

July 27, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

We, the Desert Trails Parents Union (“DTPU”), are seeking letters of interest from prospective partners for the transformation of Desert Trails Elementary School (“Desert Trails”) located in Adelanto, California under California’s historic Parent Trigger law. Almost one year ago, we set out on a groundbreaking journey to transform our school through community organizing. Due to the inability thus far to reach an agreement with our preferred school transformation partner – our local school district – we are launching an open “Request for Proposal” (RFP) process to solicit proposals from school districts or non-profit organizations to partner with us in transforming our children’s failing school.

Upon thorough review of all letters of interest submitted by 5 pm PST on Friday, **August 3, 2012**, we will solicit proposals from respondents for the purpose of selecting an operator for the newly Transformed Desert Trails Elementary (“TDT”) during the 2013-2014 Academic Year. The selected proposal will then be submitted to the Adelanto School District for final approval.

**BACKGROUND:**

Desert Trails Elementary School is a K-6<sup>th</sup> grade school located in Adelanto, California. Desert Trails is one of the worst schools in California, ranking in the bottom 10% of all elementary schools statewide. Out of its graduating sixth grade class, 72% of its students are not proficient in English-language arts, while 70% are not proficient in Math. Desert Trails also ranks last out of the 10 elementary schools in the Adelanto School District. For the last six years, it has been classified by the state as a failing school, and students’ test results have continued to decline over the last three years.

Members of the School Site Council, Parent-Teacher Association and other important school committees, have tried for years to address the academic and cultural problems at the school. For example, our past volunteer efforts have included forming a Coyote Club to create incentives that reward students doing well in school, having the PTA buy books for students as Christmas gifts, and sponsoring Spirit Days. Over the years, we have brought forth our concerns and ideas and have been eager to work alongside school leaders to turn around the unacceptable conditions at Desert Trails Elementary. Unfortunately our efforts to collaborate with school and district officials have mostly been met with staunch resistance, yielding very little change at Desert Trails. Not surprisingly, the school has entered its sixth year of classification as a failing school.

Frustrated by Desert Trail’s continued failure, as well as by the inaction of the school district’s leadership, we contacted Parent Revolution, a non-profit organization dedicated to the empowerment of parents that, like us, are seeking to improve their low-performing schools. After receiving training in community organizing strategy and tactics from Parent Revolution, we began to hold house meetings during the summer of 2011 (with an open-invitation for all members of the school community to attend) where we discussed how to improve our school. Afterward, we held meetings at a local park, and conducted door-to-door surveys with as many parents as we could reach to identify the specific

educational issues that were most important to us all. In response to the feedback from these extensive one-on-one and group discussions, we identified the need for and established the DTPU in September 2011.

Our DTPU developed a series of concrete and focused policy recommendations to improve academic performance at Desert Trails. We also presented a comprehensive set of objectives to the District, hoping that this would finally create a productive working relationship with school officials. Unfortunately, the District once again refused to partner with us.

In November 2011, we began circulating Parent Trigger petitions to transform Desert Trails. Even while gathering the petitions, DTPU remained in contact with the district, reminding them of our desire to work together. Our preferred reform option was not a charter conversion. Instead, we sought to provide the school both the autonomy and systems of accountability needed to improve the educational outcomes of its students. We held out the option of converting the school into an independent, but community-based charter as our backup plan should the district refuse to work collaboratively with us to help achieve our in-district reform objectives.

On January 12, 2012, DTPU submitted petitions representing an overwhelming 70% majority of the school and at the same time we were initially successful in attempts to engage District staff in serious discussions to negotiate in-district reforms based on common sense solutions already in place in districts throughout the country. Our requests were relatively straightforward – we wanted more local autonomy at our school site, with our principal empowered to make important decisions on staffing, budget, and curriculum based on the needs of our children. To achieve this we asked for an MOU with the District to grant greater autonomy and a modified collective bargaining agreement, modeled after “thin” and “pilot” contracts ratified by NEA and AFT affiliates throughout the country.

The District, however, broke off discussions and chose confrontation over collaboration, illegally denying our petitions and forcing us to go to court to protect our rights and those of our children.

