



Montana Board of Public Education

Public Charter School Application

September 2023

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INTRODUCTION

[HB 549](#) (2023) 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.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to review all information and resources available on the Board’s webpage under the Public Charter School tab prior to drafting and submitting a public charter school application.

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 no later than November 1, 2023. The Board will review the public charter school application, and if completed, will facilitate an interview, and take public comment on the application at the November 15-17, 2023 Board meeting. Final approval of the application will take place at the January 18-19, 2024 Board meeting.

We recognize that this application does not provide the space to fully and accurately respond to each of the questions in the application. Attachments and appendices are permitted. Please make sure to clearly state where corresponding responses are located within the application.

Please note that submitting a public charter school application does not guarantee that a public charter school contract will be granted. Failure to adhere to any requirements may yield a defective 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 GFPS Core Elementary School

Local school district in which the public charter school will be physically located: Great Falls Public Schools

Contact Information for the Governing Board Chair

Contact Person: Gordon Johnson School Board Chair
Name **Title**

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PUBLIC CHARTER APPLICATION

Name of Public Charter School: Great Falls Public Schools Core School

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

We propose to create a public charter school to engage a continuum of learners in a “learning exchange”. Currently forty-four percent of our elementary teachers are in the first three years of their career. While these teachers bring valuable energy, enthusiasm, and excellent ideas; they have not yet developed the full repertoire of skills and competencies that more experienced teachers possess. The Core school will build classrooms staffed with the most innovative, collaborative, and experienced teachers in our district. These teachers will assume leadership roles within the school and collaborate to design and deliver timely, adaptive instruction that will serve as a model to pre-service teachers. Instruction will involve the key elements necessary for high student achievement: evidence-based math and literacy practices, knowledge building, cross-curricular connections, authentic problem-solving, hands-on experiential learning opportunities, and student discourse. The overall premise is that excellent instruction must adapt and evolve to prepare our K-6 learners for futures we have yet to imagine. K-6 students are the first layer of our learning exchange.

The next layer of the learning exchange focuses on pre-service teachers. We propose to “grow our own” teachers, beginning late in high school or early in their college career. Key to this is employing college students as paraeducators who will be immersed in the school's day-to-day operations, allowing them to observe, learn, and gain practical experience while completing their degree in Elementary Education. By extending the time they spend in a school setting with kids to three full years, we better equip them to assume responsibility for their own classroom when the time comes. The complexity of classroom teaching has increased in the past twenty years. We predict this extended, immersive experience will prepare our new teachers more fully, lead to increased teacher retention and reduce teacher burnout in the first years of teaching. We have worked to develop a new partnership with University of Montana Western to provide undergraduate credit in a sprint model, allowing students to attain a teaching degree in three year's time. Additionally, UMW has applied for a grant to reduce or eliminate tuition costs for these pre-service teachers in our program. We are also continuing a longstanding partnership with Great Falls College MSU to provide additional local options for undergraduate coursework. Pre-service teachers would observe, learn, plan and practice in all areas of the school while they complete coursework and acquire skill. Many of their college courses will be taught by the Core school teachers, who will also be employed as adjunct faculty with our college partners.

The final layer of the learning exchange is intended to support our current Great Falls Public School teachers. We currently use a collaborative instructional coaching model to provide professional learning and support the growth of all GFPS teachers. The vision for the Core school is for it to become the district hub of growth and learning for teachers, pre-service teachers, paraeducators, parents and students. It will become a place where people can observe lessons and participate in lesson study, benefit from side-by-side coaching, take professional development offerings, and plan with teachers from the same grade level. Creating a hub for learning allows us to share a common message, build capacity in culture, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, classroom management, and behavior, all while building intentional connections with students, parents and the wider community. Our belief is that accelerated teacher learning will translate to accelerated student learning.

Opening Date: August 2024 Public Charter Term Length: 5 years(renewable)

Grades to be served: K-6

Minimum Enrollment Per Year: 200

Planned Enrollment Per Year: 420

Maximum Enrollment Per Year: 420

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

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Year 1	50	50	50	66	66	66	70							
Year 2	50	50	50	66	66	66	70							
Year 3	50	50	50	66	66	66	70							
Year 4	50	50	50	66	66	66	70							
Year 5	50	50	50	66	66	66	70							

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

We recognize that this section does not provide the space to fully and accurately respond to each of the questions below. Attachments and appendices are permitted. Please make sure to clearly state where corresponding responses are located.

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

Our vision is to create a dynamic space that invites a wide variety of learners to build skills and knowledge, collaborate, innovate and grow together. The mission of this proposed public charter school is to create a "learning exchange" that provides top notch education to both K-6 learners, preservice teachers and practicing teachers through immersive apprenticeship, instructional coaching, innovative classroom design, and high quality instruction. According to John Hattie, the effect size of collective efficacy is 1.57, which translates to more than three years of growth. We know that when teachers collaborate to tackle challenges, take action and experience success, this builds the belief that they can influence outcomes for students. This collective efficacy and intentional culture-building focused on learning and growth has incredible potential to increase student achievement and develop excellent future teachers.

The vision of the charter school is based on several key beliefs and principles. It emphasizes the importance of highly qualified and collaborative teachers who are passionate about effective teaching and learning. The vision includes an extended time for collaboration and professional learning within the school day, addressing the issue of staff shortages.

The school recognizes the limitations of the traditional education model and aims to equip students with the skills necessary for successful futures, including strong literacy and math skills, clear communication, collaborative problem-solving, and creative thinking. Addressing a pressing concern, the school seeks to address the fact that three out of five students are not reading at grade level. The vision is committed to providing early and intensive reading instruction to ensure all students can achieve at high levels.

The vision also acknowledges the community's investment in student success but emphasizes the need to create mutually beneficial partnerships with community stakeholders and develop students as "citizen actors" who engage with the real world as responsible and active members of society. Regarding teacher development, the vision recognizes the importance of providing preservice teachers with extended periods of hands-on learning, with a focus on observation, practice, feedback, and support. The initiative supports teacher retention and reduces burnout by better preparing preservice teachers to succeed when they take sole responsibility for their classrooms. The community benefits from this initiative as it offers an innovative approach to education that addresses the needs of both students and teachers. It aims to improve teacher quality, boost student learning, and foster community engagement, making it a valuable addition to the educational landscape.

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

The targeted student population includes K-6 learners from Great Falls and the larger region. The charter school seeks to educate a representative sample of students from our community. A majority of our elementary schools are designated as Title I, so this factor contributes to our choice to house the Core program at an existing Title I school. If one goal is to prepare teachers that can step into any classroom and be successful, we want to ensure that students with varied academic, behavioral and social needs are present in our classrooms. We also want to ensure that families who may not otherwise choose a charter due to issues with transportation, work schedules, or child care concerns are provided the opportunity to attend.

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

Informal student recruitment will begin in November of 2023 with a series of informational videos about the proposed Core school. These videos are intended to generate excitement and interest across the community. Since we propose to use an existing building that is both designated Title I and under-enrolled, all students currently zoned for that school will have the opportunity to attend.

Because the school is under-enrolled, 150 (or more) additional seats will be open for families to apply for a chance to participate. During spring of 2024, the remaining space (approximately half of capacity), will then be opened to the rest of the community to apply during a designated period of enrollment. To select students for the additional seats we will utilize a weighted lottery process in April. We seek to keep the demographics of the Core School representative of the district as a whole, therefore we will apply filters to ensure that happens.

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 Core School provides additional opportunities that don’t exist in our other schools, namely the addition of multiple adults in each classroom and a higher concentration of experienced teachers.

In Great Falls, all K-6 students participate in an academic program focused on four foundational subjects; English language arts, math, science and social studies. In addition, they have instruction in music, art, health, physical education, counseling, library media and technology. This content, driven by our Montana identified academic standards, would not change in the Core school.

