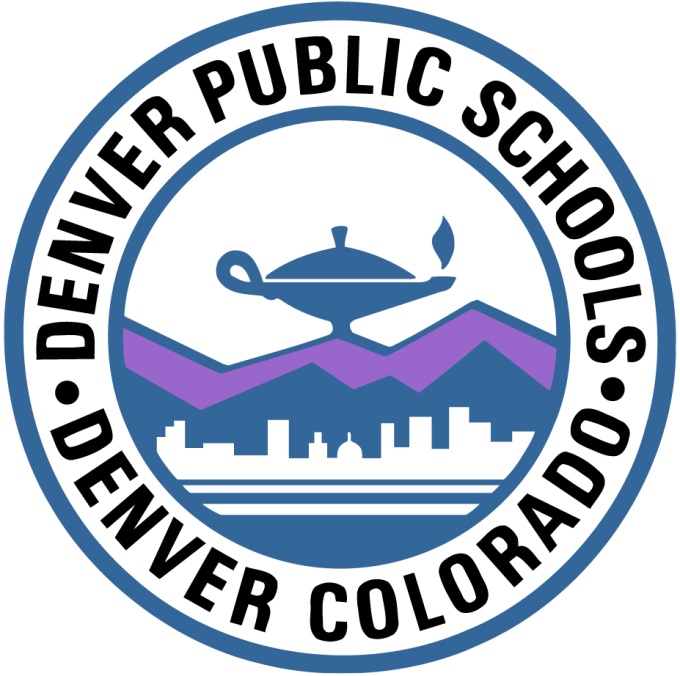
**INNOVATION SCHOOL APPLICATION**



**Vista Academy**

**June 23, 2011**

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**INTRODUCTION**

**Vista Academy –Multiple Pathway Center**

**4800 Telluride Street**

**Building #6**

**Denver, Colorado 80249**

**Temporary # (720) 423-7612**

**Permanent Office # (720) 423-7650**

**Principal/School Leader under Innovation Status: Rhonda Juett**

**Date Submitted: March 30, 2011**

Vista Academy was approved as a new school by the Denver Public School’s Board of Education in June of 2010. Vista Academy is the second of four Multiple Pathway Centers that will open in Denver Public Schools in the fall of 2011. Located on the Evie Dennis Campus in Green Valley Ranch located in Far Northeast Denver the school currently in construction will be the only school in the area to provide a Culinary Arts program, Sports Medicine, a Certified Nursing Assistant Program and provide a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math STEM elective to all of its middle school students.

The Multiple Pathway Center model is an innovative concept that focuses on re-engaging high risk youth in the educational process by meeting their needs and providing a continuum of academic and social/emotional options that are not supported by a traditional educational model. Vista Academy is requesting innovative status to successfully implement the Multiple Pathway Center model, and the school’s vision and mission to provide students with a rigorous, equitable educational program with 21st Century Skills that are necessary for students to access college and career opportunities and to succeed in a global market. In August of 2010 the future principal began outlining the model for Vista Academy.

From September of 2010-November 2011 students at Montbello High School and, Martin Luther King Jr. Early College, and Rachel B. Noel Middle School provided input on a variety of issues ranging from dress code, scheduling to the application process.

The enrollment application process for both the middle and high school began in January of 2011. Parents and students have overwhelmingly supported the programming and innovation development process. The following includes standard design elements of the MPC model that require innovation status:

● No time restrictions for course completion, with a “No-Fail” approach to grading. Students earn a diploma based upon demonstration of the State and National Standards through the Diploma Plus Competencies, rather than credits or “seat time.” This means that in order for a student to “pass” a class, his or her report card grades on the class Content and Personal Competencies, after being converted into a traditional letter grade suing the algorithm within DiplomaPlus.net, must be at least a C

● Extended day, week and year that focuses on activities that emphasize academic catch-up/keep-up and acceleration, college/career readiness, service learning/civic engagement, and extra-curricular identification and development

● An “all hands on deck” approach to staffing where teachers and staff are able to flex their hours and work outside their defined roles.

● Robust admission process that ensures students are committed to changing their behavior and successfully attaining their high school diploma or GED through participating in a rigorous learning plan.

**Innovation school plan development:**

The Vista Academy principal collaborated with Summit Academy and DC-21 in creating this application. Jeff Wein, a school development consultant, also provided input. Bianca Gallegos, Assistant Principal and Laura Kark, Office Manager also assisted with the writing of the Innovation Application.

**INNOVATION: VISION & MISSION**

1. **State the Vision of the School**

The vision of Vista Academy is to ensure that every student demonstrates **mastery of 21st century skills**, which will provide them a competitive edge grounded in a philosophy of academic excellence, leadership, global thinking, exploration, service learning, advanced technological skills, as well as culture and language acquisition.

Our actions are guided by our core values, which are to:

(1): Build unparalleled mentoring relationships focused on meeting the needs of all students.

(2): Ensure that all staff nurtures, cultivates, and assists students with maintaining their SWAGGER.

(3): Create an academic learning environment where all teachers teach from the heart to be heard.

1. **State the Mission of the School**

The mission of Vista Academy is to foster a rigorous academic learning environment and school culture that embodies equity, diversity, and a sense of belonging for all students, parents/guardians, staff, and community. Our covenant is to identify, address, and move past performance barriers allowing students to regain their academic success SWAGGER (**S**cholars, **W**orld-class, **A**ctively engaged in our community, **G**o-getters, **G**lobal thinkers, **E**nterprising, and **R**elentless in our pursuit of an education) in ways that are holistic and intentional.

1. **Explain how the vision and mission support the mission of Denver Public Schools.**

All academic and social/emotional programming at Vista Academy is aligned with the mission and vision of Denver Public Schools and would attribute to the fulfillment of its promise to the students it serves. Vista Academy will contribute to this promise by re-engaging students and producing students who are showing increased student achievement and graduating students prepared to matriculate to college and careers. Vista Academy student’s will master 21st century skills, be grounded in the principles of service learning, which align with Denver Public School’s vision that states that students will be well-prepared for success in life, work, civic responsibility, and higher education.

1. **Identify specific barriers and/or school needs that impact student achievement. Explain how innovation status will help the school overcome the barriers and/or address the needs in order to achieve the mission.**

**Teaching from the Heart to Be Heard and Building Unparalleled Relationships with Students**

Vista Academy will serve students who have been failed by the traditional education system that did not adequately nurture their gifts, curiosity, intelligence, and power as learners. Our students have a diverse set of risk factors ranging from being over-aged and under-credited, students who are proficient in various subjects but their social/emotional skills create difficulty in a traditional high school setting. Our students are high risk and the diverse set of risk factors also include but are not limited to gang involvement, drug and alcohol use, adjudication, mental health needs, pregnancy/parenting, truancy, and behavioral issues. The one thing that our students have in common is their commitment, interest and determination in completing their secondary education.

Our teachers and staff will meet our students on a daily basis with an unwavering positive attitude. They will bring passion to their craft on a daily basis to stop the viscous cycles that many of our students are experiencing; for some students, this may be their final opportunity. We have the arduous task of re-engaging students within the educational process for the purpose of producing scholars, world class citizens, and global thinkers, who are relentless in their pursuit of an education.

In order to meet this arduous task of re-engaging, students gaining innovative status will allow Vista Academy to deliver a variety of intensive supports outside the localized efforts of professionals in the building. This includes enrichment workshops/classes, tutoring, and other learning experiences that fall outside the academic core, but create a program that nurtures and develops the whole child. It will also allow the school to create a culture of excellence that embraces and builds upon our differences.

Finally, Innovation status will allow Vista Academy to truly become a 21st century learning environment by stepping outside the traditional classroom constraints to create an effective and rigorous, competency-based, blended online/hands-on, project-based program.