Our latest reform proposal – made before the district illegally rejected our petition– was our “Partnership School” reform model. A Partnership School, as conceived of by our DTPU, would have allowed the parents and the district (along with the teachers union had they chosen to participate) to collaboratively transform Desert Trails in a way that empowered all parties while gaining freedoms and autonomies for the school that we parents sought all along. It would leverage the autonomies provided by charter law to bring the school under control of a local non-profit, but structure governance and operations of that non-profit as a partnership between the district, parents, and other outside experts similar to a public-private partnership or joint powers authority. Under this arrangement current teachers could remain employees of the district (and members of the collective bargaining unit), but be “on loan” to the Partnership School, and many, most, or all district services could be retained at the school site. Simultaneously, the school would gain significant freedoms from the Education Code as well as the ability to modify the existing collective bargaining agreement while ensuring teachers could still retain basic, important protections within a modified contract.

In spite of the Districts' obstruction it is still DTPU's preference to develop a Partnership School at Desert Trails, but we can no longer continue to bet our children's futures solely on the cooperation of a district that has refused to reciprocate our desire to work together.

Therefore, we intend to exercise our power under CCR, Title 5, and Section 4802.2 to solicit additional proposals for partners that can transform Desert Trails. We are hopeful that the Adelanto Elementary School District will participate but given their history of obstruction and rejection, DTPU has an obligation to our parent members and our children to seek out alternative proposals. Under the regulations, this process will be open to anyone – including districts and labor organizations interested in submitting Partnership School proposals, as well as existing non-profit charter operators submitting traditional independent charter proposals.

The final selection of our school partner will be made by a vote of the parent petitioners, according to the process outlined in the Parent Trigger law's state regulations and outlined during the Parent Trigger campaign.

According to section 4802.2(d) of the implementing regulations for the Parent Empowerment law and based upon with Judge Malone's order of July 18, 2012, the petitioners (DTPU) are authorized to immediately begin their process of soliciting and selecting a partner/operator. The process will allow for a 90 day window for DTPU to make its selection, commencing with the District's compliance with Judge Malone's order of July 18, 2012, or the tolling of the 30 day deadline (whichever comes first).

As outlined in the attachment given to every parent who signed a Parent Trigger petition, DTPU will ultimately conduct a vote among parents who signed the petition to select the successful proposal, and the decision of the majority of voting petitioners will be binding. Since the 90-day operator selection period window is so short, DTPU is now seeking to identify and collaborate with qualified RFP partners to ensure that we receive the highest quality proposals possible. Upon receipt of these letters of interest by August 3, 2012, DTPU will invite qualified respondents to participate in the RFP process. Additionally, all selected respondents will be invited to participate in workshops with DTPU to facilitate the process of creating a proposal informed by, and reflective of, the input of parents.

Letters submitted become the property of DTPU. We cannot provide any assurances that any award will be made. Proposers will be responsible for their own costs of making any submissions.

Please address any questions to **Doreen Diaz, Desert Trails Parent Union Coordinator, at 760.486.3658 or via e-mail at [Deserttrailsparentunion@gmail.com](mailto:Deserttrailsparentunion@gmail.com)**. Answers regarding this request will be provided in writing and may be shared with other potential Proposers.

Sincerely,

The Desert Trails Parent Union

## LETTER OF INTEREST: SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

### REQUIREMENTS

The Desert Trails Parents' Union ("DTPU") planned Request for Proposal process ("RFP") for the newly transformed Desert Trails Elementary School ("TDT") will be a competitive process. Letters of interest must be received by 5:00pm PST on Friday, **August 3, 2012**.

Letters of interest shall provide:

1. A detailed explanation of the Proposer's qualifications as a school operator, charter management organization or educational management organization.
2. A general description of the Proposer's current or proposed educational program and their unique ability to meet the specific needs of all students at Desert Trails Elementary.
3. A demonstrated commitment and description of plans for establishing a collaborative learning community that meaningfully engages the DTPU, and parents and community members in Adelanto.

By submitting a letter of interest, selected Proposers agree to attend at least two workshops for the following purposes prior to submission of a proposal:

1. One workshop with the parents of Desert Trails in order to understand their vision for the school and to identify common ground where a school district or other operator can forge a collaborative relationship with parents from the outset.
2. One informational workshop that will detail the planned RFP's guidelines, timeline, and evaluation criteria. In addition, this session will enable respondents to ask questions about the laws that will govern the TDT, including admission requirements, etc.