What would change is the range of delivery models and the flexibility of the learning environment. By employing teachers with a large repertoire of pedagogical tools, we can offer a wide range of models to engage students in active learning. Our innovative teachers will utilize elements of blended learning, project-based learning, and flipped classrooms. They will structure mathematics learning by leading with inquiry and following with more direct instruction. They will utilize low-floor, high-ceiling mathematical tasks, and open middle problems as an alternative to endless math problems on a worksheet. They will work with students to generate compelling questions about the world around us and allow students to lead on the path to the answers. They will engage students in Socratic seminars to gain a deeper understanding of what they are reading and learning. They will be playful in making cross-curricular connections, and asking open-ended questions. Most importantly, instruction will be guided by a vision of the skills, not just the discrete knowledge, that students need to be successful in their future lives. We seek to build students who are clear communicators, critical thinkers, problem solvers, and content creators (not solely content consumers). The instruction in the Core school will be designed to reflect these priorities.

Our teachers will engage in frequent formative assessment and feedback to guide student learning. The tools we will use for benchmarking may include program-specific probes and measures, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), Montana Alternate Student Testing (MAST) testlet standards reports, and our district common content assessments. Will will utilize benchmarking assessments at the beginning, middle and end of the year.

For a summative, through-year look at student achievement and teacher/program effectiveness we will utilize MAST anchor data, MAP growth data, the Montana Science Assessment, comparisons of common district assessment data across years, and comparisons of other benchmark data from beginning to end of year.

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

We appreciate the flexibility that a charter affords to deviate from standards in ways that enhance student educational opportunities. Since a key outcome of our school is to produce high quality teachers who will need to be equipped to teach in schools without variances, straying too far from the norm will not serve them well. Some flexibilities we would like the freedom to explore are the ability to seek additional funding through grants or outside donations to enhance our programs and facilities, and as well as allocation of resources in ways that might be unique to this school. These variances will be guided by our commitment to innovation, improved student outcomes, and addressing specific community needs. We will remain accountable to our Board of Trustees and follow all applicable state laws, regulations and district policies.

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

The uniqueness of this school requires that each of these elements be customized to meet the needs of both adult learners (preservice teachers and paraeducators) and young learners (students in grades K-6). The design is based upon the following Core ideas.

A. Redefining Teacher Development:

The charter school will redefine "development" as the observable, measurable progress toward an ambitious standard for both teaching and student learning. By clearly defining, labeling and modeling what great teaching looks like, preservice teachers will have a concrete and aspirational goal to strive for, which will increase their sense of purpose and motivation when seeing tangible results for students. Additionally, our preservice teachers will be given feedback to gain understanding of their own performance and progress. This reflection and self-awareness is key to identifying areas for improvement and fostering a culture of continuous growth among our educators.

B. Reevaluating Professional Learning Supports:

We know that no single strategy guarantees widespread teacher improvement. Ongoing evaluation of existing professional development supports will occur at the charter school, allowing us to assess their effectiveness. More and more schools are using observation -- teachers observing teachers -- as a form of professional development that improves teaching practices and student performance. Observation can take a variety of forms; lesson study, instructional rounds; peer coaching; cognitive coaching, and learning walks. Strategies that prove to be impactful will be retained, while those with limited results will be restructured or replaced with more effective alternatives. This experimentation will enable us to identify innovative practices that resonate with educators and positively impact their teaching. Allocating funding based on impact will be a guiding principle. Resources will be redirected towards activities that yield the most significant benefits, ensuring an efficient and purposeful allocation of funds.

C. Reinventing Support for Effective Teaching:

At the charter school, investments in teacher development will be balanced with investments in recruitment and retention. To extend the reach of our master teachers, the school will foster collaboration and mentorship with preservice teachers and a wide range of community partners. The creation of a charter school focused on teacher development is a proactive response to the challenges of recruitment, retention and meaningful professional development.

D. Teachers' Beliefs and Commitments are the Greatest Influence on Student Achievement:

According to John Hattie (2012), "The effect of high effect teachers compared with low effect teachers is about 0.25, which means that a student in a high impact teacher's classroom has almost a year's advantage over his or her peers in a lower effect teacher's classroom. The differences between high-effect and low-effect teachers are primarily related to the attitudes and expectations that teachers have when they decide on the key issues of teaching - that is, what to teach and at what level of difficulty, and their understandings of progress and the effects of their teaching."

The linked video GFPS Core School presents a brief overview of the school concept.

<https://youtu.be/k6sQmjb2cd4>

Our structure, methods, instructional design and learning environment can be summed up in one word-engagement for all.

Two classrooms will exist at each grade level with the classroom teacher responsible for all core subjects for students, along with the instruction and supervision of the college students. Having two classrooms at each grade level ensures that classroom teachers engage in and model purposeful collaboration and intentional planning with a team teacher. It also allows for subject-area specialization (departmentalizing) in the upper grades. The additional support of paraeducators in the classroom, allows teachers time for intentional planning that maximizes cross-curricular connections, technology integration, and community partnerships. The result of this planning allows all educators to deliver engaging, experiential learning that closely resembles real world learning for students.

In addition to the core subject areas, students will receive instruction in Health and Physical Education, Art, Music, Instrumental Music, Counseling, and Library Media from specialists certified in these areas.

Each classroom will enroll students up to the state maximum. Hattie's research suggests that reducing class size does enhance student achievement, but only by a marginal amount. "Our preoccupation with class size is an enigma; what's really important is that the teacher learns to be an expert in their own class, no matter what size it is." (2012).

Great Falls Public Schools has a robust curriculum review process. Curriculum documents, implementation guides and resources are selected and developed based upon best practice, and research from a variety of sources including the Institute of Education Sciences-What Works Clearinghouse and Ed Reports. For this reason the charter school will utilize the GFPS

board-adopted instructional resources for each content area, with the flexibility to make adjustments to delivery based upon student assessment results. For the college learners, we will utilize the existing syllabi and materials established by University of Montana Western.

One key difference between this charter and the existing GFPS elementary schools is an intentional focus on building mutually-beneficial community partnerships that provide opportunities for enhanced learning. Partners could contribute in a variety of ways for the benefit of the school, its students, and its staff. Possible areas of support include serving on our advisory board, dedicating volunteer time, materials, and/or financial resources to bring learning to life. The school would contribute back to its partners by utilizing the talents of students and staff in recognition and other services. An example of this in action might be partnering with a local bank to provide instruction in financial literacy to students in exchange for having students record advertisements or draw promotional materials for the bank. To help create citizen actors who understand that service to their community benefits all, the school could partner with our no-kill animal shelter. They would be able to instruct students on the vital importance of their role, and in return students could do a penny drive to purchase needed items. We might also capitalize on the prevalence of medical professionals to support learning of STEM concepts, using students from the medical college to explain the components of the human body system to our students; as practice for explaining to patients. These opportunities will truly create a community-wide learning exchange.

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.

A key tenet of the Core School is that all students deserve to have at least one year's growth in one year's time. To that end, we will have all the tools, programs and services available to other GFPS students and schools. In Great Falls teachers are immersed in the MTSS framework. Teachers are adept at creating customized learning plans (both academic and behavioral) for students in order to meet their unique learning needs. They use data to set measurable goals, progress monitor students along the way, and adjust instruction to meet learning needs. School leaders will be an integral part of the process and ensure that students with disabilities will receive all services outlined in their IEPs. English Language Learners also have individual plans and are supported both by classroom teachers and our two districtwide EL teachers. The EL teachers provide guidance, support, and professional development to equip teachers to implement the EL plans. The Core school will have the same level of Gifted Specialist support as each of our other schools. Students needing more intensive intervention will be served using both push-in and pull-out support. Because of the advanced skill of our classroom teachers, we expect that differentiation will be used regularly to meet the needs of diverse learners. Having a Montana certified administrator with knowledge of specific laws and regulations in each of these areas is essential to ensure compliance.