**INNOVATION: EDUCATION PROGRAM**

1. **Describe the research-based educational program the school will implement and how the program will produce gains in academic achievement.**

**Diploma Plus Historical Snapshot**

Diploma Plus was developed by Commonwealth Corporation in 1996 as a response to the alarmingly high dropout rate and barriers to post-secondary success for underserved youth, and the inadequate supply of high quality alternatives to traditional high schools.  Diploma Plus believed that traditional education was not working for our young people, and so the staff, along with community organizations and teachers asked themselves what an ideal high school experience would provide. Their answers included: high expectations, connections to the real world and postsecondary experiences, supportive relationships with adults, and the opportunity for students to “show what they know”. In DP schools, students live that model every day.

**The Diploma Plus Model**

Diploma Plus® schools chart a new path to success for young people who have not reached their potential in a traditional secondary school setting. Diploma Plus (DP) combines high expectations for every student, a competency-based and standards-aligned approach, a personalized learning environment, and opportunities to make connections between classroom learning and the world outside the school walls. DP students are placed into and promoted through three distinct Diploma Plus Phases (Foundation, Presentation, and Plus) that allow students to learn content and skills at the appropriate level, regardless of their age or previous credit accumulation.

The Diploma Plus model is rooted in Four Essentials: a performance-based system, a supportive school culture, a future focus, and effective supports. In partnership, these essentials detail a blueprint for success for Diploma Plus school communities.

**Diplomas Plus Performance Based System**

Diploma Plus Schools provide curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are focused on knowledge, skills, and understandings.  Students develop meaning at their own pace and are placed, promoted, and graduate according to their demonstrated learning rather than seat time, age, or credit accumulation. The following are the essential elements of the Performance Based System:

Rigorous Curriculum

Vista Academy teachers and staff through the intentional planning of the various courses, units and lessons will build a deep understanding of the Colorado State Standards through the use of the Diploma Plus Competencies. Once students demonstrate their mastery of a particular course through presentations of learning, authentic assessments and their portfolio they will be able to obtain credit for the course and move on to the next course. Students will be exposed to Advanced Placement courses, dual enrollment, partnering with the Community College of Aurora and other higher education institutions in the area. Diploma Plus is the framework that Vista Academy will use to deliver the DPS curriculum in a competency-based digital format. This format is developed and monitored by Diploma Plus and syncs with the DPS Infinite Campus system.

Effective Instructional Practices

At Vista Academy teachers and staff facilitate instruction and programming that is student centered and our philosophy is that teachers will teach from the heart to be heard. Our teachers and staff will build unparalleled relationships with our students. We will use data to inform our practice and everything that occurs at Vista is performance based.

Authentic Assessment

Vista Academy students will determine the body of work from their classes, service learning projects, learning landscapes, and internships that best demonstrates their performance as it relates to the diploma plus competencies and state standards. They will monitor their skills, development, and self evaluate using their passport and other tools that will help provide students with advocacy, goal setting skills, and a personal voice to ensure their success in school and life. Students will finally be able to tell anyone what they have learned in various subject areas because they have mastered the Diploma Plus competencies and the state standards.

Promotion and Graduation Structure

Vista Academy teachers and staff will use data and various tools such as the passport and students snapshot to help support the body of evidence that student use so that they know that they are on track to graduate and are mastering various skill sets.

**Diploma Plus Supportive School Culture**

Diploma Plus Schools work intentionally to develop a positive and supportive school culture.  This culture is developed through specific relationship-building activities and deep-rooted school norms that nurture the strengths of diversity and inclusivity.  Diploma Plus Schools build supportive school communities through the following:

Youth Leadership and Voice

Vista Academy will build leaders that are able to compete in a global market and have mastered various 21st century skills. Students will engage in school governance, peer mediation, service learning, and have individual plans that will build leadership and give students a strong voice to advocate for their needs and ensure that the school has a culture that embraces, develops and nurture our students.

Cultural Responsiveness

Vista Academy values diversity of our school community and will promote school-wide exploration of issues related to personal and group identity and privilege, recruit faculty and staff that that are representative of our student population, and develop a commitment to learning that responding to the personal and group identities and cultures within our school community.

Positive Relationships

Vista Academy will support positive relationships through school wide celebrations, gatherings, and rituals. Students will participate in service learning, and cohorts that they will be with as long as they are at Vista Academy that will provide opportunities for students to develop phase specific identities, norms, and relationships; SWAGGER Enrichment, and Cohort Exchange students will develop positive peer and mentor-student relationships. Through service learning, job shadowing, internships and speakers students will build positive connections to the broader community.

**Diploma Plus A Future Focus**

Diploma Plus Schools intentionally focus on students’ futures through awareness, exposure, and preparation opportunities, and by providing transitional experiences for students in all DP Phases.  This involves a multi-year sequence of civic, career and college exploration activities and opportunities that are embedded in advisories, classroom activities, and out-of-school time.  The following experiences and opportunities are provided at all Diploma Plus schools:

Post Secondary Readiness

A philosophy of Post Secondary Readiness is embedded in everything that we do at Vista Academy. Students will be required to earn college credits and certifications in core classes and our Career Technology Classes while they are still in high school. Our Friday schedule provides students with in-depth exploration and practice in this area culminating in a plan that will see them through college and entry into a career.

Career Preparation

Students will be exposed to many careers and areas of interests. Vista Academy will offer a Culinary Arts, Certified Nursing Assistant, Sports Medicine, and Computer Aided Design programs where students will select per what they are most interested in and also be able to explore and make connections to other career interests.

Civic Engagement

Vista Academy students through their service learning projects, learning landscapes, formal school projects and various leadership opportunities will become responsible engaged participants in their communities.

Personal Competencies

Vista Academy students by utilizing the Diploma Plus Competencies ensures that all students who graduate will be team players, culturally exposed, will be critical, creative thinkers and communicators. Students will also understand the importance and impact of their choices on themselves and the surrounding world.

***The SWAGGER Journey***

What is Vista SWAGGER? Vista SWAGGER embodies the best of our students and expresses who our students are holistically. Our students have their own unique sense of style but are also academically astute, artistic, physically conditioned, diverse, caring individuals who together create a culture that is SWAGGER. Our students have:

**S** cholar(s): A person who attends a school or study under a teacher; a learned person; a person who has done advanced study in a special field.

**W** orld-Class: We rank among the foremost/highest caliber in the world; of an international standard.

**A** ctively Engaged In Our Community: We are vigorously involved in service learning projects that uplift our community.

**G** o-Getters: We are ambitious enterprising people who take action and get things done; we are driven to accomplish goals and whose careers progress rapidly.

**G** lobal Thinkers: We think beyond our own existence and prosperity and examine how we are connected through technology with the world; we understand that what we do have global implications and we have the capacity to improve lives throughout the world.

**E** nterprising: We show initiative and willingness to undertake new projects.

**R** elentless In Our Pursuit of An Education: We are intense in our pace to obtain a quality education and career preparation and will achieve this end goal no matter what obstacles are put before us.

Our teachers and staff believe that all students have SWAGGER because it is our responsibility to ensure that students have the tools necessary to epitomize Vista SWAGGER. Part of this responsibility is to make sure that all students understand and make a connection to what each word in SWAGGER means and associate why it is relevant for them. Our scholars will be provided engaging and relevant supports and opportunities to build their SWAGGER until they GRADUATE or obtain a GED.

**SWAGGER Purpose**

The purpose of SWAGGER being at the heart of what we do at Vista Academy is to address the disconnect that students experience in today’s society with regards to having to choose between being cool and stylish or intelligent. At Vista Academy our scholars will be comfortable showing that they are intelligent, articulate, informed, and caring individuals without feeling that they can’t have a sense of style or be cool because the cool thing at Vista Academy is to be RELENTLESS in our pursuit of an education. At Vista Academy our scholars, teachers and staff core embrace the SWAGGER philosophy and this is shown daily by our actions.