### TIMELINE

- This Letter of Interest Request is dated July 27, 2012.
- Letters of interest will be evaluated by DTPU immediately upon submission. Based on its review of the Letters of Interest, DTPU will then invite qualified potential operators to participate in its RFP process and to submit full proposals for the transformation of Desert Trails Elementary (Academic Year 2013-2014).
- All respondents that submit a letter of interest agree to attend at least two required informational workshops as outlined under the above "requirements" section should they be invited to participate in the RFP process.
- Letters of interest must be submitted via email to **Desertrailsparentunion@gmail.com** no later than **5 pm PST on Friday, August 3, 2012**.

The following is the timeline of DTPU’s RFP process:

Timeframe	Activities
Friday, July 27	Release of Letter of Interest Request
Friday, August 3	<b>Letter Of Interest Due Date</b>
Monday, August 6	Respondent Notification
Tuesday, August 7	Release of RFP Application & Information Session
Friday, September 21	<b>RFP Due Date</b>

## FORMAT & EVALUATION CRITERIA

### FORMAT:

Please use the following guidelines to format your letter of interest:

- **LENGTH AND FONT SIZE:** Please use fonts no smaller than 11 point. Maximum letter of interest length including cover letter should not exceed **7** pages.
- **TITLE PAGE:** Name of Proposer, address, website address, telephone number, fax number, e-mail address and primary contact person.
- **COVER LETTER:** Signed by the person or persons authorized to sign on behalf of the Proposer
- **LETTER OF INTEREST:** Discuss your qualifications as a Proposer capable of successfully implementing a proposal to operate a school at the TDT. You should touch upon your capability to turnaround the academic performance at Desert Trails, your distinctive ability to meet the needs of the school’s unique population and to meaningfully engage the school’s parents and community members in Adelanto.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA:

Letters of interest shall be evaluated by DTPU upon the following criteria:

1. Respondent’s experience, knowledge and the strength of the proposer and any current educational operations.
2. Respondent’s ability to meet the unique educational needs of all students at Desert Trails Elementary.
3. Respondent’s commitment to DTPU’s mission for the TDT and to establishing a collaborative learning community that meaningfully engages the school’s parents and community members as partners.

DTPU will invite respondents that submit Letters of Interest that show merit to participate in the RFP process.

## MISSION AND PROFILE OF SCHOOL /SURROUNDING COMMUNITY

### MISSION:

The mission of the newly Transformed Desert Trails Elementary School (“TDT”) will be to empower and support effective educators as they present an engaging, data-driven, college and career preparatory curriculum to establish high expectations for the success of all children. TDT shall strive to ensure that as students master content they also learn *how* to learn, developing self-confidence, critical thinking skills and a true passion for lifelong learning. The school’s nurturing and collaborative school community shall develop an important sense of belonging, where students, parents, teachers and staff embrace relationship-building, open communication, cultural diversity, and respect as crucial elements for the success of all students

The transformation at Desert Trails shall be launched no later than September 2013. It is anticipated that, in the absence of restructuring, the TDT would open with approximately 736 students in kindergarten through Grade 6 (four classes per grade, with 23-25 students per class for grades K-3 and 25-28 students per class for grades 4-6). All students currently enrolled in Desert Trails Elementary in 2012-13, and their siblings, will have the option to attend the transformed school and will be guaranteed admission to the TDT. As a school of choice, no student can be compelled to attend the TDT. While we cannot with 100% accuracy predict enrollment, the following is our conservative enrollment projections for 2013-2014 academic year for the TDT:

	2013-14
Kindergarten	100 (25 x 4)
Grade One	100
Grade Two	100
Grade Three	100
Grade Four	112 (28)
Grade Five	112
Grade Six	112
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>736</b>

### SURROUNDING COMMUNITY: ADELANTO AND THE HIGH DESERT

Adelanto, which means “progress” or “advance” in Spanish, is a small community in the High Desert area of San Bernardino County, with a population of approximately 31,765 residents; approximately 63.5% of households reporting having children under the age of 18 living with them. As of 2010, 10% of the population of Adelanto was under age five, with another 26.42% under the age of 18 – in other words, more than one third of the residents of Adelanto are school age or about to be attending school.