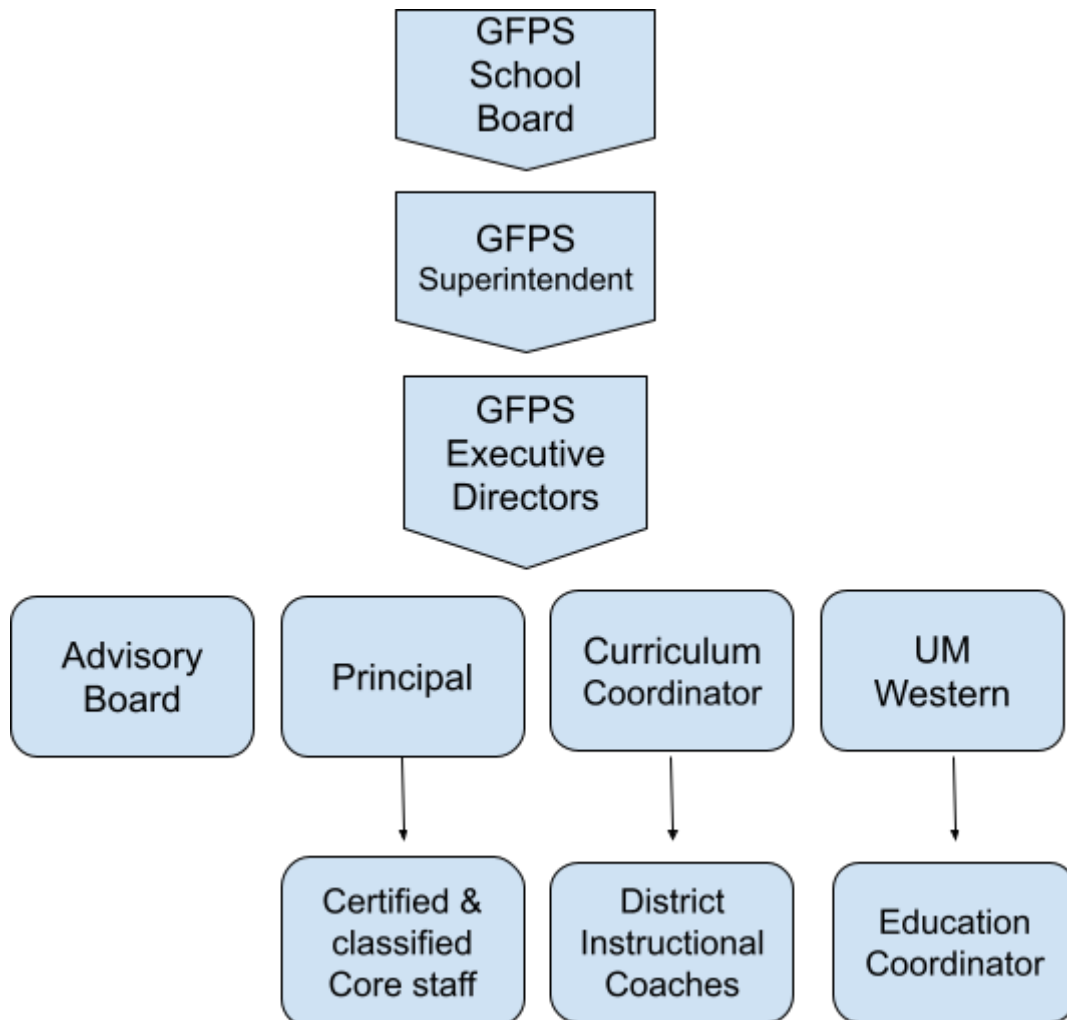
8. Describe student discipline policies, including those for special education students.

The Core school will follow all GFPS board policies and Montana state laws in regards to discipline. This school is not a divergence, but rather a maintenance of practice concurrent with all other schools that are a part of GFPS.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

We recognize that this section does not provide the space to fully and accurately respond to each of the questions below. Attachments and appendices are permitted. Please make sure to clearly state where corresponding responses are located.

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 GFPS Core School will be governed by the GFPS School Board, as are all other schools in our district. Similarly, the district superintendent and executive directors have responsibility for this building in accordance with our administrative chain of leadership. The advisory panel will function in an advisory capacity to the school board. Make up of the advisory panel will include the principal, Curriculum Coordinator and a representative from our University partnership, a teacher, a parent, community member, and another educator. This group will be a liaison between the school and the School Board, making sure the focus remains on the vision and mission of the school.

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

Roles	Responsibilities
School Board/Trustees	This is our governing board. All major decision-making occurs at this level and is guided by recommendations from the Superintendent.
GFPS Superintendent	<p>The Superintendent is the Chief Executive Officer of the district and provides administrative leadership; day-to-day supervision and oversight of the district as a whole.</p> <p>The Superintendent maintains a close working relationship with the School Board and makes informed recommendations regarding the K-12 school program (in conjunction with the Executive Directors).</p>
Executive Directors	<p>The Executive Directors supervise and provide leadership, direction, guidance and support to all building principals.</p> <p>They provide general oversight of all district schools (including the Core school) and assess the performance of the school leader through a formal evaluation process.</p> <p>They facilitate communication with all stakeholders.</p> <p>Provide informed recommendations regarding curriculum, instruction, assessment and policies to the Superintendent.</p>
Principal	Oversees the day to day operation; staff supervision; student discipline, scheduling, budgeting; facilities; ensures school has voice and representation at

	<p>district-level meetings and adherence to district policies, procedures, and Montana state laws.</p> <p>Builds structures for shared decision making among staff; Serves as key instructional leader; plans all professional learning in conjunction with the Curriculum and Education Coordinators.</p> <p>Builds partnerships with families (parent involvement) and within the greater community.</p> <p>Teaches methods courses.</p>
<p>Advisory Board/ Panel</p>	<p>The advisory board is structured to take advantage of the varied expertise of all stakeholders. The board will allow people invested in the Core School to engage in strategic planning and provide insights. They will meet regularly to assess progress and chart next steps.</p> <p>The advisory board will make recommendations that align with the Core school’s vision and mission.</p>
<p>Curriculum Coordinator</p>	<p>Serves as chair of the Advisory Board.</p> <p>Teams with Principal and Education Coordinator to build vision, structures and frameworks for the school and school staff.</p> <p>Builds community partnerships, seeks and writes grants.</p> <p>Guides professional development for the district as a whole; ensures that the Core school aligns with district initiatives while also utilizing the flexibilities that the charter allows.</p> <p>Participates in instructional walkthroughs for planning; oversees, supports and guides the work of district level coaches.</p> <p>Teaches methods courses.</p>

<p>Education Coordinator UMW .5</p>	<p>Serves as liaison between colleges/universities and the Core School.</p> <p>Focuses on recruitment of students, student placement, and advising.</p> <p>Ensures that college courses are staffed and scheduled. Collects data for accreditation and grant purposes.</p> <p>Teaches methods courses.</p>
<p>University of Montana Western</p>	<p>Rely on Education Coordinator/Principal/Curriculum Coordinator to hire qualified staff in a dual role as classroom teacher and as teachers of record for methods courses.</p> <p>Provide online access to courses not offered in the school.</p> <p>Fund methods course instructors and Education Coordinator.</p> <p>Share the course of study that aligns with higher education requirements.</p> <p>Grant credit to enrolled students.</p> <p>Collaborate with the school in: scheduling, student placement, advising, recruitment staffing of courses, data collection, accreditation support.</p>
<p>Teachers/College Instructor of Record</p>	<p>Assumes all expected duties of a classroom teacher (management of the day-to-day classroom; planning and delivery of instruction, parent communication, assessment, record keeping).</p> <p>Pilots innovative teaching practices and curriculum on a small scale to help determine effectiveness prior to implementing on a larger scale districtwide.</p> <p>Participates in shared decision making; engages in and provides professional learning.</p>

	<p>Supervises paraeducators, practicum and student teachers.</p> <p>Models lessons for Yr 3-4 college students.</p> <p>Teaches methods courses.</p>
Districtwide Instructional Coaches	<p>Coaches will serve all district elementary schools.</p> <p>Coaches will be housed at the Core school to collaborate on best practices in instruction that can then help to support the job-embedded work they do.</p> <p>Support GFPS teachers from all schools to observe specific teaching practices, receive side-by-side-coaching, and explore best practices at the Core school.</p>

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.