**Vista Academy Academic Programs and Culture**

The programming that we have at Vista Academy sets us apart from any other school in Denver Public Schools. Beginning from when students apply until they earn their high school diploma or GED scholars will receive innovative programming that will firmly set them on their path to success. All students enter a 20-day probationary period, students are evaluated academically to make sure they are placed appropriately. During the probationary period, it may be determined that students lack the commitment to the Vista Academy Model and may be referred to a more appropriate setting or may have academic levels changed. We offer four Career and Technology Education CTE programs as well as a middle school STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) program. Students further along in their SWAGGER Journey will participate in internships and job shadowing opportunities. From the beginning of their SWAGGER Journey scholars participate in various enrichment workshops/classes, retreats and are assigned to their cohorts as well as receive a Vista Academy Passport. Scholars will also participate in bi-weekly service learning projects to meet the authentic needs of the far northeast community.

Vista Academy will provide educational programming to our scholars Monday through Friday from 7:35am-7pm and on Saturdays from 8am-12pm. The Culinary Arts will provide students with hands-on real life learning experiences as they prepare dishes that will dazzle patrons visually and bring the taste palette to life with international flavors for lunch, catering events, at our concessions during sporting events. The Sports Medicine program will provided hands on experience for students by allowing them to assist with athletic trainers and other personnel with caring for athletes participating in athletic events at the Evie Garret Dennis Campus.

**Academic Offerings**

Our scholars participate in a competency based grading and diploma program that requires them to develop a portfolio and provide presentations of their learning. Scholars who are interested in obtaining their GED can take classes to prepare for the various GED subject tests. Vista Academy offers APEX, an academic program that allows scholars to recover credits that they need to obtain. For many students, the need to recover only one or two course credits is all that stands between them and graduation from high school. These students may have already satisfied seat time requirements for a course in which they were unsuccessful — and may have learned a significant amount of what was expected of them. These students are seeking an opportunity to accelerate through the required course material to earn those final credits. If Apex is used for core content subjects, students will have access to a highly qualified teacher who can answer questions.

Other students are ill prepared for high school coursework and have failed several classes.  For these students, the challenge of making up the required credits is daunting. If the only option is to repeat the same course, in the same traditional format as the first time, the chance of success is low. Not wanting to fail again, these students are at increased risk of dropping out — or may have already dropped out. At Vista Academy students will participate in a rigorous blended learning program where students receive diverse instructional modalities through on-line, 1:1, and small group instruction. This will allow all students demonstrate mastery of the Diploma Plus competencies and state standards.

Apex Learning digital curriculum makes it possible to offer a credit recovery program that can address the diverse needs of all these credit-recovery students. With Apex Learning online courses, students can progress at their own pace, taking as much — or as little — time as necessary to master the material. Particularly significant for credit-recovery students, unit-level diagnostics allow students to move quickly over material they have previously mastered. Direct instruction incorporates multimedia — in the form of images, audio, video, animations, and interactive elements — along with instructional text to provide students with multiple representations of concepts as well as address their different learning styles. Apex Learning digital curriculum is based on time-tested pedagogical principles. Apex accesses high quality rigorous educational alternatives for all students through on-line learning. Online courses are developed by an experienced educational team (including curriculum experts, instructional designers, subject matter experts, assessment specialists and teachers. The scope and sequence of each course is created based on national and state content standards.

Through partnerships with the Community College of Aurora, University of Colorado at Denver and other institutions of higher education, scholars will be able to obtain college credit via concurrent enrollment and certifications connected to our CTE programs in addition to their diplomas.

We offer our scholars a state of the art Culinary Arts program, Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), Sports Medicine, and Computer Aided Design STEM programs. The Culinary Arts Program falls within the Hospitality and Tourism Career Cluster and prepares students for careers that encompass the management, marketing and operations of restaurants and other food services, lodging, attractions, recreation events and travel related services. The Certified Nursing Assistant and Sports Medicine program falls within the Health Science Career Cluster and prepares students for careers in planning, managing, and providing therapeutic services diagnostic services, health informatics, support services, and biotechnology research and development. The Computer Aided Design program falls within the Architecture and Construction Career Cluster and prepares students for careers in documenting, planning, managing, building and maintaining the built environment.

Middle School scholars will participate in the Project Lead the Way, Gateway to Technology program that will engage them in project based CTE exploration in Design & Modeling, Automation & Robotics, Energy & the Environment as well as Flight & Space.

Another exciting learning opportunity that Vista Academy has for its scholars, teachers and community is the Solar Champions Program developed by Namaste Solar. The Evie Dennis campus will have the highest solar energy production capability of any other school within the district. The green energy curriculum provided by Namaste can be integrated into all subject areas and will give our scholars a unique opportunity to learn about how our campus operates using green energy. This program is a natural connection to the STEM offerings at Vista Academy.

**Program Description**

**SWAGGER Enrichment**: Students are provided with monthly enrichment activities to prepare them embrace their SWAGGER and prepare them to exceed the expectations Vista places upon them. SWAGGER Enrichment begins upon our student’s admission into Vista Academy and continues until they earn a diploma or GED. Vista SWAGGER is at the heart of who we are and what we do to prepare our students to compete in a global market.

**SWAGGER Retreat**: Students will be scheduled at the end of each summer to participate in a one week SWAGGER Retreat where they are placed in their cohorts and begin to build a sense of team with their peers. Students will continue to build a sense of team by participating in a weekend retreat at the beginning of each trimester.

**Cohorts Model**: all students are placed in cohorts that will meet consistently throughout the year. Once assigned to their cohorts students will participate in a weekly Cohort Exchange to ensure that their Vista Passports are in order. In ensuring that their cohort’s passports are in order they will study together, support one another and build a strong cohesive unit.

**Vista Passport**: all students will receive a passport that will provide them with an advocacy tool they will utilize as a guide that outlines academic requirements, service learning expectations, career expectations, their personal education plan, overall SWAGGER progress and much more. Anyone who asks a student at Vista Academy “Is your passport in order” will experience students who understand where they are at and be able to articulate where they are going.

**Service Learning**: the method of teaching, learning and reflecting that combines academic classroom curriculum through active participation in organized service experiences that meet authentic community needs. Service learning values student’s personal, social, career and ethical growth. Students will participate in service learning activities and projects on a bi-weekly basis as long as they attend Vista Academy. Our students as part of their SWAGGER are actively engaged in their community. When they apply for colleges and universities these institutions will see that civic responsibility is something that is at the heart of what our students believe and they show it through their years of service learning.

**Interactive Communications**: this is a class that will continue to provide Vista Academy students with SWAGGER Enrichment that will build and provide practice with technology, building their portfolio, public speaking and various 21st century skills necessary to be successful at Vista and in life.

**Learning Landscapes**: Vista Academy Teachers and Staff will work diligently with the community to provide learning landscapes in the Far Northeast Community to connect what students are learning in the classroom to what happens outside of the classroom in their everyday lives.

**Our Middle School**

Vista Academy will have a middle school that will consist of approximately seventy-five students. Our dynamic middle school program will allow students to participate in a project based learning environment that will encompass, cohorts, utilizing a passport to monitor their progress and assist students with being accountable for their learning and provide them with a voice to appropriately advocate for their learning. The passport will also provide teachers and staff with an instructional accountability tool that will assist them in implementing quality instructional programming and a gage to which to build unparalleled mentoring relationships. Students will have the opportunity to accelerate their learning by taking AP classes and all students will create a body of work that that demonstrates mastery of content in their portfolios. Each student will select an extra-curricular activity that they will participate in during the last period of the day and is built into their schedules. Students will have the opportunity to acquire the language of their choice as well as develop a plan that will clearly outline their post secondary pathway that is student centered and addresses the student’s interests.

On the 2nd and 4th Friday of the month teachers will have a half day for Enrichment in the morning and PLC’s in the afternoon. On the 2nd and 4th Fridays scholars will participate in Cohort Exchange (monitoring their Vista Academy Passport) with their Cohort Advisor and work with their peers to support academics, and social/emotional needs. In the afternoon a school bus will take and return students from service learning projects.

On the 1st and 3rd Friday of the month students will be in school all day. In the morning all students will engage in Cohort Exchange and then Academic Enrichment for the remainder of the day, which will include Personal Finance 101 and the development of key 21st Century Skills.

Scholars will have access to technology and resources to build skills in subjects that they are not proficient in on a daily basis. It is an expectation that by making sure that scholar’s passports are in order that they register for workshops to build various academic skills that will be offered outside of the school day in the evenings and Saturday mornings.

