A.2 Target Population

CASA Academy will serve students in kindergarten through third grade in the Central Phoenix Community, between Interstate 17 and the Squaw Peak Freeway, north of Thomas Road and south of Bethany Home Road. This includes zip codes 85012, 85013, 85014, and 85015. CASA Academy proposes to serve students in this community with the firm belief that all students can overcome challenges, think critically, excel in academics, and become role models for their community. This will ensure they are ready for success in college, life, and society. Specifically, CASA Academy will target the learning needs of Central Phoenix's low-income, early elementary student population in kindergarten through third grade by providing a transformative education, using authentic approaches, and focusing on character education.

A. Description of Target Population

General Demographics of the Target Region

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 74% of the population in the target area under 18 is Hispanic or Latino, 10% is Black/African-American, 4% is American Indian, and 10% is White/Caucasian.[1] Using data from the Arizona State Department of Education, we estimate that 81% of students in these local school districts qualify for free or reduced price lunch. Additionally, in this target region, 12% of students require special education services and 19% of students are English Language Learners. See Figure A.2.1 for more information on school-specific demographics.

Figure A.2.1: Demographics of K-3 Schools in the Target Area[2]

School Name	*Charter or District*	*Total Student Count*	*Students of Color*	*Free & Reduced Lunch*
Imagine Elementary at Camelback	Charter	523	92%	96%
Solano School	District	631	80%	87%
Longview Elementary School	District	440	84%	82%
Madison Rose Lane School	District	925	52%	55%
Westwood Primary School	District	914	89%	97%
Maie Bartlett Heard School	District	631	78%	67%
Maryland Elementary School	District	821	75%	83%
Clarendon School	District	431	84%	81%
Encanto School	District	621	85%	NA
AmeriSchools Academy – Camelback	Charter	201	56%	81%

[1] "National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a Part of the U.S. Department of Education." National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a Part of the U.S. Department of Education. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2013.
[2] Arizona Department of Education

Midtown Primary School	Charter	98	70%	90%
Madison Park School	District	631	79%	71%
Average			77%	81%

Low Levels of Educational Attainment

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, in 2011, an average of 14.3% of adults in the target region never graduated high school and only 28.05% of adults in this region attained a Bachelor's degree.[3] See Figure A.2.2 for more detailed information.

FigureA.2.2: Educational Attainment by Zip Code[4]

Zip Code	*No High School Diploma*	*High School Diploma*	*Bachelor's Degree*
85012	4%	96%	45.7%
85013	12.4%	87.6%	21.5%
85014	12.6%	87.3%	28.5%
85015	28%	72%	16.5%
Region Average	14.3%	85.7%	28.05%

The low levels of educational attainment described above have distinct and devastating effects on poverty in this region, including higher amounts of students living in poverty, higher crime rates, and higher teen pregnancy rates.

In this region:

- 81% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch, compared to the Arizona average of 57.44%[5]
- The median household income is $39,247, compared to the Arizona average of $46,709[6]
- 42.7% of households in the target region are single parent families, compared to the Arizona average of 40%[7]
- The unemployment rate is 9% compared to the Arizona average of 7.9%[8],[9]
- The crime rate is 2.3 times greater than the national average[10]
- There are 78.7 teen births per 1000 families in this district, compared to the Arizona average of 51 teen births[11]

[3] "National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a Part of the U.S. Department of Education." National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a Part of the U.S. Department of Education. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2013.
[4] Ibid
[5] Arizona Department of Education
[6] "Arizona Household Income." *Department of Numbers*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 Apr. 2013.
[7] "Kids Count Data Center." *Children in Single-parent Families*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 Apr. 2013.
[8] Legislative District 24 Statistical Profile 2011." N.p., 2011. Web. http://www.azdhs.gov.
[9] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
[10]"Apartments.com | Crime." *Apartments.com | Crime*. N.p., n.d. Web. 08 Nov. 2012. <http://www.relocationessentials.com
[11] "Legislative District 24 Statistical Profile 2011." N.p., 2011. Web. http://www.azdhs.gov.