Since we are using an existing school building, staffing at the Core School will be a reallocation of current district personnel. College students will have the opportunity to be hired as paraeducators. This staffing plan will remain consistent throughout the charter’s term.

Job Title	Number Employed
Principal	1
Administrative Assistant	1
Education Coordinator	.5
Classroom Teacher/College Instructor	14
Paraeducators	a cohort of 10 each year
Specialists (PE, Art, Music, Gifted, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Speech Language Pathologist, School Psychologist)	9-shared between buildings
Special Education Teacher	1-3
Intervention Teacher	1
Counselor	1
Librarian	1
Custodian	2

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

October 2023

- GFPS Cabinet members will collaborate with the Board in seating an Advisory Board.
- Charter Application submitted to the Montana Board of Public Education
- Informational sessions for community & staff

November 2023

- Advisory Board begins meeting
- Informational sessions for community & staff
- School location selected and announced
- Principal position advertised

December 2023

- Informational sessions for community & staff at selected school
- Advisory Board meetings continue
- Principal interview and selection

January 2024

- Placement conversations with all teachers from selected school
- Placement of teachers (following the Collective Bargaining Agreement)
- Continue student/parent messaging/communication
- Advisory Board meetings continue
- Round 1 of In-district transfers begins to include Core school positions

February 2024

- Continue student/parent messaging/communication
- Advisory Board meetings continue

March 2024

- Continue student/parent messaging/communication
- Advisory Board meetings continue
- Confirmation from each family about staying at Core school so we can determine numbers of open spots
- New students invited to apply following Advisory Board recommended process

April 2024

- Continue student/parent messaging/communication
- Advisory Board meetings continue
- Educational forum with prospective cohort students at GFC-MSU
- Classroom placement of students

May 2024

- Continue student/parent messaging/communication
- Advisory Board meetings continue
- Hire cohort students as paras/transfer existing paras as needed

June 2024

- Continue student/parent messaging/communication
- Advisory Board meetings continue
- Gather staff to formalize vision, mission, handbooks
- Curriculum planning

August 2024

- School opens with K-6 students following GFPS school calendar

January 2025

- Classes begin onsite with college students.

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

Please refer to the timeline above. We believe our messaging videos, as well as the staff and public presentations will entice current teachers to apply. Positions will be advertised in-district first to hire both administrators and staff. Our half-time Education Coordinator, paid through the grant, will also be opened to an application process.

We propose a true collaborative model for continuous improvement, driven by teachers and supported by leadership. Once staff has been hired, teachers will be engaged in the visioning and planning process prior to school opening in Fall 2024. The unique design of our school ensures that all teachers are engaging in high-level professional learning at all times. Walkthroughs, data from teacher-to-teacher observations, and student assessment data will serve to focus weekly structured conversations and support an ongoing refinement process. Differentiated professional development will be a reflection of the needs of our staff and students. According to The New Teacher Project's research study entitled *The Mirage*, which studied teacher professional development in three large school districts and a charter school network, "Many teachers' complaints about their professional development appear to stem from a sense that it is not customized to fit their needs. Differentiation is a basic tenet of good teaching, and perhaps the same principle holds true for teacher improvement, too. It doesn't matter how many thousands of development activities a district offers if it fails to consistently connect teachers with the activities that are right for them at the right time. The districts we studied don't seem to be creating time for teachers to engage in the activities they say could be more effective. For example, even though nearly three-quarters of the teachers we surveyed said that observing other excellent teachers was a good use of their development time, they reported observing excellent peers less than twice a year." The model we are proposing with the Core School will provide ample opportunities for teachers to observe each other. This process is naturally differentiating.

In addition to day-to-day professional learning, our district provides multiple opportunities for teachers to engage in learning about best practices, specific educational topics, new instructional strategies, etc. To support college learners, we have created a daily schedule for them that provides built-in time for in-the-moment coaching, reflection and professional learning.

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

The GFPS Core School will follow all existing teacher employment policies and evaluation practices in place in Great Falls Public Schools and University of Montana Western. GFPS currently utilizes the Montana EPAS framework for formal teacher evaluation. This process requires teachers to be formally evaluated three times per year in their first three years of teaching, and every third

year following. Although this is a good tool for identifying areas of strength and areas for growth with specificity, we know ongoing formative feedback from both peers and school leaders is what will continue to improve instruction and foster growth.

Even more important than the evaluation tool and feedback is the intentional culture we intend to create around learning and growth for all. The New Teacher Project studied this effect in the charter school network and concluded that the charter schools they studied had, “some differences on an institutional level in comparison to the districts we studied; specifically, a more disciplined and coherent system for organizing themselves around teacher development, and a network-wide culture of high expectations and continuous growth. In focus groups, CMO [Charter Management Organization] teachers reflected on the sense that everyone in their school community is constantly working toward better instruction, and pushing each other to do their best work. One experienced teacher explained it this way: “Because I have been teaching for as long as I have, I have a lot of friends with similar years of experience who are doing the same thing from day to day and not necessarily growing. What’s unique about being at [my school] is that there is always going to be someone to push you. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to stagnate here.” This is our goal at the Core School.

The GFPS Core School will follow all the existing principal employment policies and evaluation practices in place in Great Falls Public Schools.. GFPS currently utilizes the Montana EPAS framework for formal principal evaluation overlaid with our current strategic plan. The .5 Education Coordinator will be evaluated by UM Western, with input from GFPS.

15. State the proposed governing bylaws.

The GFPS Core School will be governed by all applicable state and federal laws, and accreditation standards, as are all our district schools. Additionally, our school will follow all GFPS School Board Policies, as any other building in our district.

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

Our partnerships with University of Montana Western, and Great Falls College MSU are critical to our operation and mission. A Memorandum Of Understanding will outline the relationship between Great Falls Public Schools and these entities.

- A. UM Western will provide stipends for adjunct faculty, mentoring and support from their faculty to ours, tuition waivers for students, and a .5 FTE position to support preservice teachers and staff onsite.
- B. Great Falls College MSU will enter into an articulation agreement with UM Western to be able to provide onsite general education courses in lieu of distance learning for students who prefer this method.
- C. GFPS will provide the facility, certified, classified and administrative staff and all other components necessary for the successful operation of an elementary school.

17. Provide the proposed calendar and sample daily schedule.

See Appendix A: GFPS 2024-2025 School Year Calendar

See Appendix B: Teacher/Paraprofessional Sample Daily Schedule

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

We recognize that this section does not provide the space to fully and accurately respond to each of the questions below. Attachments and appendices are permitted. Please make sure to clearly state where corresponding responses are located.

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

As this will be a current operating school, the existing transportation and food service will operate as they have in the past. Students will be able to ride the existing bus routes to the school. Our district Food Service Department will prepare food for breakfast and lunch and have it delivered to the charter school daily. There will be no other significant operational or ancillary services needed.

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

This is an elementary school. Existing elementary programs will be funded and delivered as they have been in the past for this school as they are for the other district elementary schools. The General Fund Budget supports the existing programs for students and will continue to do so.

Current extracurricular activities at the elementary level include track and cross country. Current co-curricular opportunities include Starbase, Art and Music field trips, and a skiing field trip. This charter provides an opportunity for additional experiential learning opportunities through private partnerships that support our school's vision and mission. This could include additional field trips or guest speakers. These additional opportunities would be funded by the private company or organization.

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

Great Falls Public Schools are audited annually. Existing policies and financial set-up will be the same as all other existing schools. Any additional funds donated by outside entities in support of the Core School will be managed through the Great Falls Public Schools Foundation.