All students will also have access to a Special Education Interventionist that will collaborate with staff, team teach, and implement interventions for students who have Individual Education Plans, and assist our staff with implementing best practices.

Vista provides mild moderate programming and has SPED teachers that will coordinate the program for the school and make sure that IEP's are being met and students are receiving the services that they need. All students are completing the MAP Assessment to provide a clear picture of where they are at and what supports they need academically and social/emotionally.

The Vista program is an inclusion program so all students will be in the general education classroom with support from teachers, paraprofessional, and tutors. Students who need reading and math interventions will be placed in intervention classes. Students will have access to enrichment classes and workshops that are geared towards meeting gaps. Some will be required to participate and others will have the option to sign up for these workshops/enrichment classes. Note that the school’s model is geared towards addressing the needs of high risk youth so the class sizes, cohorts, hands on project based, service learning and other programming is meant to ensure that students who are falling through the cracks academic and social/emotional needs are being met.

**Our High School**

Vista Academy High School is a dynamic school that will provide students with a vast amount of educational opportunities including, AP classes, college credits via dual enrollment, and flexible scheduling options. Students through Diploma Plus can accelerate their credit attainment while ensuring that they have mastered the standards and competencies needed to show proficiency in a course. All students will be placed in cohorts whom they will interact with as long as they are at Vista Academy. Students will have the opportunity to participate in one of four career technology education programs but will also have the opportunity to explore many careers as well as make connections to colleges that offers programs that will meet our students post secondary interests and needs. Students who need to recover credits will have the opportunity to participate in APEX online learning that will allow students to master content from classes that they have not experienced success with preciously and at their own pace. Our classes will have no more than 25 students in them and all classes are project based, infused with technology and other opportunities to practice 21st century skills.

On the 2nd and 4th Friday of the month teachers will have a half of day for Enrichment in the am and PLC’s in the afternoon. On 2nd and 4th Friday the following will occur for students: (1) Students at the *Foundation Phase* will participate in Cohort Exchange (monitoring their Vista Academy passports) with their Cohort Advisor and work with each other to support academics, and social/emotional needs. After lunch they will have service learning. (2) *Presentation Phase* students will do the same except as *Foundation Phase* students but they will be responsible for getting to their job shadowing. (3) *Plus Phase* students will have a full day internship.

On the 1st and 3rd Fridays students will be in school all day except for students at the Plus phase, who will participate in full day internships. Students who are at the Foundation and Presentation Phase will have Cohort Exchange (making sure that their passports are in order) and Post Secondary Enrichment (developing college and career plans) in the mornings. Special enrichment guests will work with students in the afternoon.

High School Students will have traditional supports such as a school social worker, psychologist, nurse, and counselor. They will also have a Transitions Coordinator who will help students overcome obstacles or fill in gaps that are preventing students from being successful in school. Scholars will have access to technology and resources to build skills in subjects that they are not proficient in on a daily basis. It is an expectation that by making sure that scholar’s passports are in order that they register for workshops to build various academic skills that will be offered outside of the school day in the evenings and Saturday mornings.

High school students will have 70 minute classes Monday through Thursday. All teachers will obtain their ELL Certification and will have an ELA Interventionist to help our staff implement ELA interventions. We will utilize 21st Century technology to provide skill building in Language Arts, Math, and Science for high school students. Workshops will be offered in the evenings and on Saturdays that some students will be required to participate in and others will have the option of taking.

All students will also have access to a Special Education Interventionist that will collaborate with staff, team teach, and implement interventions for students who have Individual Education Plans, and assist our staff with implementing best practices. Vista provides mild moderate programming and has SPED teachers that will coordinate the program for the school and make sure that IEP's are being met and students are receiving the services that they need. All students are completing the MAP Assessment to provide a clear picture of where they are at and what supports they need academically and social/emotionally.

The Vista program is an inclusion program so all students will be in the general education classroom with support from teachers, paraprofessional, and tutors. Students who need reading and math interventions will be placed in intervention classes. Students will have access to enrichment classes and workshops that are geared towards meeting gaps. Some will be required to participate and others will have the option to sign up for these workshops/enrichment classes. Note that the school’s model is geared towards addressing the needs of high risk youth so the class sizes, cohorts, hands on project based, service learning and other programming is meant to ensure that students who are falling through the cracks academic and social/emotional needs are being met.

**INNOVATION: ASSESSMENTS**

1. **Describe the school’s assessment plan and how it is critical for the school to produce gains in academic achievement.**

**A. Provide an overview of the school’s proposed assessment plan. Describe any assessments that will supplement assessments required by DPS and the state.**

It is important to regularly assess students because learning happens on a continuum. Continuous assessment is crucial in providing feedback to the teacher on the effectiveness of classroom instruction, and for teachers and students to know how students are developing academically. Frequent Assessment also allows students to have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning.

At Vista Academy our students, teachers, staff and parents, work together to create assessments that are student-centered. Student-centered instruction at Vista Academy will mean that teachers act as a guide and shares control of the learning environment. We have an assessment culture where students are involved in deciding how to best demonstrate their learning.

**Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Assessment**

One Size Doesn’t Fit All! Each child learns differently. NWEA has developed computerized adaptive assessments that test differently, allowing teachers to see their students as individuals – each with their own base of knowledge. NWEA Measures of Academic Progress tests present students with engaging, age- appropriate content. As a student respond to questions, the test responds to the student, adjusting up or down in difficulty. The result is a rewarding experience for the student, and a wealth of detailed information for teachers, parents, and administrators. The underlying data driving the assessment ensures remarkable accuracy, based on over 24 million assessments given over 30+ years. The equal-interval RIT scale increases the stability, providing grade-independent analysis of a child’s learning. For educators, it means at last having timely information that, used well can change the course of a student’s school year- and life. MAP assessments will be used at the beginning of each trimester to review the progress of our students.

**Developmental and Gateway Portfolios**

At Vista Academy every student is required to have Developmental Portfolios that contain his or her accumulation of significant work for each content area. The developmental Portfolio is a living document designed to engage the student in reflection on his or her learning, to demonstrate his or her progress, as a body of work to show academic growth. Developmental Portfolios also serve as a formative assessment for teachers to track and assess student progress in the Prioritized Standards and the DP Competencies. Students at Vista Academy are also required to create and present culminating Gateway Portfolios in order to be promoted or graduate from each phase. The Gateway Portfolio is comprised of the student’s best work from each content area (either original or revised documents from the Developmental Portfolio), relevant standardized test scores, and future focus and cohort experiences. All of these artifacts will demonstrate our student’s understanding of the Prioritized Standards through the Diploma Plus Competencies. Vista Academy will use the Gateway Portfolio as an authentic, summative assessment of the student’s learning.

**Colorado Student Assessment Program CSAP**

CSAP will be given per DPS/State requirements. However, Vista Academy is requesting that any scholars with sophomore credit who have taken the CSAP twice in high school be exempt from taking the test a third time based on the following exemptions and waivers from the CDE (Definitions of Tiers I, II, and III-Alternative High Schools and At-Risk programs.

**TLAP**

The TLAP (8th Grade Technology) Pre and Post Test will be given according to DPS requirements.

**ACT and SAT**

The ACT (American College Test) and SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) are the two standardized tests accepted by most colleges and universities for admissions purposes. The ACT and SAT Practice test and actual test will be given in accordance to district and test guidelines.

**Accuplacer**

The Accuplacer is a suite of computer-adaptive placement tests that quickly, accurately, and efficiently assess reading, writing, and math skills to determine if developmental classes would be beneficial before the students take college-level work.

**B. Explain how the school will measure and evaluate academic progress of individual students, student cohorts, and the school as a whole throughout the school year and at the end of each academic year**.

Teachers will provide daily formative assessments. Vista Academy will use MAP to give a real time analysis of student academic performance. This along with CSAP data, transcripts/report cards and intake data, Infinite Campus attendance, and behavior will inform class selection, interventions, enrichment workshops, and cohort placement.

