

# **The Need for Vista Grande High School**

*Revised October 2006*

Who wants a new and different kind of high school in Taos County? Hundreds and hundreds of Taos County residents, that's who. Over the period of just three months in 2005, over 340 families signed a petition supporting the development of our new high school...and the signed petition represents but a fraction of the actual demand present in our county. Very little public school choice currently exists in the county at the high school level—there are no charter high schools, no magnet high schools, and two extremely small alternative educational settings only available to a handful of special-need students. Three public high schools—Penasco High, Questa High, and Taos High—serve the entire 2,200 square mile region, with the overcrowded and centrally-located Taos High enrolling the vast majority of students. Many students do well at the existing high school settings, and go on to strong academic futures.

For many more others, however, the current options for high school in Taos do not serve them well at all. Hundreds of students in Taos County each year are unmotivated, unengaged, and underperforming. Hundreds of students experience depersonalized education in overcrowded conditions, and often suffer educational neglect. The majority of Taos County high-schoolers perform significantly below state expectations on standardized tests.\* Countless families in Taos County are yearning for another public option, but currently have no choice.

This limited situation is about to change. In early 2006 Taos Municipal Schools chartered a new and different kind of public high school to serve students in Taos County—Vista Grande High School. Vista Grande will open in the fall of 2007 with a population of 120 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders. Sixty students in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and sixty students in 12<sup>th</sup> grade will be added in successive years to reach a total student population of 240 in the fall of 2009.

Taos teenagers who already have strong direction, passion or talent seem to do well at Taos High School and other schools in the area. Yet there are many others—those who are not rewarded at school, those who are not inherently motivated to do schoolwork, those who are lost at a large institution, those who lack family support or are neglected and “falling through the cracks”— who do not thrive at Taos High and other area schools. These students need a smaller, nurturing environment and an engaging, motivating curriculum taught by invested teachers with time to plan and create together. They need an extremely supportive school culture and education that directs their talents and inspires them to continue in school. Vista Grande High School has been created to meet this need. Vista Grande High School is not about bringing a nice new school to Taos for the wealthy few; Vista Grande High School is about social justice—bringing out the best in our community's young people by creating a smaller, more supportive school environment that is public, free and open to all.

## **What Vista Grande High School Will Bring to Taos**

### ***Vista Grande High School will bring students back to Taos public schools.***

By being a smaller, more supportive and more engaging high school, Vista Grande intends to:

- Attract students from across all of Taos County, a 2,200 square mile area.
- Retain students who currently drop out or struggle with attendance.
- Motivate students who are bored, unmotivated and uninspired.
- Engage students who want to use their hands *and* their heads.
- Retain students who choose to move out of Taos County for high school.
- Attract families who choose to attend private school.
- Attract families who choose to homeschool their students.
- Attract students who will move to Taos County for this high school.

\* Student data available on separate sheet upon request. Contact [todd@rwcs.org](mailto:todd@rwcs.org).

***Vista Grande High School will bring new money to Taos County.***

The county will enjoy immediate economic benefits from Vista Grande. New money, both private and public, will flow into the county from both local and national levels. The annual operating funds received from the state will be more than \$1,600,000 when at an enrollment of 240 students. Below are some additional funding sources that could bring additional monies to Taos:

- Federal stimulus planning grant of \$450,000 over three years (confirmed)
- Walton Family Foundation planning grant of \$20,000 (confirmed)
- Walton Family Foundation implementation grant of \$360,000 over two years
- Daniels Fund Charter School Grant
- National Endowment for the Humanities grant
- Other public funds for instructional materials, technology, special education

***Vista Grande High School will help unify our diverse population.***

Without a public high school choice in the county, all families with enough resources who are not satisfied with the existing public high school in their area tend to choose between a public school outside of Taos County or choose a private school in the area. This choice tends to polarize our community, increasing the racial and economic divisions already present in the culture of the Taos area. By creating Vista Grande High School as a quality school serving all of Taos County, we will be providing a free and public school choice for hundreds of families—a true common ground of project-based learning that will unify our diverse county rather than divide it further. Students of diverse racial and economic backgrounds will be working together on commonly-shared school projects and tasks that incorporate head, hands and heart.

***Vista Grande High School will allow Taos to better serve Taos students countywide.***

One kind of school is not for every student. It is a basic right for a student to attend a school that works for them. Different students learn in different ways. Taos county teens deserve a free and public choice in their education. Taos Municipal Schools understands this, and in the past has authorized two other options in addition to the newly-chartered Vista Grande High. For students seeking a smaller school setting, extra social and academic support, a sense of community, or a more engaging and rigorous project-based curriculum to bring out their best, Vista Grande High School offers a truly different choice to conventional high school. Taos Municipal Schools and the leadership of VGHS have worked together to offer a new kind of high school to best serve the community.