Adelanto is closely intertwined with its larger neighbors: Victorville (population 115,903), Apple Valley (69, 135) and Hesperia (90,173). While Adelanto is expected to open its own new high school in fall 2012, to date, its students have attended high school in Victorville at either Silverado or Victor Valley

High Schools. Similarly, there are few major employers or retail establishments in Adelanto’s boundaries (notably, the Adelanto Elementary School District is one of the top two or three employers in the community), thus most residents work and shop in neighboring communities.

Like other communities in the High Desert area, median home prices in Adelanto have dropped significantly in recent years, from approximately \$325,000 at the beginning of 2006 to less than \$100,000 by 2011. In 2010 alone, there were 506 foreclosures in Adelanto.

While the City has struggled economically in recent years, its population has steadily grown from a little more than 18,000 in 2000 to its current population of 31,000. Adelanto is a richly diverse community, with approximately 58.3% of the population Hispanic/Latino, 19.5% African American, 17% White, and 1.6% Asian. Today, 49% of Adelanto’s residents do not speak English as their primary language at home, with the overwhelming majority of these being Spanish speakers.

Notably, 16% of the residents of Adelanto over age 25 did not complete 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and another 21% did not complete high school – thus a total of 37% did not earn a high school diploma. Just 7% have a four year college degree. These educational attainment levels are significantly lower than the statewide averages, where a total of 19% of California residents over 25 did not complete high school and 30% of residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher level of education.

**ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT DATA: ADELANTO PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND DESERT TRAILS ELEMENTARY**

As illustrated in the foregoing chart, school failure continues to be a persistent trend for the public schools in Adelanto. Unfortunately, **out of 10 public schools in Adelanto serving elementary grades, only two are not in Program Improvement Status.** The two schools that are not in PI status both lost points on the API in 2011. And unfortunately, things get worse as students’ progress through the system, with the middle schools and high school all in Year 5 PI status and API scores below 700.

Overall, in 2010-11, more than 5,000 students attended public elementary schools in Adelanto that by the State’s definition, are failing. And Desert Trails Elementary has long been the lowest performing elementary school in the District. Desert Trails Elementary was placed in Program Improvement status in 2006-07, and since that time, it has failed to achieve “Adequate Yearly Progress” each year.

**Desert Trails Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)**

Year	API Score	Met AYP?	# of AYP Criteria Met
2006-07 (PI Year 1)	671	No	18 of 21
2007-08 (PI Year 2)	744 (+73)	No	18 of 21
2008-09 (PI Year 3)	734 (-10)	No	20 of 21
2009-10 (PI Year 4)	706 (-28)	No	11 of 21
2010-11 (PI Year 5)	712 (+6)	No	13 of 21

Based on  
2011 API  
scores, Desert  
Trails ranks

305th out of 326 public elementary schools in San Bernardino County. In other words, Desert Trails

Elementary School has been consistently failing its students for years. A closer look at student achievement data reveals the severity of the challenge at Desert Trails. California Standardized Test results group students into five different levels: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic and Far Below Basic. Students who are “Proficient” or better demonstrate the desired skill mastery defined in the state content standards for their grade. As the 2011 STAR test results for Desert Trails Elementary demonstrates, half or even three-quarters of the students at Desert Trails consistently have failed to meet state standards:

**STAR Test Results Desert Trails Elementary School**

	<b>% Proficient or Advanced: English Language Arts</b>	<b>% Proficient or Advanced: Mathematics</b>	<b>% Proficient or Advanced: 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Science</b>
2006-07	23.8%	36.6%	25%
2007-08	31.6%	58.2%	29%
2008-09	34.4%	52.8%	21%
2009-10	30.4%	43%	12%
2010-11	34.4%	44.4%	22%

We believe passionately that every child, regardless of his/her family’s financial means, is entitled to a high-quality, free public education. We believe that providing high-quality educational options is an imperative for our community, and our nation’s future success. As residents of Adelanto and the High Desert, we understand what our community’s children need to succeed, and we understand the hard work that must take place to ensure their success.