



**Letter of Intent to Create an  
Alaskan Charter School  
within the Fairbanks  
North Star Borough**

**To Open in the 2025-2026  
School Year**



*Pearl Creek STEAM Charter School*  
*Christina Turman*  
*P.O. Box 82494 Fairbanks, Alaska 99708*  
*907-687-9144*  
[stinaturman@gmail.com](mailto:stinaturman@gmail.com)

*2/10/2025*

***Letter of intent to open Pearl Creek STEAM Charter School***

To the School Board Members and Members of the FNSBSD Administration,

Please receive this as our official Letter of Intent, to apply for a Charter School for the 2025-2026 academic year. Required documents are attached as follows:

- i) Academic Policy Committee Members
- ii) Mission Statement
- iii) Narrative Description of the Proposed Charter School

In the spirit of cooperation, we request that you expedite this request and waive Policy 935.1, specifically the October 1, 2024 deadline for submitting applications for charter schools. While we understand the importance of deadlines, the extraordinary circumstances we face warrant special consideration. Our school community was not informed about the potential closure of Pearl Creek Elementary School until January 6, 2025. The announcement on this date and the official vote to close the school on February 4, 2025, occurred well after the October 1, 2024, deadline. During your last work session and meeting, board members expressed a willingness to expedite charter applications for impacted schools. We assume such comments were made in good faith and are formally requesting this consideration.

We look forward to partnering with you on this exciting venture.

**Academic Policy Committee:**

<b>Teachers</b>	
Shawna Henderson Ex Officio	Shawnahen@hotmail.com
Kristi Downing	Kristi.Downing@k12northstar.org
Paula Addis	paddis1013@gmail.com
Dawn Olund	dawnslawns2020@gmail.com
<b>Parents</b>	
Katie Spellman	Katie.Lin.Spellman@gmail.com
Ben Loeffler	bloeffler3@gmail.com
Heidi Wood	heidi.wood@gmail.com
Jennifer Redmond	jen.miller907@gmail.com
Lou Frenzl	rfrenzl81@gmail.com
Edgar Henry	nizoonh@icloud.com

<b>Community Members (Advisory/Nonvoting)</b>	
Jim Gillis	jgillisak@gmail.com
Solomon Pomerantz	solomon.pomerantz@icloud.com
Kristina Miller	kristinamiller107@gmail.com
Kathy Mayo	kathy.mayo@kmayoassociates.com

**Mission & Goals:**

**Mission:** The Pearl Creek STEAM Charter School (PCSC) engages our students by providing integrated opportunities in science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics to develop critical thinkers, collaborative problem solvers, effective communicators, and proactive local and global citizens. Our place-based STEAM education celebrates diversity and helps students see the arts and sciences as integral parts of a whole. Situated within the boreal forest, Pearl Creek Charter School will build deep partnerships with local researchers and knowledge-holders to foster place-based learning through a STEAM model.

The 2022-2026 Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy specifically identifies the FNSB School District's commitment to increasing Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) education in the district as its top strategy for laying our community's educational foundation for a healthy workforce and economy.

#### **Goals for the Pearl Creek STEAM Charter School (PCSC):**

- **Improved STEAM knowledge and skills:** Increased student proficiency in science, technology, engineering, and math concepts, as determined by AK STAR and Alaska Science Assessment test results.
- **Enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving abilities:** Students demonstrating advanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills through design thinking projects, presentations, capstone projects, external STEAM challenges, and community outreach events.
- **Positive attitudes towards STEAM careers:** Increased interest in pursuing STEAM-related fields in higher education, and participation in Kids 2 College through a partnership with the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF).
- **Equitable access to STEAM education:** Reduce barriers to STEAM education by ensuring curriculum, transportation, enrichment activities, after-school programming, family engagement, and local partnerships designed to provide more equal opportunity throughout our community across race, socioeconomic status, gender, culture, and ability.
- **Inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in STEAM:** Intentional and expansive inclusion of Indigenous knowledge through partnership with Indigenous knowledge holders and elders serving in honorarium-based residencies and committee-informed incorporation of Indigenous Alaskan STEAM into curriculum.

**Narrative Description of the Proposed Charter School:** *The narrative description of the proposed charter school must include its organization, operation and educational program.*

Pearl Creek STEAM Charter School is a proposed K-5 elementary school with an emphasis on STEAM education – the integration of science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics – through an interdisciplinary and inquiry-based approach. The STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) education model is an approach to learning that integrates these disciplines as access points for guiding student inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking - creating a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to learning.

Depending on community interest and building capacity, PCSC will open as K-5 and expand to 6th grade in 2026-2027, 7th grade in 2027-2028, and 8th grade in 2028-2029.

#### **Background**

In February 2025, the FNSB school board voted to close Pearl Creek Elementary School in the face of declining district enrollment, deferred maintenance costs and a projected \$16 million budget deficit for FY26. A proposal put forth by the community and school principal to transition

to a magnet school in order to attract more students to the public school system, offer additional parent choice within the district, and grow Pearl Creek's successful place and project-based curriculum was not accepted by the school board.