Clearly, there is a correlation between low levels of education in this region and effects on health, income, and crime. These consequences demonstrate a distinct need for a change that will alter the cycle of poverty that is occurring in this target area. Higher levels of educational attainment are becoming increasingly more important in Arizona. With quality education, the youth of this community, as the Morrison Institute's recent findings conclude, "could become a potential new source of talent in the state," as "Arizona's future economic and social well-being depends heavily on erasing the educational deficits of the state's young Hispanic residents."[12] The need to close this achievement gap is urgent. By 2018, 61% of jobs in Arizona will require some postsecondary training, according to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.[13] If all students in Arizona attained a high school diploma, each individual's average salary would be $7,498 more each year.[14] For the state of Arizona, this would mean a yearly increase of 3.1 billion dollars in income, a 714 million dollar increase in home sales, a 28 million dollar increase in auto sales, and a 22 million dollar increase in annual state tax revenue.[15]

Although CASA Academy will serve the primary grades, high school graduation and college attainment is a vital part of the school's mission and curriculum. CASA Academy's educational philosophy and program are designed to close the academic achievement gap for elementary students in Central Phoenix, so that students stay on grade level and on track toward success in middle school, achievement in high school, and graduation from college. CASA Academy will do this by maintaining high expectations at the primary level, investing parents and students in the idea of college, and by ensuring that students have strong middle and high schools to attend, such as Empower College Preparatory, when they move on from CASA Academy.

A Need for Effective Early Childhood Education

It is not enough to simply focus on diploma attainment as a means to ending the cycle of poverty in this region. CASA Academy firmly believes that remediation of students is not enough; change must come from where the cycle begins, with Central Phoenix's youngest students. The needs of young children in the target region are significant. In this region:

- There are 41,461 children aged 0-14[16]
- 40.9% of children under 12 are living in poverty[17]
- The legislative district's birth rate of 17.5 out of 1000 residents is significantly higher than the average Arizona birth rate of 15.4 out of 1000 residents[18]
- The percentage of mothers who sought prenatal care in this legislative district (74.1%) is significantly lower than the Arizona average (80.1%)[19]
- The percentage of low-weight births per 1000 births is 75.7, as compared to the Arizona average of 70.7[20]

Due to larger population growth, the higher percentage of children living in poverty, and the health risks posed to young children in this region, there is a high need for effective early childhood education that can prevent students in this region from falling further behind. Research finds that for children living in

[12] "Five Shoes Waiting to Drop on Arizona's Future." http://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu
[13] "Arizona." *Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018*. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2013.
[14] "Arizona High Schools." Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012. Web. 13 Apr. 2013.
[15] Ibid
[16] "Legislative District 24 Statistical Profile 2011." N.p., 2011. Web. <http://www.azdhs.gov/hsd/profiles/leg24.pdf>.
[17] Ibid
[18] "Legislative District 24 Statistical Profile 2011." N.p., 2011. Web. <http://www.azdhs.gov.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

poverty, there is an increased risk for consequences that can often, unfortunately, be identified at birth.[21] Children living in poverty face challenges associated with negative academic outcomes, higher rates of behavioral or emotional problems, lower economic outcomes as adults, and negative health consequences.[22]

CASA Academy will target the achievement gap where the problem begins: at the earliest ages possible. Teachers and leaders will work to close this gap by providing rigorous instruction and intensive character education, promoting high levels of parental involvement, and utilizing authentic approaches to learning to enable students to make connections between their learning and life.

Current Levels of Academic Performance

As a whole, students in the target area are not achieving at a high level in reading and math proficiency. Figure A.2.3 shows the 2012 AIMS test results in the target region for applicable grades to CASA Academy.

Figure A.2.3. 2012 School Performance in Target Area[23]

School Name	***Grades***	***Letter Grade***	***AIMS Passing Reading***	***AIMS Passing Math***	***Math Median Growth Percentile***	***Reading Median Growth Percentile***
Imagine Elementary at Camelback	K-5	B	73%	62%	42	58.5
Solano School	PS-8	B	67%	57%	55	55
Longview Elementary School	PS-8	C	59%	46%	41.5	39.5
Madison Rose Lane School	PS-5	A	82%	72%	61	67
Westwood Primary School	K-3	C	65%	70%	28	20
Maie Bartlett Heard School	PS-7	C	42%	57%	37	60
Maryland Elementary School	PS-8	D	59%	39%	42.5	39
Clarendon School	PS-8	A	74%	66%	NA	NA
Encanto School	PS-8	C	62%	57%	47	49
AmeriSchools Academy – Camelback	K-12	A	89%	64%	63.5	73.5