Students will receive and must maintain a Vista Passport that includes multiple academic, service learning, post-secondary readiness, and social/emotional metrics. Teachers will maintain Student Snapshots for each of the student’s various performance data points to help them develop and cultivate unparalleled mentoring relationships.

**C. Explain how and how frequently the school will collect and analyze diagnostic, formative, predictive, and summative student academic achievement data, use the data to refine and improve instruction, and report the data to the school community.**

**●** MAP’s Assessment will be proctored to all students and 3-4 times and year. The data obtained from the MAP’s Assessment will be used by teachers to guide their instructional practices in the classroom to differentiate and scaffold instruction to meet the individual needs of students in the classroom. The MAP’s Assessment will be administered to all students prior to them entering Vista Academy so that we can see their academic level and schedule them appropriately. This assessment will serve as a formative growth data.

● Students work on their Developmental and Gateway portfolios consistently throughout each trimester. Teachers and students will work together to determine the appropriate bodies of work that will best demonstrate student learning.

● The Diploma Plus Formative and Authentic Assessments will be administered by teachers and used 2-4 times per trimester.

● As part of Diploma Plus students are required to build a portfolio based on the

authentic assessments where they have demonstrated the success (those in which competency scores were at least proficient. The portfolio will serve as a record for students to show mastery of learned information. Presentation of leveled portfolio pieces allows the scholar promotion to the next level.

● CSAP, TLAP, ACT, SAT, and Accuplacer are all summative data points that will be used and reported on a yearly basis.

**INNOVATION: GRADUATION AND PROMOTION**

1. **Describe the school’s proposed graduation and promotion policies.**

Vista Academy will meet and exceed the district’s minimum promotion and graduation standards. Please see Appendix C-Request for Alternative Promotion and Graduation Standards.

**Developmental and Gateway Portfolios:**

Every scholar is required to have a Developmental Portfolio that contains his or her accumulation of significant work for each content area. The Developmental Portfolio is a living document designed to engage the scholar in reflection on his or her learning, to demonstrate his or her progress, and as a complete body of work to show academic growth.

To be promoted or to graduate from each phase, scholars are also required to create and present culminating Gateway Portfolios. The Gateway Portfolio is comprised of the scholar’s best work from each content area, relevant standardized test scores, and future focus and advisory experiences. All these artifacts should demonstrate that each scholar understands the prioritized standards through the Diploma Plus competencies.

One month before the scholar is ready to graduate, he/she will present their Gateway Portfolio to a panel of staff, including the principal and assistant principal. Once the presentation is complete, the panel decides if the scholar is allowed to graduate or whether the portfolio should be presented again with additional information, improvements, etc. Currently, all advisement teachers are charged with the responsibility of portfolio progression. We also have a lead teacher who monitors and tracks a student’s portfolio progress with the counselor.

**Identified promotion and graduation criteria:**

The Diploma Plus model has clear and explicit promotion and graduation criteria that are a combination of required experiences, demonstrated understandings, course requirements, and standardized test scores. The criteria will be aligned to the scope and sequence of Vista Academy, which identifies the Prioritized Standards to be learned, the content, and personal competencies that scholars will be required to demonstrate, and the key products that students will create in each course at each phase. The portfolio is designed to hold a collection of the student’s best work from authentic assessments. He/she will present to the panel how certain academic competencies were mastered in classes and how personal competencies were met through service learning. Students will also present any concurrent courses they were enrolled in and the grades they received. There is also a section of the portfolio that provides the panel with information regarding college/career plans. In addition to all high school requirements, a completed portfolio presentation is a graduation requirement.

In order for a student to graduate from Vista Academy and any Diploma Plus High School, students must successfully complete the school’s graduation requirements, pass the ACT or SAT, and successfully complete a non-remedial college course at a local community college, and 80 hour internship and related assignments, and a Service Learning project.

**Individualized Student Pace and Progress:**

Vista Academy scholars will progress at the pace that is appropriate for them as individual learners. All students are expected to meet the same Prioritized Standards, yet the length of time it takes each student to meet them is dependent upon the individual. In the Diploma Plus program students are promoted to the next phase or graduate when they demonstrate understanding of the Prioritized Standards for their current phase through the Diploma Plus competencies. Scholars who need more time to meet the Prioritized Standards for a course are not considered to have “failed” that course, but simply given more time to complete it.

Competencies are present in two key areas of the Diploma Plus School’s promotion and graduation structure. First, students’ report card grades, which are explicitly based on the Diploma Plus competencies, are one element of the promotion criteria. For a student to “pass” a class, his or her report card grades on the class Content and Personal Competencies, after being converted into a traditional letter grade using the algorithm within DiplomaPlusl.net, must be at least a C. Since one of the requirements for a student to be promoted to the next phase is successful completion of the courses in that phase, the Diploma Plus Competency grades on the report cards are integral to this process. Secondly, a students’ Gateway Portfolio and its presentation should demonstrate a deep understanding of the course’s identified learning standards by applying the subject area competencies.

**Competency-based Tracking and Reporting System:**

A school-wide system will be implemented for tracking and reporting student competency attainment over time and across subject areas. This online program is aligned to Infinite Campus and competency grades are transferred to regular grades for parents and the district to analyze and evaluate at the end of each designated term. Competency based grades are connected to the Diploma Plus Competencies and the Prioritized Standards. The Diploma Plus Personal Competencies are used throughout the school to support students in identifying and acquiring the personal skills needed to be successful in both academics and the workplace. These competencies are used along with the subject-specific competencies in all courses in order to provide students with necessary feedback and to hold them accountable for these important 21st Century skills. In addition, the use of Personal Competencies helps to reinforce the connection between students’ academics and the world of work.

**Phases to Identify and Group Students:**   
 Scholars will be identified and grouped by the developmental phases of Foundation (0-79 Credits), Presentation (80-179 Credits), and Plus (180-240 Credits).  These phases are used to group students based on their learning needs, not by their age or previous credit accumulation.  Typically, Foundation Phase students are learning eighth-grade Prioritized Standards; Presentation Phase students are working on tenth-grade Prioritized Standards; and Plus Phase students are learning 12th grade Prioritized Standards. The MAP Assessment, transcripts and meeting with students will assist with determining which developmental phase students will enter.

**Class Scheduling**

Scholars will be assessed in MAP’s upon enrollment or prior to classes beginning. Students are placed in the appropriate classes depending on their skill levels, rather than age, prior credit accumulation, or previous classes taken. Once the MAP Assessment data and transcripts are reviewed, and a meeting (s) with students occur it is determined which courses the scholar will need to complete and which level of Diploma Plus he/she will enter.

**Vista Passport and Cohort Exchange:**

The Vista Passport is a tool that scholars are responsible for maintaining. Each student is monitored and supported by his or her Cohort Mentor.

During Cohort Exchange scholars will work together to ensure they are maintaining their SWAGGER and that their passports are in order. This is a time when scholars seek interventions and additional assistance in various academic areas.

We are requesting systems segregation between the students attending Multiple Pathways Centers and the traditional 4-year track graduation.

**ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GOALS AND GAINS**

1. **Describe the goals and specific gains in academic achievement the school will commit to as a result of securing innovation status.**

**Reengaging Students:**  
• Attendance averaged 78.3% in 2008-09 in New York City Diploma Plus Schools, with most schools meeting a 80% benchmark; this rate is better than comparable schools serving the same population.  
• In 2008-09, New York City Diploma Plus schools had 84.1% of students return to their Diploma Plus school, up 6% from the previous year. In addition, fewer students in NYC Diploma Plus schools are dropping out or transferring. There was a 3.8% decrease in dropout from 2006-07 to 2008-09 and a 2.2% decrease in student transfers.

**Improving Academic Performance:**   
• In New York City, Diploma Plus schools participation and passing rates on the Regents exams (New York State High Stakes Required Test) exceeds those of comparable schools. In the most recent year for which comparisons were available, Diploma Plus schools scored 8% higher in math and 24% higher in English.