Pearl Creek Elementary School has a long history of dedicated parental involvement, including leadership of after-school clubs, parents serving as classroom volunteers, and a vibrant and successful PTA. Facing closure, this dedicated community has organized under the goal of maintaining access to its neighborhood school situated on 147 acres of boreal forest, expanding Pearl Creek Elementary's applied place-based education under a STEAM model, increasing access to the facility through a lottery, and designing a charter school unlike any other currently in the district.

## **Facility**

To achieve PCSC's objectives of excellent place-based STEAM education, the ideal school facility would have the following:

- A site with close connection to the natural world on and around the school to facilitate scientific inquiry and outdoor recreation, including access to public lands and trail networks.
- Proximity to UAF, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), Alaska Center for Energy and Power (ACEP) and other research and teaching facilities.
- Access to an aquatic environment nearby, such as the Pearl Creek and Frog Pond for scientific study.
- Existing community garden in which to study botany, biology, and food sustainability.
- Proximity to the FNSB Grey bus line.

We propose that the existing Pearl Creek Elementary School is the optimum borough-owned facility for the PCSC Charter School. As FNSBSD decided to close Pearl Creek Elementary School on February 4, 2025, PCSC proposes to lease this building at 700 Auburn Drive, Fairbanks AK 99709, per AS 14.03.255(d).

Pearl Creek has a deed capacity of 548 students, and is located in northwest Fairbanks, off of Farmers Loop, in close proximity to the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), and the FNSB Grey Line bus route. The community and parents have already leveraged the public lands adjacent to the school to develop a public trail network and outdoor laboratory around the school.

The school opened in 1982, and PCSC is committed to working with the FNSB Assembly to address deferred maintenance issues for the building through the Borough's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Per AS 14.03.255(d), the proposed building must '*...meet requirements for health and safety applicable to public buildings or other public schools in the district.*' As Pearl Creek is currently being used as a public school, it meets requirements for health and safety standards and is an ideal venue for PCSC.



## **Organization**

PCSC will have an Academic Policy Committee (APC), which is the primary governing body designated to oversee and supervise all aspects of the school. The APC shall have the maximum power permitted by law, shall establish policy for the school, shall fulfill the duties established by AS 14.03.250 - AS 14.17.450(d), and may include, but is not limited to:

1. Ensure the fulfillment of the mission of Pearl Creek STEAM Charter School.
2. Oversee and have ultimate accountability and responsibility for academics, curriculum, personnel issues, finances and budgeting, operations/maintenance, legal management, and other administrative tasks as required by the school.
3. Promote professional conduct in accordance with FNSB School District policies.
4. Delegate to the Principal those tasks deemed appropriate by the APC and to render the Principal opinions regarding the hiring, evaluation, and/or termination or non-retention of teachers, staff, and other personnel to the extent permitted by law.
5. Review contracts.

The APC shall have no fewer than seven (7) and no more than eleven (11) members. The APC shall comprise teachers, parents with students in the schools, the principal, and community members with knowledge and experience able to contribute to the working of the school. The APC will comply, where applicable, with any and all provisions of the FNSBSD regarding charter schools, Alaska Statute regarding charter schools, the Fairbanks Education Association, and Educational Support Staff Association.

Three committees will provide guidance and support in achieving PCSC's mission: a Curriculum Advisory Committee, a Grants Committee, and Student Experience Committee. The Curriculum Advisory Committee will comprise STEAM subject matter experts (practicing scientists, engineers, artists, etc.) with experience communicating STEAM subjects to elementary school audiences. The Grants Committee will comprise experts in writing and administering grants for education, educational outreach, informal education, citizen science, etc. They will inform and assist in not only obtaining grant funding but also executing program evaluation and refinement (see below). The Student Experience Committee will provide advice on how to make PCSC welcoming and accessible to all students in the district.

## **Operation**

Pearl Creek's STEAM programming will emphasize active family involvement. As a charter school, each household will have a volunteer requirement of 20 hours per school year. We will offer a wide variety of volunteer opportunities to ensure this requirement is not a barrier to any family. The Pearl Creek community has a demonstrated commitment to school involvement, through previous programs like Pearl Creek's annual STEAM night, annual STEAM student project fair, aiding in field trips and classroom projects, and facilitating many of our afterschool clubs. On average, family and community volunteers operate between 6 and 8 after-school

clubs each quarter at no extra cost to the school district, and we anticipate this number to increase as a STEAM Charter School. At the core of our family engagement strategy is consistent and effective communication with our families.

This school will build on decades-long partnerships with representatives of UAF, NREL, state and federal agencies, and many others. In addition to leveraging the cost-efficiency of the many thousands of dollars of in-kind support from these partners, we will have an advisory council of parents, teachers, and community stakeholders (STEAM research partners in the Fairbanks area and STEAM workforce sector representatives) to help guide our program development and ensure it meets the workforce and education needs of our community.

### **Admissions and Lottery**

Listed in no particular priority, the following groups will be given preference in admission to PCSC: students of PCSC employees, APC members and founding members of the school; students who are in existing Pearl Creek families will be grandfathered in through the founders' clause; current students' siblings; Title 1 designation students; Migrant students; and students living within the existing Pearl Creek Elementary School boundaries. The remainder of available places at PCSC will be filled by lottery.