[21] Kristin Anderson Moore, Ph.D., Zakia Redd, M.P.P.,1 Mary Burkhauser, M.A., Kassim Mbwana, M.P.P, and Ashleigh Collins, M.A. "Children in Poverty, Trends, Consequences, and Policy Options." Child Trends, 2009. Web. 13 Apr. 2013.
[22] Ibid.
[23] The grade levels, student body size, school type were gathered and the percentage of students who qualify for Free or Reduce Price Lunch was gathered from Arizona Department of Education. The AIMS data was gathered from the Arizona Department of Education AIMS results.

Midtown Primary School	K-5	C	82%	36%	62	14
Madison Park School	1-8	C	72%	47%	NA	NA
Average			69%	56%	47.95	47.55

For the 2012 school year, Arizona's A-F Accountability grading system shows only three schools in the target area attaining an A; the rest of the schools in the target area earned a B, C, or D. Further, an A rating does not necessarily mean that the majority of students are performing on grade level. For example, A-rated AmeriSchools Academy had only 64% of students passing the math portion of the AIMS test in 2012. Clarendon School, another A-rated school, had only 74% of students passing the reading portion of the AIMS test and 66% of students passing the math portion of the AIMS test. These passing percentages are not good enough and demonstrate the need for higher student performance at the school level. Additionally, if we hold to the assumption that a median growth percentile score of 66 or higher indicates high growth, none of the schools in this area have indicated high growth in math and only one indicates high growth in reading. If students continue on this trajectory, the achievement gap will increase.

In order to become a high-performing school in this region, CASA Academy will strategically map out its curriculum to correspond to Common Core Standards, utilize authentic approaches in the classrooms in order to allow students to think critically and make connections, involve parents at high levels in the academic success of their child, conduct frequent data analysis including weekly data meetings and refine instruction based on benchmark scores, and individualize targeted levels of professional development for each teacher. CASA Academy will hold itself accountable to high expectations for student achievement, as well. A student at CASA Academy must score an 85% on all summative assessments 85% of the time in order to continue on to the next grade level.

B. Meeting the Needs of the Target Population

The analysis above identifies that current school models in the area are not achieving the results necessary to close the achievement gap. Further, the research indicates that this community faces many challenges surrounding poverty. CASA Academy will not allow these to be excuses for low levels of student achievement but will rather will, intentionally and proactively, meet the needs of students and always maintain the belief that all students can achieve at high levels. CASA Academy will address the needs of the community in the following ways.

Research Based, Model School Program

To provide a high quality education to the students in the targeted community, CASA Academy has based its school model upon the successful elements and practices of other high performing schools serving a similar community. These core characteristics, which serve as the basis for CASA Academy's operating principles and are essential to the success and core design of the school, include:

1. Critical Thinking and College Bound Culture: CASA Academy will meet the needs of students by providing an authentic approach to learning that encourages students to explore and think critically about the world around them. CASA Academy will also seek to break the cycle of poverty by investing students in college from the earliest ages possible.

2. Data-Driven Instruction: CASA Academy will meet the needs of its students by utilizing student data to improve instruction. Teacher instruction will be evaluated, improved upon, and differentiated based on individual student academic scores.

3. Hiring, Developing, and Retaining Effective Teachers: CASA Academy recognizes that strong learning gains for students are the outcome of strong instruction. CASA Academy will recruit and hire the best possible teachers, provide individualized professional development for these teachers, and offer incentives for teachers to remain at CASA Academy.

4. Sense of Community and Family Engagement: CASA Academy understands that there is a direct link between parental involvement and academic achievement. CASA Academy will invest parents in their student's learning from day one by fostering close relationships between parents and teachers, prioritizing communication, and making sure that parents feel they are part of a community at CASA Academy.

5. Student Ownership of Learning: CASA Academy seeks to promote student ownership of learning by providing multiple ways in which students can explore, inquire about, and understand material in an authentic context.