• In California, all schools receive an annual Academic Performance Index (API) score that measures their academic performance and growth from the previous year. Opened in 2007-08, the Merlo Institute for Environmental Technology, a Diploma Plus School in Stockton, CA enrolled students who were struggling the most; in 2008-09, although still low at 522, Merlo had the highest growth in the district with a point growth of 19. The district average growth was 6 points. Merlo also met targets school wide and for subgroups. In addition, in 2009, Merlo made the greatest gain in California Standards Test  scores in their district.  They improved by 104 points over last year.  
• Indiana has a 40 credit graduation requirement, with an average earned of 10 credits a year.  DP schools reporting averaged above 10 credits, with Lawrence Township DP students accumulating an average of 13.8. This indicates students were both engaged and worked to demonstrate higher academic performance than at their previous schools.

**Improving Graduation Rates and Opens Postsecondary Pathways:**   
• DP schools, in each of the four geographic networks, have higher graduation rates than comparable schools (as measured by similar demographics and educational histories).  The average graduation rate from the Plus Phase was 88%.  
• Diploma Plus students are more interested in and are accepted into/planning to attend college after attending their Diploma Plus schools: in 2008, 87% of students reported they were more interested in college while 86% of Diploma Plus graduates across all sites were accepted into and planning to attend college (an equal number for 2 or 4 year schools). In the sites we were able to track students, 70% of Diploma Plus graduates entered college within a year after graduation.   
• In 2008, 95% of students reported that they felt better prepared for adulthood in Diploma Plus than in their former school.

**Improving Middle School Student Achievement through Interventions**

Vista Academy’s middle teachers and staff core will rely on a data to implement targeted academic interventions for students. Visa Academy will have 70 minute language arts, math daily. Students will have science class two days a week and the Project Lead the Way, Gateway to Technology elective which is a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math elective two days a week, exposing them to science four days a week. All teachers will obtain their ELL Certification and will have an ELA Interventionist to help our staff implement ELA interventions. We will offer LANGAUGE! 4th edition, and the Wilson Reading Program. Other Language Arts Intervention workshops and individual applications will be available to students via online to help build skills. Math building applications via 21st Century technology will be available for students to use in school and outside of school. Vista Academy will utilize AVID strategies and teach students how to keep their Vista Passports in order.

**Improving High School Student Achievement through Interventions**

The high school teachers and core staff use Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) Assessment, CSAP, transcripts and other data to determine what Diploma Plus Phase our students will begin their SWAGGER Journey and develop a schedule and program to meet their individual needs. High school students will have 90 minute classes Monday through Thursday. All teachers will obtain their ELL Certification and will have an ELA Interventionist to help our staff implement ELA interventions. We will utilize 21st Century Technology to provide skill building in Language Arts, Math , and Science for high school students. Workshops will be offered in the evenings and on Saturdays that some students will be required to participate in and others will have the option of taking of taking.

As a multiple pathway center our ultimate goal is to re-engage students who have dropped out of a DPS school, who are chronic non attenders, and who are considered high risk, and put them on the road to obtain their SWAGGER so that they are proficient and/or advance in all subject areas at the appropriate grade level. Data shows that many of the students who would fall within the high risk category are reading and writing far below a 6th grade level. Other indicators used to measure student and school success include:

1. Getting a minimum of 90% of students with 80239 or 80249 zip codes to apply to Vista Academy.
2. Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) Assessment
3. PLAN (pre-ACT) and Practice SAT
4. Explore (8th grade)
5. Mastery of Diploma Plus Competencies and State Standards
6. SAT/ACT Scores
7. Accuplacer
8. Dual credits earned while in high school
9. Student who obtain certification in CTE programs
10. Students who enter jobs that are aligned with their plans upon graduating from Vista

Academy or earning their GED

1. Number of students who pass the GED subject tests and earn their GED
2. Scholarships awards received
3. College acceptance rates (100% acceptance into a college, trade/technical school or entrance into an apprentice program is expected of Vista Academy students)
4. College graduation rates (100% graduation rate is expected of all Vista Academy)

**SWAGGER Outcomes**

The SWAGGER outcomes are that our scholars are comfortable showing their academic knowledge and they help build a culture of academic excellence and diversity. Our SWAGGER will produce informed scholars who seek to understand how the things that affect them impact people around the world. Eventually, Vista Academy will created educational opportunities that will give our scholars the opportunity to travel internationally. This will lead to higher reading, writing, public speaking, and advocacy skills. Scholars will also have strong planning, communication, and other key 21st Century Skills by participating in bi-weekly service learning projects to meet the authentic needs of the Far Northeast community. Vista Academy will seek to develop and maintain learning landscapes in various businesses in the Far Northeast to extend our scholars learning beyond the classroom.

By instilling the Vista SWAGGER all scholars we will achieve the following outcomes:

• Scholars who attend Vista Academy over the course of three years in middle school and four years in high school will be proficient and advanced in reading, writing, math and science. We will see a minimum of two grade levels of growth from scholars in one year.

• Vista Academy scholars and teachers will maintain a 97% attendance rate.

• 100 percent of scholars who graduate from Vista Academy will be accepted to a College/University, trade/technical school or apprenticeship programs.

• Through our Peer/Staff Council, support staff, restorative justice our discipline incidents will be among the lowest three schools in the district; below 5% discipline issues.

• 100 percent of our scholars will have at least one adult that they have built an unparalleled mentoring relationship with at Vista Academy.

● 95% of students who take the AP exam will pass the first time taken.

● 100% of students in the plus phase will take and pass a minimum of one concurrent enrollment class

• 50% of the service learning projects that students participate in will be newly developed or expanded projects that are self-sustaining and increase the quality of life for families in the Far Northeast Community.

• 100% of Vista Academy parents/guardians will have opportunities to actively engage in the learning and the building of the school culture and decision making, through our Parent Network.

Parents will receive a Communications Survey at the beginning of each trimester to update personal information and to help us improve written and verbal communications with parents.

Vista Academy is in a planning year and will open in August of 2011, therefore there is not a UIP to submit.

**INNOVATION: TIME**

1. **Describe how the school will use time strategically to support the vision, mission and education program so as to produce gains in academic achievement.**

Vista Academy will provide educational programming to our scholars Monday through Friday from 7am-7pm and on Saturdays from 8am-1pm. The school will adopt a trimester system that will align with DPS Trimesters and will follow the DPS Calendar year with some minor adjustments in scheduling to meet the needs of our scholars. (see Attachment A for the middle school schedule, Attachment B high school schedule). Vista Academy will offer summer programming beginning the summer of 2012 to provide students with additional academic programming and summer camp options.

**INNOVATION: STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

1. **Describe the enrollment procedures and practices of the school with innovation status.**

Vista Academy is located in the Far Northeast but is not a part of the Far Northeast enrollment zone. Vista Academy desires to enroll approximately 75 middle school students, (25 students in 6th, 7th and 8th grade) and 175-215 high school students during the 2011-2012 school year.

Vista Academy will require an application from students (Please see Attachment C for the Middle School Application, Attachment D for the High School Application and Attachment E for Admission Scoring Rubric). The application is intended to help staff determine if the student is committed to beginning their SWAGGER journey. It is also intended to help faculty develop a clear understanding of the student so that the appropriate enrichment is provided when entering the school. The application has a rubric that is geared toward providing points to the student population that Vista is meant to target.

**INNOVATION: HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

1. **Describe the proposed plan for staffing, recruiting, selecting, and developing employees, the school’s personnel policies, and the school’s leadership structure. Explain how they will be changed by innovation status, and how these changes will lead to increased student achievement.**

Vista Academy believes that all students can achieve academically to their maximum potential and successfully move on to appropriate post secondary options and careers of their choice. It is our position that we are relentless and passionate about teaching and helping students excel academically, socially, and physically. Our teachers and staff are a part of a team that has mastered competency and standards based instruction, think out of the box, and builds unparalleled mentoring relationships with students. Our teaching and staff core are lifelong learners and exemplifies high levels of professional growth.