The Pearl Creek Charter School is committed to practically addressing obstacles that will make the proposed charter school a valid and attainable choice for all families. Currently, the more prevalent obstacles identified are transportation, working around family and caretaker work schedules, special education needs, and nutrition availability. In order to provide these services, and/or others yet to be identified, we intend to utilize creative and dynamic solutions to include:

- **TRANSPORTATION:** For the 2025-2026 school year, we intend to address transportation needs on the individual level utilizing grants, sponsorships, and scholarships for out of attendance area students with transportation needs as possible. We intend to work with FNSBSD to maximize the students eligible for transportation through the existing district transportation policy, and in the event that is not possible, retain transportation funding and work with local entities to design a transportation system that meets the needs of our families and student body.
- **SCHEDULING:** Partner with ThrivAlaska to provide before- and after-school childcare on a sliding scale tuition fee basis, providing a robust selection of afterschool clubs and tutoring options through our extensive volunteer database and other community partnerships.
- **SPECIAL EDUCATION:** PCSC is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students, including those with special needs. Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans will be admitted in accordance with state and federal laws, ensuring that all necessary accommodations are made.
- **NUTRITION:** Work with the FNSB School District and others to provide hot breakfast and lunches.

## **Educational Program**

The Pearl Creek STEAM Charter School will deliver a high standard of core reading, writing and math content areas, and weave STEAM and applied project-based learning throughout. As an elementary school, PCSC teachers and staff will continue to build upon the demonstrated effectiveness of integrated, multidisciplinary teaching. Our weekly schedule will provide daily “walk-to-STEAM” choice exploration courses for students to take deep dives into the areas of their interest, which we will call “iSTEAM”.

On Fridays, half of the school day will be dedicated to “Lab,” which will allow for deeper engagement from the iSTEAM courses in longer experiments, tinkering, making, or field trips. Each iSTEAM course and lab will be tightly aligned with Next Generation of Science Standards and with the Alaska State Standards. Students will receive science and STEAM lessons, as well as design their own questions, run experiments, collect data, and draw their own conclusions. We will provide professional development opportunities quarterly for staff to continue to build skills in STEAM integration, novel technologies, and current science and art trends, drawing from our extensive existing partnerships and future emergent partners.

Our “logic model” or “theory of action” promotes positive outcomes such as increased student engagement in STEAM fields, improved STEAM skills, and higher rates of post-secondary STEAM educational pursuits with higher rates of proficiency as measured by the Alaska STAR and Alaska Science Assessment.

## **Key components of Pearl Creek’s STEAM Charter School Logic Model**

### **Inputs:**

- Human Resources: All staff teaching STEAM courses, dedicated STEAM lab, guest speakers from our community, UAF, and family volunteers.
- Financial Resources: Fundraising by the school for specialized equipment, field trips, and potential UAF grant money to help with staffing labs.
- Community Partnerships: Collaboration with local businesses and UAF.

### **Activities:**

- Project-Based Learning: Designing and implementing hands-on STEAM projects aligned with curriculum standards with a culminating capstone project/field trip specific to each grade level.
- Inquiry-Based Instruction: Encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving through open-ended investigations using the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) framework for science inquiry.
- Interdisciplinary Units: Integrating STEAM concepts across different subjects, i.e. reading, writing and social studies.
- Mentorship Programs: Pairing students with community professionals and UAF students.



- Competitions and Exhibitions: Participating in STEAM challenges, and showcasing student work in capstone projects and quarterly family nights.

#### **Outputs:**

- Student-developed prototypes: Tangible results from design thinking projects.
- Presentations and portfolios: Demonstrating acquired knowledge and skills through presentations, digital portfolios and a capstone project specific to each grade level.
- Increased participation in STEAM competitions: Higher student involvement in external STEAM challenges, i.e. robotics competitions, science fair, and other challenges, such as the National Science Bee, World Robot Olympiad, Perennial Math Tournaments, STEM Racing, Math League, and Exploravision.
- Community outreach events: Sharing student projects and engaging the broader community in our family nights and community events; such as Food Bank participation.

#### **Outcomes:**

- Improved STEAM knowledge and skills: Increased student proficiency in science, technology, engineering, and math concepts, as determined by AK STAR and the Alaska Science Assessment.
- Students demonstrating advanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Positive attitudes towards STEAM careers: Increased interest in pursuing STEAM-related fields in higher education.
- Greater diversity in STEAM pathways: Attracting a wider range of students to pursue STEAM careers and participation in Kids2College through UAF.

#### **Program Evaluation and Refinement**

Our STEAM school will build upon our existing knowledge base to develop new and exciting standards-aligned projects and learning modules. Critical aspects of this process are using current educational research techniques to evaluate learning outcomes and family satisfaction in ways that result in specific recommendations for improvement. To this end, we will have a volunteer Grants Committee (see above) that includes community members with experience in the design and implementation of educational program evaluation. In addition to standard district-wide data (e.g., AK STAR scores, FNSBSD school climate data), program-specific formative and substantive assessments will be designed and utilized.