the Bridger Charter Academy operate as a professional learning community (PLC). PLC’s are formally defined as: *A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators.* Additionally, teachers within the BCA receive on-going training from Summit Learning. More broadly, professional development needs within the BCA are considered within the District’s high school professional development committee that builds and recommends the annual PIR schedule at the high school level.



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

All staff within the BCA are recruited, on-boarded, and evaluated consistent with the policies and procedures within Bozeman Public Schools. Building administration at Bozeman High School completes the evaluations for the teaching faculty within the BCA.

**15. State the proposed governing bylaws.**

As a charter school under the Bozeman Public Schools locally elected board of trustees all BSD7 policies and procedures are applicable to the BCA.

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

The only contractual relationship unique to the BCA is the partnership with Summit Learning for the technology platform that tracks student progress and mentoring.

**17. Provide the proposed calendar and sample daily schedule.**

The Bridger Charter Academy follows the [high school calendar](#) and master schedule. Students who choose to participate in the BCA take one or more periods of their daily schedule in BCA courses.

## BUSINESS OPERATIONS

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

Students within the BCA have access to district transportation and food services consistent with all students at Bozeman or Gallatin High Schools.

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

Students within the BCA are able to access all extracurricular programs and clubs that are offered at Bozeman and Gallatin High School. Because BCA students don't spend their entire schedule within the program, and the program serves a relatively small student population, the District will not be adding BCA specific extracurricular or cocurricular programs.

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

All BSD7 financial policies, controls, and audit requirements for the Bozeman High School District will be applicable to the BCA.

**21. Describe the insurance coverage that will be obtained.**

The BCA is currently covered via the District’s insurance policy. No changes to that policy are anticipated with the requested move from a charter program to a charter school.

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

The BCA will exist under the auspices of the Bozeman School District and be afforded all of the financial benefits and structures as other District programs. Personnel and operating costs will be financed primarily through the District’s General Fund, with supplemental support provided through the Transportation, Retirement, and Interlocal Agreement Funds, among others. Certified staff will be paid in accordance with the District’s collective bargaining agreement, so those costs are known and capped. Budgets for supplies and equipment will be managed by the building principal in accordance with District policy and state law. Current and anticipated annual budget:

	General Fund	Retirement Fund	Other Funds	Total
<u>Uses of Funds:</u>				
Salaries & Benefits	\$252,000	\$50,400	-	\$302,400
Other Costs	226,800	-	-	226,800
Total Uses	\$478,800	\$50,400		\$529,200
<u>Sources of Funds:</u>				
General Fund	\$478,800	-	-	\$478,800
Retirement Fund	-	50,400	-	50,400
Other	-	-	-	-
Total Sources	\$478,800	\$50,400	-	\$529,200

Federal grant support will also be available, as appropriate for the terms of the grant.

The District has the highest bond rating of any public school district in the state and a decades-long streak of clean audits. Both of these accomplishments speak to the District's effective internal controls, overall financial strength, and management aptitude.

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

Similar to the budget, cash flow will be handled as with other General Fund programs. General Fund reserves are currently at the legally-allowed maximums, providing ample time for state base aid and local tax funding associated with the program to become available. Although the District does not anticipate it to be necessary, we are also able to make interfund loans to the General Fund as a last resort.

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

The BCA is currently operational and doesn't require fundraising revenue for operations. The district would receive any donations or community philanthropy directed at the BCA consistent with board policy and procedures.

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

Bozeman High School's recent renovation included the addition of a new classroom wing. The upper floor of this new wing was designed specifically to meet the programming needs of Bridger Charter Academy.

Five classrooms are designated for BCA. These classrooms serve students in English, social studies, math, and science courses. The BCA Health Enhancement is located in the gym areas of Bozeman High School.

In addition to the classrooms, the upper floor of the new classroom wing also features the BCA Community Center, a multipurpose room designed for BCA student and staff needs. The room hosts community events like weekly student breakfasts, staff lunches, student support meetings, and student mentoring conversations. The space also features two staff offices, one for our BCA school counselor and one for our BCA teacher leader.

Overall, the BCA classroom wing is designed as a comprehensive educational space with a smaller physical footprint for students who prefer to spend a large part of their school day in a smaller setting.

**COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND NEED**

**26. Describe the specific evidence of significant community support.**

The Bridger Charter Academy has been a successful model in Bozeman Public Schools since 2016. The program prioritizes culture and climate and creates a “Bridger Family” inclusive of current and past students, parents/guardians, staff, and community members. A wonderful example of the family nature of the program is the Annual Bridger Thanksgiving celebration that brings together current and former students, families, BCA staff, central office staff, and the BSD7 Board of Trustees for the Thanksgiving celebration.

Additionally, the periodic charter program renewal process allows for formal community engagement and input opportunities at publicly noticed meetings.

**27. Describe the opportunities and expectations for parent involvement.**

Bridger Charter Academy parents/guardians are welcomed and expected to attend separate sessions during annual school events such as Incoming Freshman Parent Night and Back to School Night. Parents/guardians are expected to be involved in their student’s educational progress. One feature of the BCA’s smaller class size is the ability for teachers to contact parents/guardians regularly with updates. Parents/guardians are expected to monitor student progress in the Summit platform.