Our Vista community believes in the vision that we must “teach from the heart to be heard.” This means that we have high expectations and give students the tools to meet those expectations, as well as to give them the time to learn and practice what we expect from them. The Vista Academy teaching and staff core are a critical part of our student’s academic puzzle. Since many of our students are trying to put together their lives, and to get back on track after they have given up, our focus on student success is the basis for everything that we do, everyday.

Our teachers and staff will meet our students with an unwavering, positive attitude; with passion that we bring to our craft on a daily basis and with a commitment to stop the vicious cycles that many of our students are experiencing. This is particularly important because for some of our students this may be their final opportunity to achieve academic and social success. We have the arduous task of re-engaging students within the educational process for the purpose of producing scholars, world-class citizens, global thinkers, who are relentless in their pursuit of an education. For the reasons listed above, we are committed to seeking and hiring both full time and part time candidates who understand the nuances of working within a culturally-diverse community; who understand the challenges and best practices of supporting students in a Multiple Pathway Atmosphere, and who have the skills to utilize a competency based, accelerated diploma program.

Within the current DPS hiring framework, Vista Academy does not have the flexibility to hire either full time or part-time individuals as the need arises. Further, the current system does not provide the flexibility to hire part time and/or temporary professionals who have the appropriate background and experience in a given area.

Having immediate and on-going access to the open employment market will give Vista Academy a tremendous advantage in assembling and maintaining the “world class” set of educators necessary to meet the needs of our students.

To meet the needs of all students and to achieve the academic performance goals outlined in Section XI and in **Appendix D,** Vista Academy requires a maximum flexibility to design and implement human resource policies and procedures that align with the vision, mission and education plan of the school.

Vista is committed to hiring outstanding individuals who understand and are prepared to meet the demands of creating a school that produces significant gains in academic achievement for all students.

The innovation plan includes waivers from state statute and the DPS/DCTA collective bargaining agreement, including but not limited to, waiver of the Teacher Employment, Compensation and Dismissal Act or 1990.

**Employment Status.** Teacher’s employment with Vista Academy and the Denver Public Schools will be “at-will” and will not be subject to the Teacher Employment Compensation and Dismissal Act of 1990, § 22-63-101, et seq. The teacher will have a right to end his/her work relationship with Vista Academy and the Denver Public Schools will have the right to end the work relationship with the teacher at any time in accordance with personnel policies in the Employee Handbook.

Teachers employed by the Denver Public Schools prior to their employment at Vista Academy will be at-will as described in the preceding paragraph. Such teachers will regain their non-probationary status with DPS upon securing, without break in service, a mutual consent position within another DPS school. Such teachers will have the right to participate in the DPS staffing cycles available to all DPS teachers, but will not be guaranteed placement in any other school or further employment beyond their employment at Vista Academy if they do not secure a position through mutual consent.

The employment of secretaries and paraprofessionals with Vista Academy and the Denver Public Schools will be “at-will.” Secretaries and paraprofessionals will have a right to end his/her work relationship with Vista and the Denver Public Schools for any reason at any time. Vista and Denver Public Schools will have the right to end the work relationship with secretaries and paraprofessionals for any reason at any time in accordance with personnel policies in the Employee Handbook.

The employment of custodians and facilities managers with Vista Academy will be “at will.” Vista Academy can release custodians and facilities managers from the school for any reason at any time, provided school leadership proposes, and the District approves, an alternative custodial and facilities management solution. The employment rights of custodians and facilities managers with the District that have been released from Vista Academy will be determined by District policy and the applicable collective bargaining agreement or memorandum of understanding.

As described in this document, including in **Appendix E**, Vista Academy is requesting maximum flexibility to:

● Recruit and hire all staff, including teachers, administrators, and other support personnel, using practices that will ensure employee fit with the school’s Innovation Plan.

● Post all vacant positions and recruit and hire all staff as the need arises, even if such need falls outside the District’s standard hiring cycle.

● Not receive direct placements of teachers by the District.

● Create non-traditional job descriptions, which may include adding roles and responsibilities to any job.

● Establish the calendar, work year, work week, work day, job assignments, class size and teaching loads to align with the Innovation Plan.

● Create a governance and leadership structure that aligns with the Innovation Plan.

● Hire non-licensed teachers for non-core subjects who are not required to meet NCLB highly qualified criteria; the school will hire teachers who meet the highly qualified requirements for all core content classes.

● Create a professional development program that supports the Innovation Plan. The school will have the option to participate in District-provided professional development.

● Create a process to address under-performing employees.

● Establish compensation rates and other methods of rewarding performance and extra work time, including additional bonuses and/or incentives.

● Implement other programs and policies, such as dress code and employee and student conduct expectations, that will support the school’s culture as described in the Innovation Plan.

Such flexibility will be limited only by federal law, and state statutes, and Collective Bargaining Agreement provisions

and District Board policies not waived in this application.

**Professional Development Autonomy*.*** Vista Academy will make decisions regarding professional development that promote the growth of all staff members. This may include implementing peer assistance programs and hiring professionals and coaches on contract or on a short-term basis to meet the School’s and faculty’s unique professional development needs. The professional growth programs will support practices vital to improve the achievement of all scholars at Vista Academy and ensure teachers the professional latitude necessary to realize the mission of Vista Academy. Vista Academy staff will also continue to participate in the District professional development.

By converting to Innovation status, professional development can be tailored to the strengths and needs of our staff so that they can better support our scholars.

**Performance Management System**

Vista Academy will have the flexibility to administer a teacher evaluation system that is in alignment with its mission, vision, values and educational program. Vista Academy intends to use LEAP, the district’s teacher evaluation process, as a foundation and may adapt LEAP or adopt an alternative evaluation system in the future. If Vista Academy wishes to modify LEAP or adopt an alternative evaluation system, the school will demonstrate that its plan is appropriate and superior to LEAP, meets the requirements of SENATE BILL 10-191, and will seek approval from the district.

Consistent with the DPS LEAP evaluation system, the principal, the assistant principal, and peer observers will be involved in the evaluation process. Teachers will be evaluated three times a year once per trimester and will receive feedback on progress toward individual growth goals and student achievement gains. Frequent observation and feedback will be used to drive instructional improvement that will result in increased student achievement.

***School Staffing and Compensation****.* The compensation package will have, as its foundation, the salary system established in the DPS/DCTA ProComp Agreement. Staff at Vista Academy will receive compensation through stipends for working in the extended day programming, weekday and weekend enrichment activities, SWAGGER Retreats in the summer, and other summer and holiday programming. All staff is expected to participate in the extended day program which requires a three trimester commitment. Flexibility will be provided as needed.

A supplemental compensation structure will be developed in collaboration with Vista Academy Stakeholders. The stipend policy will be outlined in the Vista Academy Employee Handbook. Supplemental compensation is dependent on available funding and could vary from year-to-year. All employees at Vista Academy will participate in PERA. Should any staff or faculty member transfer from Vista Academy to another DPS assignment, all pension benefits will be portable and there shall be no loss of benefit.

**Schedule and length of the school day**

By having Innovation status, Vista Academy will be able to tailor and personalize their academic program to re-engage students in the educational process, build student academic skills, and prepare them for college and careers.

***Extended School Calendar and Schedule.*** Vista Academy will provide educational programming to our scholars Monday through Friday from 7am-7pm and on Saturdays from 8am-1pm. Students will attend school from 7:35am-4:05pm. High school students have scheduling options that will fit their needs including evening and Saturday hours. Teachers will work an additional hour work day incorporating a class that will provide students with extra-curricular activities that the teacher is passionate about and has selected to facilitate. The additional hour work day was outlined during the initial interview with teachers. It is also noted in the Vista Academy Offer Letter as well as on teacher’s extra-curricular activity selection forms. Beginning August of 2012 teachers will report back to work on August 1st.

**Leadership Succession**

Vista Academy’s leadership succession plan assures that the continuity of the new instructional system is maintained when school leadership changes. The leadership succession plan will begin by thoroughly orienting all staff and families to the mission, vision, values and instructional and intentional culture systems in place at Vista Academy. This orientation will, in part, be intended to obtain formal and direct commitment from the community to the school’s plan for student success. As a result, all subsequent hiring and promotions at Vista Academy will be tied to the strategic goals developed to support the mission, vision, and instructional and intentional school culture systems.