21. Describe the insurance coverage that will be obtained.

All schools are covered under the standard District policy. Our insurance provider is the Marsh McLennan Agency. We have confirmed that they will also cover the charter school as it is part of our district.

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

The budget for this school will be maintained by the District General Fund Budget as it has been in the past. Specific allocations are made based on the number of students who are attending the school. Maintenance and utility bills are a function of the District budget and will continue to be funded similarly.

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

The Core School will operate in a similar manner to the existing elementary school. The cash flow will be maintained from the General Fund Budget. The expectation is that the program will not cost more than the existing elementary school which is funded by the General Fund Budget. Any additional costs would be enhancements to the academic program and would need to be funded through outside partnerships.

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

A \$400,000 grant has been awarded to the University of Montana Western for this program. This grant will be used to support tuition waivers for preservice teachers in our program, a .5 FTE position who will support preservice teachers onsite and be a liaison between GFPS and UM Western, and potentially the stipends for our teachers in their work as adjunct faculty. If stipends aren't paid out of the grant, these will be funded by UM Western.

Additional fundraising contributions may come from the PTA of this school for activities that would be typical of a PTA in any other building. These fundraisers would follow the set district procedures for prior approval and acceptance of the donation after.

Business partnership contributions could be accepted and distributed through our Great Falls Public Schools Foundation as an enhancement to current programming.

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

This program will take place in an existing elementary school. It will be entitled to the same maintenance and repair that all our school buildings receive. There will be no need for a backup or contingency plan other than what exists as part of potential district emergency situations.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND NEED

We recognize that this section does not provide the space to fully and accurately respond to each of the questions below. Attachments and appendices are permitted. Please make sure to clearly state where corresponding responses are located.

26. Describe the specific evidence of significant community support.

This fall our district has put out a survey to our community to gather input about how they feel about our schools. The survey window will not close until mid-November, but the initial responses we have sorted through contain some community concerns about overcrowded classrooms at the elementary level mostly due to an inability to hire enough teachers this school year. There are also concerns about new teachers who are underprepared and underperforming. Additionally, there are numerous comments about the need to provide additional support to teachers and staff for the complexities that exist in today's educational system and in Great Falls.

From the beginning of this planning process, we recognized the importance of clear communication to all stakeholders. To that end, we created informational flyers and videos to introduce the concept, a landing page connected to our [district website](#) with Frequently Asked Questions and other materials (see appendices H-J). We also created social media posts, spoke with our local news outlets, and held multiple community information nights. We crafted specific presentations for our district leaders, our teaching staff, our Board of Trustees and our teacher's union. District leaders dedicated much time to answering questions and providing information to staff, parents and community members.

Evidence of widespread support include attached letters of support, and unanimous support from our Board of our request to submit this application. Additionally, whenever we have impactful changes, we invite the public to well-publicized information sessions. Usually, these are very well-attended and audience members express concerns. At our informational nights, only a small number of community members were in attendance, and those that attended had comments and questions that could be interpreted as positive and supportive. We infer from this that our community is either reserving judgment until they know more, or they are in favor of this idea.

Appendix C: Letter of support from University of Montana Western

Appendix D: Letter of support from Great Falls College Montana State University

Appendix E: Letter of support from Great Falls Development Alliance

Appendix F: Letter of support from Great Falls Chamber of Commerce

Appendix G: Letter of support from United Way of Cascade County

Appendix H: Frequently Asked Questions

Appendix I: Ten Things to Know About the Core School

Appendix J: Core School Informational Flyer

27. Describe the opportunities and expectations for parent involvement.

At the heart of the Core School is engagement and collaboration. Our parents are an integral part of this collaborative process. We know that students experience better outcomes when we go beyond traditional parent communication and create varied opportunities for true family engagement. All of

these opportunities will be based upon our idea of a learning exchange. We want our students to share what they are learning, creating, and doing. In turn, we will capitalize on the knowledge, skills, and expertise of our parents to enhance this learning. The sky's the limit on the creative ways we can exchange learning with families, and we intend for these opportunities to be authentically created by our students and teachers.

One of the first tasks for our Advisory Board is to craft a parent compact which will outline the elements of this collaborative relationship.

NOT AN EXISTING LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD? COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION

We recognize that this section does not provide the space to fully and accurately respond to each of the questions below. Attachments and appendices are permitted. Please make sure to clearly state where corresponding responses are located.

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

Appendices

Appendix A: Great Falls Public Schools 2024-2025 Calendar

Appendix B: Teacher/Paraeducator Sample Daily Schedule

Appendix C: Letter of support from University of Montana Western

Appendix D: Letter of support from Great Falls College Montana State University

Appendix E: Letter of support from Great Falls Development Alliance

Appendix F: Letter of support from Great Falls Chamber of Commerce

Appendix G: Letter of support from United Way of Cascade County

Appendix H: Frequently Asked Questions

Appendix I: Ten Things to Know About the Core School

Appendix J: Core School Informational Flyer

Appendix K: Works Cited

Appendix A: Great Falls Public Schools 2024-2025 Calendar

GREAT FALLS PUBLIC SCHOOLS
GREAT FALLS, MONTANA
SCHOOL YEAR
2024-2025

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI		MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
AUGUST						JANUARY					
				1	2	(New Year's Day)			*	*	*
(Teacher Orientation)	5	6	7	8	9		6	7	8	9	10
	12	13	14	15	16		13	14	15	16	17
	19	20	21	22	23		#	21	22	23	<(24)>
	#	#	FD	29	30		27	28	29	30	31
SEPTEMBER						FEBRUARY					
(Labor Day)	*	3	4	5	6	(President's Day)	3	4	5	6	7
	9	10	11	12	13		10	11	12	13	14
	16	17	18	19	20		*	18	19	20	21
	23	24	25	26	27		24	25	26	27	28
	30										
OCTOBER						MARCH					
		1	2	3	4		3	4	5	6	*
	7	8	9	10	11		10	11	12	13	14
(State Meetings)	14	15	16	#	#		17	18	19	20	21
	21	22	23	24	25		24	25	26	27	(28)
	28	29	30	31			31				
NOVEMBER						APRIL					
					(1)	(Spring Break)		1	2	3	4
(Thansgyg)	4	5	6	7	8		7	8	9	10	11
	11	12	13	14	15		14	15	16	17	*
	18	19	20	21	22		*	#	23	24	25
	25	26	#	*	*		28	29	30		
DECEMBER						MAY					
	2	3	4	5	6		5	6	7	1	2
(Christmas)	9	10	11	12	13	(Mem. Day)	12	13	14	15	16
	16	17	18	19	20		19	20	21	22	23
	*	*	*	*	*		*	27	28	29	30
	*	*									
JUNE							2	3	4	5	<(LD)>
							9	10	11	12	13

* Holidays	<u>Student Days</u>	<u>PIR Days</u>
# PIR Days	45	4
() End of Quarter	46	2
<> End of Semester	43	0
First/Last Day	<u>46</u>	<u>1</u>
Δ Emergency Make up day	180	7
◇ No School/Some Staff on Duty		