These operating principles will enable CASA Academy to meet the needs of the community it intends to serve. Additionally, some further details about the school's model and approaches to learning are described below.

Authentic Approaches to Student Learning

CASA Academy recognizes that it will serve a population of students living in poverty and recognizes that many students may have lower levels of background knowledge and limited previous experiences. In order to address these issues, students at CASA Academy must develop the capacity to think critically and apply their learning in diverse ways. Authentic approaches enable this critical thinking and application because they relate learning in the classroom to the real world. Students will build off of prior knowledge to understand new content and apply their skills. Authentic approaches will ensure that CASA's students are on track for success in college, life, and society.

Supporting Special Education Needs

CASA Academy expects that 12% of its student body will qualify for special education services. See figure A.2.4 for further detail. This is relatively high in comparison to the Arizona state average of 8.2%.[24] In order to address this need, CASA Academy will partner with contracted special education professionals in the first year and will hire a full time, highly-qualified and certified special education teacher in years 2 and 3. Additionally, CASA Academy will educate and train all teachers in special education compliance and best practices regarding the education of special education students.

Figure A.2.4: School Percentage of SPED Students in Target Region[25]

School Name	Percentage of SPED Students
Imagine Elementary at Camelback	5%
Solano School	17%

[24] "Special Education: A Better Perspective (full Report)." *Special Education: A Better Perspective (full Report)*. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Apr. 2013.
[25] Arizona Department of Education

Longview Elementary School	16%
Madison Rose Lane School	8%
Westwood Primary School	8%
Maie Bartlett Heard School	7%
Maryland Elementary School	12%
Clarendon School	20%
Encanto School	13%
AmeriSchools Academy – Camelback	NA
Midtown Primary School	15%
Madison Park School	8%
Average	12%

Supporting English Language Learners

CASA Academy will serve, on average, 19% English Language Learners.[26] See figure A.2.5 for further detail. In order to accommodate the needs of these learners and in particular, their potential vocabulary deficiencies, CASA Academy will ensure that all of its teachers are certified in Structured English Immersion, that all instruction is in compliance with ELL laws and regulations, and that teachers continuously employ strategies that will scaffold instruction and differentiate based on student need. Additionally, leaders and teachers will ensure that parent relationships are fostered and maintained despite language barriers and that academic expectations for all students are high, including expectations for students who are English Language Learners.

Figure A.2.5: School Percentage of ELL Students in Target Region[27]

School Name	Percentage ELL
Imagine Elementary at Camelback	18%
Solano School	17%
Longview Elementary School	21%
Madison Rose Lane School	6%
Westwood Primary School	42%
Maie Bartlett Heard School	40%

[26] Ibid.
[27] Arizona Department of Education

Maryland Elementary School	13%
Clarendon School	13%
Encanto School	21%
AmeriSchools Academy – Camelback	NA
Midtown Primary School	15%
Madison Park School	6%
Average	19%

Promoting Regular Attendance

Academics are not the only challenge low-income students face. Poor attendance is another obstacle that is less discussed but perhaps equally responsible for the achievement gap. School absences affect children in poverty disproportionately; chronic absenteeism is most prevalent among low-income students. A Johns Hopkins study entitled "The Importance of Being in School" studied a nationally representative data set and found that chronic absence in kindergarten was associated with lower academic performance in first grade.[28] The impact was twice as great for students from low-income families.[29] The students who were chronically absent continued to perform at the lowest levels of academic achievement until fifth grade.[30] The study found that because students in poverty benefit the most from being in school, one of the most effective strategies for providing pathways out of poverty is to do whatever it takes to keep students in school every day.[31] The study declared that increased attendance alone, "even without improvements in the American education system," would increase academic achievement in low-income communities.[32] In fact, according to the study, children from low-income communities with good attendance outperformed their more affluent peers on literacy assessments.[33]

CASA Academy recognizes that student attendance must be a major priority, especially in light of the figures listed above. In order to increase attendance, CASA Academy will enact an attendance policy that rewards students with high attendance by providing incentives. CASA Academy also intends to educate parents about the statistics discussed above during home visits before the beginning of the school year. In addition, the school will conduct APTT meetings quarterly to both update and empower parents in regards to their child's academics and attendance. Finally, the school intends to call parents of absent children every morning and to conduct additional home visits to families whose students are consistently attending school.

