



For Immediate Release

## **Explora, CNM Form Groundbreaking Partnership to Launch Brillante Early Learning Center**

***Brillante will deliver a new comprehensive model of early childhood education that not only focuses on serving the critical development period of children from birth to age 5, but also the workforce development of high-quality early childhood educators and the childcare needs of the community***

Albuquerque, N.M. -- Explora Science Center & Children's Museum (Explora) and Central New Mexico Community College (CNM) have joined forces to launch a trailblazing model of early childhood education. It invests in high-quality STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) early education and childcare, a well-trained early childhood educator workforce, and much-needed childcare services for community members and CNM students who are parents striving to earn degrees, certificates and a better quality of life for their families. All three of these focuses will bolster positive outcomes for our community and economy, while also delivering a promising model that can be emulated at other early childhood centers across the state and country.

The 14,000-square-foot facility, called the Brillante Early Learning Center, is being constructed as Phase Two of Explora's Cradle through Career STEAM Learning Campus development in Old Town Albuquerque. It's expected to establish Explora and CNM as national leaders in early childhood practice and workforce development. Brillante will deliver high-quality early childhood education and care for young children (infant to 5-years-old) that will be rooted in STEAM education and play-based learning, while also serving as a learning lab for CNM students pursuing certificates and degrees in the college's Early Childhood Multicultural Education (ECME) program.

"Explora is so excited about this project, which is grounded in community listening and which has been developed with a Planning Team of local early childhood experts. We've heard from so many families that high-quality early childhood education and care is critically-important for

improving both family and community prosperity. Brillante Early Learning Center will change lives – helping young parents finish their certificates and degrees and get jobs that can end generational cycles of poverty – and we couldn't be more excited to be working with CNM on this impactful partnership,” says Explora Co-Executive Director, Kristin Leigh, who has been working on the concept for Brillante Early Learning Center for close to 10 years.

Brillante will be a STEAM-based early childhood school using the Reggio Emilia approach to education. This approach views children as active, capable and extremely valuable members of the community who should be encouraged to explore, question, and interpret the world during their first five years of life. Providing a state-of-the-art, experience-rich environment where children can engage in this approach every day will contribute to healthier, more engaged and more productive members of society.

For CNM students in the ECME associate degree and certificate programs, Brillante will be leveraged as a learning lab, providing real-world, field-based experience and mentorship in a high-quality early care and education center, preparing them to become highly valued members of the early childhood education workforce across the state. Students will be able to complete their on-site field work in Brillante classrooms with mentoring and supervision from CNM faculty, as well as conduct certain course assignments at a centralized location. CNM faculty and staff will also be able to visit and observe Brillante as a resource for developing curriculum and for ongoing professional development. Brillante will continue to offer professional development opportunities for early childhood educators and directors from across New Mexico, such as the annual Summit for Early Science Learning.

The Albuquerque community, including CNM student parents, will be able to take advantage of high-quality, highly subsidized childcare services at Brillante. Childcare issues are a significant barrier to pursuing and completing higher education for many working learners. There are currently two Brillante pilot classrooms operating at Explora, with the majority of the children served having parents who attend CNM. Once the facility is complete, the center is projected to serve more than 100 young children, with most of them being children of CNM students.

“At CNM, we're very excited about this extraordinary partnership with Explora, because it's going to create so many positive ripple effects on our community, our students, and our state,” said CNM President Tracy Hartzler. “We all know the critical importance of providing high-quality education and care during the formative years for children up to age 5. To provide that high-quality early education to all New Mexico families, we need a larger and well-trained early education teacher workforce. Separately, one in six CNM students report being parents – and they need more options for quality childcare. Too often, childcare challenges cause them to give up on an education that would provide them a better life. We're confident that this partnership and model are going to deliver impressive, inspiring outcomes and solutions on a number of fronts.”

Nobel Prize-winning economist, James Heckman, has done significant research on the return on investment in early childhood education. Brillante has drawn inspiration from his [equation](#) – “Invest+Develop+Sustain=Gain” – which is: 1) Invest in educational and developmental resources for disadvantaged families to provide equal access to successful early human development; 2) Nurture early development of cognitive and social skills in children from birth to age 5; 3) Sustain early development with effective education through to adulthood; 4) Gain a more capable, productive, and valuable workforce that pays dividends to America for generations to come.

Brillante intends to be a national model for this type of investment in action.

The Brillante facility will include eight to 10 classrooms serving infants through Pre-K students; adult classrooms for CNM students; a welcome plaza with Explora hands-on STEAM exhibits; space for school-wide meetings; an art studio; outdoor learning spaces; and a full kitchen.

The construction cost of the facility is projected to be \$14 million, with funding coming from the State of New Mexico, the City of Albuquerque, Bernalillo County, Explora, CNM, and private corporations, foundations, and individuals.

This high quality, STEAM-based early childhood center will be free to most New Mexicans due to funding from the State of New Mexico’s Childcare Assistance Program, the New Mexico Pre-K grant, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.