Appendix B: Teacher/Paraeducator Sample Daily Schedule

		Teacher 1							Paraeducator 1				
		M	T	W	TH	F			M	T	W	TH	F
8:00-8:25	Playground						8:00-8:25	Playground					
8:25-8:45	ELA/SS						8:25-8:45	Structured learning					
8:45-9:00							Paraeducator Duties						
9:00-9:15													
9:15-9:30													
9:30-9:45													
9:45-10:00													
10:00-10:15	RECESS						10:00-10:15	RECESS					
10:15-10:30	ELA/SS (Project Based Time)						10:15-10:30	Recess Debrief					
10:30-10:45							Paraeducator Duties						
10:45-11:00													
11:00-11:15													
11:20-11:30	LUNCH 11:20-12:00						11:20-11:30	LUNCH 11:20-12:00					
11:30-11:45													
11:45-12:00													
12:00-12:15													
12:15-12:30	COUN	PE	MUSIC	PE	LIB		12:15-12:30	Big Scholar Lunch Break					
12:30-12:45	MATH/SCIENCE						12:30-12:45	Curric & Assessment	Paraeducator Duties	Methods of Health Education	Paraeducator Duties	Children's Lit	
12:45-1:00													
1:00-1:15													
1:15-1:30													
1:30-1:45													
1:45-2:00						RECESS							
2:00-2:15	MATH/SCIENCE (Project Based Time)						2:00-2:15	Recess Debrief					
2:15-2:30							PM Break						
2:30-2:45													
2:45-3:00													
3:00-3:20	Differentiated Learning Time	PLC for adults	Differentiated Learning Time				3:00-3:20	Flexible Lab Time	Methods of Health Lab	Para duties PD	Flexible Lab Time	Flexible Lab Time	
3:20-4:00	Mentoring & PD		Mentoring & PD		Mentoring & PD		3:20-4:00	Mentoring & PD		Mentoring & PD		Mentoring & PD	
								paid	paid				
								non-paid	coursework				

Appendix C: Letter of support from University of Montana Western

THE UNIVERSITY of MONTANA WESTERN

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

October 27, 2023

Board of Public Education
46 N Last Chance Gulch, Suite 2B
PO Box 200601
Helena, MT 59620

RE: Great Falls Public Schools CORE Charter School Application

Dear Review Committee:

We are writing to offer our support for the CORE charter school that Great Falls Public School (GFPS) is proposing to open in the fall of 2024. We are excited about the possibility of a school that will provide an immersive learning environment to grow educators, GFPS employees, and K-6th grade students. In partnership with GFPS, the University of Montana Western (UMW) is planning to provide on-site teacher preparation coursework taught by the K-6 classroom educators at the CORE school, who will serve as UMW adjuncts. This unique model will allow Education majors to work and learn alongside their course instructors as they provide exceptional education to K-6 students.

UMW has watched GFPS prioritize hiring and retaining high quality educators in a way that few other districts have, particularly in recent years, as it has become increasingly more challenging to do so. The national teacher shortage is impacting Montana in significant ways, and the innovative approaches, including the CORE school, that GFPS is engaging are exactly what will be needed to recruit and retain well-prepared, highly-effective educators.

UMW is looking forward to our pre-service Education students being employed by GFPS while pursuing their degrees. This clinical approach to on-the-job training will provide financial stability and authentic implementation of course content in the field. This extended exposure to a school environment will better prepare them for their own classrooms, ultimately increasing teacher retention and reducing burnout during their formative years.

GFPS has already been a fantastic partner to UMW, as we have worked collaboratively to develop a shared vision of how we plan to partner for years to come through the CORE school. The time, thought, and effort that has been invested in forming a clear path forward is exactly what this sort of innovative thinking takes to be implemented and sustained. We are heartened at the way that all stakeholders, including parents and community members, have also been engaged in this process from the start.

We strongly encourage you to approve the CORE School application for Charter status submitted by Great Falls Public Schools.

Sincerely,



Dr. Katrina Kennett
Division Chair of Education



Dr. Estee Aiken
Dean of Strategic Initiatives

Appendix D: Letter of support from Great Falls College Montana State University



**GREAT FALLS
COLLEGE**
MONTANA STATE
UNIVERSITY

Dr. Stephanie Erdmann
Chief Executive Officer & Dean
406.771.4310
Stephanie.Erdmann@gfcmu.edu
www.gfcmu.edu

Board of Public Education
46 N Last Chance Gulch, Suite 2B
PO Box 200601
Helena, MT 59620

RE: Great Falls Public Schools CORE Charter School Application

Dear Review Committee:

I am pleased to write this letter of support for the CORE charter school that Great Falls Public Schools (GFPS) is proposing to open fall 2024. The CORE school immersive learning environment will grow educators, GFPS employees, and K-6 students. The classroom educators at the CORE school will also include college instructors and education majors that will work and learn alongside the instructors while delivering exceptional education to K-6 students. Current best practices in teaching and learning, and innovative approaches to engaging and educating students in relevant studies, will be incubated in the CORE school and shared across the district with other educators.

Great Falls College will be involved in the CORE charter school as a college partner, educating the pre-service teachers, or "Big Scholars. The ability for them to work in the CORE charter school alongside school employees and immersed in the daily operations of the school gives the opportunity to observe, learn, plan, and practice while completing required coursework. This extended exposure to a school environment will better prepare them for their own classrooms, ultimately increasing teacher retention and reducing burnout during their formative years.

This innovative model school will address several important factors in the Great Falls community and surrounding towns. The CORE school, by design, will address the staff shortage, with innovative internship and mentoring concepts. It provides an opportunity for college-enrolled students to have hands-on, immersive learning experiences. It also provides an opportunity for parents to enroll their child in a unique learning environment. The CORE school will fill a currently under-enrolled elementary school in the community.

I strongly encourage you to approve the CORE school application for Charter status submitted by GFPS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephanie Erdmann".

Stephanie Erdmann, PhD
CEO and Dean

Appendix E: Letter of support from Great Falls Development Alliance



October 27, 2023

Board of Public Education
46 N Last Chance Gulch, Suite 2B
PO Box 200601
Helena, MT 59620

RE: Great Falls Public Schools CORE Charter School Application

Dear Review Committee:

Great Falls Development Alliance (GFDA) urges the Board of Education to support the CORE charter school that Great Falls Public Schools (GFPS) is proposing to open in the fall of 2024.

GFDA is a regional public/private economic development partnership and certified Community Development Financial Institution. We are formed as a broad partnership that serves the thirteen-county Great Falls Montana trade area, comprised of the Great Falls MSA and a vast rural and tribal region of north central Montana. Our partnership includes Cascade County, Great Falls College MSU, Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians, University of Providence, Great Falls Public Schools, the City of Great Falls and over 130 local and regional businesses and institutions. GFDA's Vision is to be a change agent, catalyst, and facilitator in the Great Falls region, fostering collaboration and partnerships to support diverse economic opportunities, innovation, and growth. More specifically, our core strategic initiatives include addressing quality of life and the workforce our local employers depend upon through TALENT ATTRACTION (attract workers to relocate to the Great Falls market to increase the labor force for local employers) and WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (support creation of workforce training programs targeted to skills most needed by local employers).

GFPS' CORE charter school offers a collaborative approach to attracting and retaining qualified educators, supporting current staff and providing new opportunities for students and families. It helps create a pathway to prosperity, a route to higher wage careers very much needed in our community –by a school system struggling to find/retain skilled employees and by workers who lack access to higher wage/benefit careers. This workforce development initiative directly addresses efforts to strengthen the Great Falls regional economy, creating greater economic opportunity and improving the quality of life for members of our community. It also complements and builds on GFDA's economic development efforts.

We applaud GFPS for embracing innovation in solving the urgent need for qualified teachers in Great Falls and urge you to approve the GFPS CORE School application for Charter status.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brett Doney".

Brett Doney
President/CEO

GREAT FALLS DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY INC.
THE PORTAGE BUILDING AT WEST BANK LANDING
405 3RD STREET NW, SUITE 203
GREAT FALLS, MT 59404

VIRTUAL ASSISTANT: 1-406-564-0957
FAX: 1-406-454-2995

GrowGreatFallsMontana.org

Appendix F: Letter of support from Great Falls Chamber of Commerce



October 27, 2023

Board of Public Education
46 N Last Chance Gulch, Suite 2B
PO Box 200601
Helena, MT 59620

RE: Great Falls Public Schools CORE Charter School Application

Dear Review Committee:

This is a letter of support for the CORE charter school that Great Falls Public Schools is proposing to open in the fall of 2024. The CORE school will be a new immersive learning environment that will grow educators, Great Falls Public School employees, and K-6th grade students. The classroom educators at this school will also be college instructors. Education majors will work and learn alongside the instructors, all the while delivering exceptional education to K-6 students. Current best practices in teaching and learning will be employed in this CORE school environment. Innovative approaches to engaging and educating students in relevant studies can be incubated in the CORE school and then shared across the district with other educators.