Vista Academy’s leadership succession plan will include a process for both internal succession first, i.e. the promotion of the assistant principal to the instructional leaser and then existing staff. If this does not produce the instructional leader that the school needs then we proceed with the recruitment, and hiring of a new instructional leader from outside of the school community. Over the course of year one of the Innovation plan, a Vista Academy Leadership Profile will be developed that specifies the attributes necessary to ensure that there is a leadership in place to support the school’s mission, vision, values, and goals. The Leadership Profile will describe attributes, roles, and expectations for the Principal, and Assistant Principal.

When a leadership position is vacated, the school’s leadership team will convene to review the Leadership Profile to determine if any changes are necessary. Using the profile as a guide, a position description will be drafted and shared with existing school staff and the immediate supervisor of the position. Recruitment using both DPS and external media will commence.

Once qualified candidates are identified, a screening committee will be created to select candidates to be interviewed. Interviews will be conducted by a team determined by the school leadership team. The interview team will include stakeholders in the Vista Academy community, including parents, teachers, community members, colleges, and members of the school’s leadership team. It is the intent of Vista Academy to ensure this process is transparent and collaborative. Feedback from interviews will be used to select at least two qualified candidates but not more than four. Candidates will participate in a meet and greet that will allow students, parents and community members to interact with the candidates and fill out and submit Leadership Feedback Forms. The team the completed the interviews will then review the Leadership Feedback Forms and recommend two qualified candidates to the Superintendent.

Strong and consistent leadership is critical to the success of Vista Academy. Therefore, it is essential that the leadership succession plan ensures that the vision, mission, and core values of the school will be sustained through changes in personnel.

**INNOVATION: SCHOOL GOVERNANCE & PARENT ENGAGEMENT**

1. **Describe proposed changes to the school’s governance structure and parent engagement strategy. How will these changes produce gains in academic achievement?**

Vista Academy will institute a leadership team structure called the SWAGGER Leadership Council that will consist of the principal, assistant principal, office manager, community liaison, one person from the support staff, one teacher representative from the middle school, two teachers from the high school, one student representative from the middle school, one student from the high school, three parents and a community representative. This is a body is meant to help the school community reach consensus and provide critical information so that the Principal can reach a decision that is aligned with the vision, mission, and core values of the school.

As part of the culture at Vista Academy student voice, and advocacy, and having parents being actively engaged in the school is key to our model. Considering this model Vista Academy will not have a CSC or SLT because these often do not provide an accurate representation of the schools that they seek to serve and therefore only a small percentage of parents are represented in the decisions and the student voice is often not heard at all. There will be three required parent meetings that occur during each trimester that will provide the SWAGGER Leadership Council the opportunity to present information to not less than 95% of our parents and allow them to weigh in on critical issues through a clicker response system. This information will be collected and analyzed by the leadership team and recommendations made to the principal. There will be a similar process in place to obtain student feedback as well.

As part of the Vista Academy Parent Network, the school will sponsor monthly focus groups on important issues that occur at our school. The data from these focus groups will provide critical information to inform decisions that are made by the leadership team. There will be parent meetings every trimester where parents will provide the leadership team with feedback forms on various issues where a decision will have to be made by the team.

Vista Academy is committed to moving parent engagement to a new level by implementing our Parent Network that will focus on the following:

•Parents being actively engaged in the learning environment

•Leadership

•Volunteering/Fundraising

•Adult learning

**INNOVATION: BUDGET**

1. **Provide a budget** **and an estimate of potential cost savings and increased efficiencies as a result of innovation status. Explain how the school’s allocation of resources, as reflected in the budget, supports the vision, mission and education plan.**

Attached is the school’s five-year financial forecast. The school worked with the Instructional Superintendent and the Budget Office to develop a prudent and sustainable fiscal year 2012 budget and a five-year forecast that supports the School’s vision and mission.

Like “traditional” district schools, Vista Academy is allocated a per pupil funding base (SBB) and mill levy dollars. Additionally, and similar to DC-21 and Summit Academy, two other Multiple Pathway Schools in DPS, Vista Academy receives a subsidy from the District for serving higher-risk students (SBB+ funding model). Finally, the school may qualify for federal Title I and II dollars, which would be used to supplement core academic program. The school does not project receiving any revenue from other outside sources.

As a Multiple Pathway Center, Vista Academy projects operating costs that exceed those of a “traditional” district school. These costs are covered through the Districts SBB+ funding model. The school does not project generating any material cost savings as a result of securing innovation status.

With increased budgeting flexibility comes increased responsibility. The school’s budget includes an Office Manager who will work with the principal to implement sound financial management practices and who will work closely with the District’s Budget Office to carefully manage the school’s finances.

**INNOVATION: OTHER PROGRAMS, POLICES, OPERATIONAL DOCUMENTS**

1. **Describe any other innovations not yet explained in the application and how such innovations will lead to increased student achievement.**

As Vista Academy builds out its programs it is a goal to incorporate the following programming over the next 2-5 years:

• An international internship component will allow students to travel to a country of interest per their CTE to gain international work experience in their area of interest and to visit colleges and universities in that country.

**•** Add a restaurant to the culinary arts program and expand the program to include hospitality management.

**•** Incorporate a Leadership Institute where students/teachers are writing about their experiences and pulling together bodies of work that can be presented to schools, school districts, organizations and companies.

**WAIVERS**

1. **Describe the waivers you are requesting from DPS policies, collective bargaining provisions and state statutes. Clearly describe the replacement policies and practices that the school is proposing for each waiver.**

Please see attached **Appendix E.**

**ADMINISTRATIVE AND FACULTY SUPPORT**

1. **Provide evidence of administrative and faculty** **support**

As a new school, Vista Academy administrators, faculty, and staff demonstrate their support for the Innovation Plan by choosing to work at the school. All staff members are provided with information about the Innovation Plan prior to accepting employment. Additionally, as a new school, a Collaborative School Committee has not been established.

**COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

1. **Provide evidence of community support**

Please see Attachment I

## APPENDIX A

## Request Waivers in Curricular Materials & Instructional Design

Not applicable. Vista Academy is not requesting an academic waiver.

**APPENDIX B**

**Request Alternative Benchmark Assessment Program**

Not applicable. Waivers are not being requested.

**APPENDIX C**

**Request Alternative Graduation & Promotion Standards**

1. Explain the school’s policies and standards for promoting students from one grade to the next. Describe how and when promotion and graduation criteria will be communicated to parents and students.

The scholars at Vista Academy will not advance from one grade to the next. They are promoted through the levels of Diploma Plus by district and state standard credit accumulation and by mastered competencies (Foundation-Presentation-Plus). The Diploma Plus model is explained to parents and scholars upon enrollment, during the SWAGGER Enrichment, and through the Parent Network’s focus groups and meetings. This will be reinforced through in the student’s passport, the Vista Academy Parent Enrichment Guide, and during student-led parent/teacher conferences.

1. Provide the school’s exit standards for graduating students. Exit standards should clearly set forth what students in the last grade you anticipate serving will know and be able to do.

Scholars must have met all state and district high school graduation requirements and a total of 240 credits. They must also present their Diploma Plus Portfolio to a panel of staff, peers and parents as an additional graduation requirement.

1. Explain how graduation and/or promotion requirements will ensure student readiness for college and other postsecondary opportunities.

Through the Diploma Plus and Multiple Pathways model, all scholars must incorporate and master personal, college and career-ready competencies. These would include:

* + Internships
  + Service learning projects
  + ACT/SAT Prep classes
  + Concurrent enrollment in college level elective classes through College Partners
  + CTE courses

1. If it differs from DPS, explain how students will earn credit hours, how grade-point averages will be calculated, what information will be on transcripts, and what elective courses will be offered. If graduation requirements for the school will exceed those required by DPS Policy IKF, explain any additional requirements.

**Appendix E**

**Waiver Request Template**

Please see attached Appendix E.