Hiring and retaining high quality educators has always been a number one priority for Great Falls Public Schools. In recent years, recruitment and retention of teachers has become increasingly challenging and nationwide we are seeing a teacher shortage. The School District knows it takes innovation and creativity to come up with the best solutions to benefit our kids and community.

Working cooperatively with college and university partners, pre-service teachers, or "Big Scholars" as they will be called, will be hired as school employees and immersed in the daily operations of the school. They will observe, learn, plan, and practice while completing coursework. This extended exposure to a school environment will better prepare them for their own classrooms, ultimately increasing teacher retention and reducing burnout during their formative years.

Students from across Great Falls will be allowed to attend the CORE school based on a lottery system. Students who are currently enrolled in the neighborhood school building that is chosen will be invited to stay at the school. However, if they request a transfer to another nearby school, the District will accommodate the child and the parents.

Community partners who wish to engage with the school staff, and parents who support the vision and mission of the CORE school will be sought and welcomed.

This innovative model school will address several important factors in our community. First, the CORE school, by design, will address the staff shortage, with innovative internship and mentoring concepts. Secondly, it provides an opportunity for parents to choose if they would like their child enrolled in a different learning environment. Third, the CORE school will fill with students, a currently under-enrolled elementary school in the community. Finally, this concept school will encourage additional innovation in other schools across the District.

As the President/CEO of the Great Falls Area Chamber, working and collaborating closely with Tom Moore and the Great Falls Public School District on several unique initiatives, of which this is one excellent example, I strongly encourage you to approve the CORE School application for Charter status submitted by Great Falls Public Schools.

Sincerely,


Shane Etwiler
President/CEO

100 1st Avenue North • Great Falls, MT 59401
406-761-4434
www.greatfallschamber.org

Appendix G: Letter of support from United Way of Cascade County



October 27, 2023

Board of Public Education
46 N Last Chance Gulch, Suite 2B
PO Box 200601
Helena, MT 59620

RE: Great Falls Public Schools CORE Charter School Application

Dear Review Committee:

This is a letter of support for the CORE charter school that Great Falls Public Schools is proposing to open in the fall of 2024. The CORE school will be a new immersive learning environment that will grow educators, Great Falls Public School employees, and K-6 grade students.

The classroom educators at this school will be college instructors. Education majors will work and learn alongside the instructors while delivering exceptional education to K-6 students. Current best practices in teaching and learning will be employed in this CORE school environment. Innovative approaches to engaging and educating students in relevant studies can be incubated in the CORE school and then shared across the district with other educators.

Hiring and retaining high quality educators has always been a priority for Great Falls Public Schools. In recent years, recruitment and retention of teachers has become increasingly challenging and nationwide we are seeing a teacher shortage. The School District knows it takes innovation and creativity to come up with the best solutions to benefit our kids and community. Working cooperatively with college and university partners, pre-service teachers will be hired as school employees and immersed in the daily operations of the school. They will observe, learn, plan, and practice while completing coursework. This extended exposure to a school environment will better prepare them for their own classrooms, ultimately increasing teacher retention and reducing burnout during their formative years.

Students from across Great Falls will be allowed to attend the CORE school based on a lottery system. Students who are currently enrolled in the neighborhood school building that is chosen will be invited to stay at the school. However, if they request a transfer to another nearby school, the District will accommodate the child and the parents. Community partners who wish to engage with the school staff, and parents who support the vision and mission of the CORE school will be sought and welcomed.

This innovative model school will address several important factors in our community. First, the CORE school, by design, will address the staff shortage, with innovative internship and mentoring concepts. Secondly, it provides an opportunity for parents to choose if they would like their child in a different learning environment. Third, the CORE school will fill up a currently under-enrolled elementary school in the community. Finally, this concept school will encourage additional innovation in other District schools.

I strongly encourage you to approve the CORE School application for Charter status submitted by Great Falls Public Schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Owen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G".

Gary Owen
President

United Way of Cascade County PO Box 1343 Great Falls, MT 59403
Phone 406.727.3400 www.uwccmt.org
I UVE UNITED

Appendix H: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a public magnet school?

A: Magnet schools are a small category of public schools that typically emphasize specific areas of study or a particular teaching method. They are subject to regulation by the public school system that operates them, differentiating them from charter schools, which work under charters that provide more autonomy. Magnet schools attract diverse students from various neighborhoods and backgrounds.

Q: Why a public magnet school?

A: The magnet school concept allows us to focus on a “learning exchange” between big scholars and little scholars. It allows us to attract students from across the region and with various backgrounds. It serves as a learning hub for students and teachers community-wide. If GFPS is not selected to be the sole provider of a public charter school in Cascade County, we will operate as a magnet school.

Q: What is a public charter school?

A: They are public schools that are created by school districts, colleges, nonprofit organizations, or other entities. Like traditional public schools, charter schools are public, free, and typically have no requirements for entry. What distinguishes charter schools is that they are allowed extra freedom to innovate with curriculum and learning methods and are held accountable to authorizing bodies for results.

Q: Why a public charter school?

A: It will remain a part of the GFPS umbrella and will have the same high quality teachers, curriculum, and function under the same policies as all our other schools. The GFPS School Board would be the governing board for this school as well. Public charter schools are allowed to determine some of their own practices; the goal is to innovate within the public school system and provide quality school choice options for families.

Q: What will SPED/Title look like in this school, and will SPED teachers also have to hold MA degrees?

A: For the 2024-2025 school year, it is essential that all staff be elementary certified in the state of Montana. In addition, staff (with the exception of SPED) need a Master’s degree as they will be teaching methods courses that are required as part of an elementary endorsement. This advanced degree is an accreditation requirement to be hired as adjunct faculty with UMW.

Courses Taught Onsite	Possible Instructors
EDU 201 - Introduction to Education With Field Experience, 3-4 Credits	Classroom Teacher
EDU 222 - Educational Psychology & Child Development, 3-4 Credits	School Counselor/School Psychologist
EDU 494 - Teacher Work Sample, 2 Credits	Classroom Teacher
EDU 495A - Student Teaching: K - 12, 2-15 Credits, 10 credits	Building Principal/Curriculum Coordinator
EDU 415 – Differentiation and Data-Driven Pedagogy, K-8, 4 credits	Intervention Teacher/Classroom Teacher/SPED
EDU 397S – Methods: K-8 Science & Mathematics Inquiry, 4 credits	Classroom Teacher

EDU 397L – Methods: K-8 Language Arts and Social Studies, 4 Credits	Classroom Teacher
EDU 438 - Literacy Assessment, Diagnosis, & Instruction, 4 Credits	Intervention Teacher/Classroom Teacher/SPED
EDU 386 - Mathematics for K -8 Schools With Pedagogy II, 4 Credits	Classroom Teacher
EDU 311 - Cultures, Diversity, & Ethics in Global Education, 4 Credits	Classroom Teacher
EDU 352 - Field Experience in Integrated Planning, Instruction, and Positive Classroom Management, P-12, 4 Credits	Classroom Teacher
EDU 397A – Methods: K-8 Integrated Arts, 4 Credits	Art/Music Teacher
HEE 302 – Methods of Instructional Strategies in PE, 4 Credits	HPE Teacher
EDU 344 - Classroom Management in Elementary Schools, 4 Credits	Classroom Teacher
EDU 385 - Mathematics for K -8 Schools With Pedagogy I, 4 Credits	Classroom Teacher
EDU 370 - Integrating Technology Into Education, 4 Credits	Classroom Teacher
EDU 334 – Children’s Lit, 4 Credits	Librarian
HEE 340 - Methods of Health Education, 4 Credits	HPE Teacher
EDU 382 - Assessment, Curriculum, & Instruction, 4 Credits	Curriculum Coordinator
EDU 233 - Literacy, Language, & Texts, 4 Credits	Classroom Teacher
EDU 234 - Reading & Writing Connections for All Learners K-8, 4 Credits	Classroom Teacher

Ideally, SPED staff would also hold Master’s degrees, with the hope of expanding program options to a SPED endorsement in the future. This school is a public school, and is subject to the same Title I eligibility requirements as traditional public schools. If the school meets the requirements, then they are eligible to receive Title 1 funding and services.

Q: Will students currently on permissive transfers to the chosen school be “grandfathered” in?

A: Yes. For decisions on student attendance, the goal is to minimize disruptions for the students and families currently enrolled in the school that is chosen.

Q: Are the cohort student teachers expected, or incentivized, to stay in Great Falls after graduation?

A: Montana, yes. Great Falls, somewhat. As part of the program requirement from UMW, all program completers will teach in Montana for at least two of the five years following student teaching. We cannot guarantee that all cohort students will stay in Great Falls. The hope is that, over the course of their three year program, they will build strong community ties and feel the support that GFPS has to offer, thus incentivizing them to stay. We also hope to attract cohort students with existing ties to Great Falls. Upon completion of the program, cohort student teachers will qualify for an out-of-district interview with Great Falls Public Schools.

Q: What is the timeline of events for: Advisory Committee selection, school selection, parent notification, principal selection, teacher applications, etc.?

A: Outlined below is a tentative timeline (subject to change based upon Advisory Committee recommendations.)

October 2023

- GFPS Cabinet members will collaborate with the Board in seating an advisory committee.
- Charter Application submitted to the Montana Board of Public Education (pending Board approval)
- Informational sessions for community & staff

November 2023

- Advisory committee begins meeting
- Informational sessions for community & staff
- School location selected and announced
- Principal position advertised

December 2023

- Informational sessions for community & staff at selected school
- Advisory committee meetings continue
- Principal selected

January 2024

- Placement conversations with all teachers from selected school
- Placement of teachers (following the CBA)
- Continue student/parent messaging/communication
- Advisory committee meetings continue
- Round 1 of In-district transfers begins to include CORE school positions

February 2024

- Continue student/parent messaging/communication
- Advisory committee meetings continue

March 2024

- Continue student/parent messaging/communication
- Advisory committee meetings continue
- Confirmation from each family about staying at chosen school so we can determine numbers of open spots
- New students invited to apply following Board recommended process

April 2024

- Continue student/parent messaging/communication
- Advisory committee meetings continue
- Educational forum with prospective cohort students at GFC-MSU
- Classroom placement of students

May 2024

- Continue student/parent messaging/communication
- Advisory committee meetings continue
- Hire cohort students as paras/transfer existing paras as needed

June 2024

- Continue student/parent messaging/communication

- Advisory committee meetings continue
- Gather staff to formalize vision, mission, handbooks
- Curriculum planning

August 2024

- School opens with little scholars following GFPS school calendar

Q: What if I'm almost done with my Masters, can I apply to work at the school?

A: Yes, if your degree is completed prior to being hired as an adjunct faculty member. Should your degree not be completed as planned you will be required to transfer to another school at the end of the school year.

Q: Would the student teacher stay with the same mentor teacher for three years or would they rotate?

A: They will rotate. The more varied experiences a big scholar has, the more prepared they will be when they enter their own classroom.

Q: Will students that want to be considered for a permissive transfer to the school but cannot provide their own transportation be transported?

A: This is a goal, however, it may not be possible in year one. Our transportation partner does not have the bus capacity, or drivers to make this a reality at the current time. GFPS also does not have the budget for this additional transportation. We intend to seek funding opportunities to make this a reality in the future.

Q: What is a school lottery? Will the new school use one?

A: In many places, there are more families who want to attend charter schools than there are seats allowed by state law or capacity in a given school. When this happens, schools use lotteries to select which students to enroll from their waitlist. A typical school lottery is 'blind,' meaning that every student who signs up has an equal chance of getting in. However, some schools do give preference to existing students, students with siblings attending the school, or at-risk groups. Once the number of available seats at each grade level are determined, the advisory committee will determine the lottery process.

Q: Will neighborhood students that do not want to attend the chosen school be provided transportation to another school?

A: Possibly. A nearby school with the capacity to accept additional students will be identified. If this school is more than 1 mile from the student's home, bussing will be a possibility. If the family chooses for their child to attend a different school than the one nearby, parents can utilize the existing permissive transfer process and will be required to provide transportation.

Q: If additional funding is provided by community partners, grants, or any other entity, will this create an imbalance of funding with the other schools?

A: No. If the school receives additional funding, the general fund dollars allotted to the school will be redistributed to the other elementary buildings, ensuring similar opportunities for all GFPS students.

Q: What will the class sizes be? If “overload” is being considered, how is that considered a model classroom?

A: We will remain under the state requirements for class size for any given elementary classroom. This allows us to have more invested, interested adults in the classroom. By adding a few additional students, it affords us the ability to pay the big scholars as aides in the classroom. Many classrooms in Great Falls are currently at the top of the state recommendation, so this would not be vastly different.

Q: Is there a consideration for loan repayment or tuition discounts for big scholars?

A: Our University partner was awarded a grant to offset tuition costs for big scholars. With the grant funding, tuition will be greatly reduced for all students. Additional government support through Pell Grants and loans will help offset the costs. The requirements for repayments for any loans taken will be managed by UM Western.

Ten Facts About the GFPS Proposed CORE School

- The school will be structured as a learning exchange between experienced teachers, preservice teachers (college students) and K-6 learners.
- By choosing an existing school, it allows us to innovate without creating a need for additional funding. The overarching goal is to minimize disruptions for the staff, students and families currently working or enrolled in the school that is chosen.
- The school will have the same state-certified teachers, use the same curriculum, and function under the same policies as all our other GFPS elementary schools.
- The school will reflect the same mix of students as all other elementary schools and will provide the same special education, Title I and gifted services.
- The school will be governed by our GFPS school board.
- The school will keep taxpayer funds in public education.
- The school will provide innovative instructional models (i.e. project-based learning) that are proven effective for student learning, and provide a place for all GFPS teachers to see them in action with real students.
- The school is designed to alleviate issues such as overcrowded classrooms and staffing shortages by allowing GFPS to “grow our own” teachers and paraprofessionals who will be well-prepared to be hired in the other elementary schools.
- The model will provide teachers at all levels and stages of their career a place to collaborate, learn and grow.
- The students will join the ranks of the 3.5 million other students in public charter schools across a broad spectrum of communities nationwide.

Appendix J: Core School Informational Flyer



WHAT IS IT?

A public school where classroom teachers are also college instructors

Education majors working and learning day-to-day in the school setting

Teaching and learning supported by multiple adults in a classroom

A school invested in parent and community partnerships



WHAT'S THE PURPOSE?

To grow high quality teachers who feel supported and want to stay in the profession long term

To accelerate teacher learning, leading to accelerated student learning



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Address teacher recruitment and retention by providing scaffolded support for both pre-service and practicing teachers

Create a common, immersive learning environment to grow students, educators and GFPS employees

WHY SHOULD I TEACH/LEARN HERE?

To benefit from a learning exchange between "little scholars" (K-6 students) and "big scholars" (pre-service educators)

Little Scholars can expect to:

- be excited and engaged in learning
- focus on reading and math with immersive science and social studies content
- be supported in learning by many different adults with unique skill sets
- experience a broad range of hands-on opportunities through community partnerships



Big Scholars can expect to:

- become confident education practitioners through an extended, immersive experience
- be hired at the school, take classes during the day and see real time application of what is being learned in college coursework
- understand the school environment as a whole
- learn from engaged and collaborative teachers who share a similar mindset and a passion for following the science of teaching and learning



Appendix K: Works Cited

Work Cited

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The New Teacher Project. (2015). The Mirage: Confronting the Hard Truth About Our Quest for Teacher Development. The New Teacher Project. Retrieved October 23, 2023, from http://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP-Mirage_2015.pdf