Supporting Parental Involvement

[28] Balfanz, Robert. "The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools." Johns Hopkins University, 2012. Web. 13 Apr. 2013.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

Researchers agree that rates of parental involvement are lower in low-income communities than in higher income schools.[34] Low-income children with less involved parents often experience fewer of the academic benefits than children coming from higher income homes. For these children, the lack of parental involvement in regards to academics leaves low-income students further behind their higher income counterparts.[35]

The founders of CASA Academy believe that the first step to increasing parent participation is creating community partnerships. During the planning year, the Director of Students and Operations will be heavily involved in community events, grassroots marketing, and non-profit and religious services throughout the target area. Additionally, two weeks before the beginning of the 2014 school year, all teachers and the Directors will conduct home visits to each student's home to set expectations and get to know students and families on a personal level. In addition, Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT) meetings will be held once a quarter. At these meetings, parents will meet in groups in teachers' classrooms and will be provided with up-to-date student and classroom data, as well as in-depth coaching that provides strategies and tools for parents to use at home to bolster their child's academic success. These meetings will empower parents to help their child succeed academically at home.[36] In addition to another home visit in January for first-year CASA Academy students, teachers will be responsible for sending home one personalized note a week to parents, calling parents every other week to update them on their child's progress, and organizing two community events with their classroom families throughout the year. Finally, CASA Academy believes that parents will be more involved with helping their children if they are more involved at the school. Each family will be responsible for volunteering for the school at least once a year, whether this means cutting out materials at home, volunteering in the classroom, working as a lunch or recess volunteer, or running a PTO for the school. Since many parents may feel intimidated by volunteering if there is a perceived or real language gap, CASA Academy will provide a variety of volunteer options and trainings that will allow parents to feel comfortable with being involved.

Provide Before- and After-School Programs

CASA Academy believes that strong before and after-school programs are an integral part of student success. As one study conducted by Princeton University suggests:

> Many low-income children today are too much on their own, both physically and psychologically, and could benefit from safe, protected spaces to play, an extra measure of adult attention, additional help with homework, and greater opportunities to participate in art and sports activities. By that logic, virtually all low-income children need access to programs.[37]

CASA Academy plans to conduct before and after-school programs at school. The school plans to open its doors at 7 AM and close its doors at 6 PM, thus leaving two hours and forty minutes of before- and after-school time for students to be able to arrive early and leave late. In order to provide these opportunities for students, CASA Academy will apply for 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant funds and will attempt to fundraise for afterschool programs through tax credit donations, grants, and volunteers.[38] These funds will be used to conduct remediation and enrichment classes after school for any student who wishes to attend the program. In addition, the Directors plan to network with local community organizations to arrange for free afterschool classes pertaining to the arts and life skills.

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[34] Johns Hopkins. "The Importance of Being in School." *Everyone Graduates Center RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Jan. 2013.
[35] Smith, Jane. "Parental Involvement in Education Among Low-Income Families: a Case Study." *The School Community Journal* 16.1 (2002): N. page. Web. <http://www.adi.org/journal/ss06/SmithSpring2006.pdf>.
[36] "An Innovative Model for Parent-Teacher Partnerships." *U.S. Department of Education*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Apr. 2013.
[37] Halpern, Robert. "After-School Programs for Low-income Children: Promise and Challenges." *The Future of Children* 9.2 (1999): n. page. Web. <http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/09_02_07.pdf>.

[38] "21st Century Community Learning Centers." *21st Century Community Learning Centers*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Apr. 2013.

Increased Instructional Hours

Studies have shown that an increase in instructional hours, both to the school day and to the school year, increase student academic gains. In December 2012, Secretary Arne Duncan declared that, "adding meaningful in-school hours is a critical investment that better prepares children to be successful in the 21st century."[39] Another study conducted by the Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis Foundation found that the "increase in the achievement gap over the primary grades can be traced mainly to the out-of-school environment."[40] Additionally, a study conducted by the Charter Schools Evaluation Project in New York, which studied over 60 charter schools, found that "a longer school year is associated with positive achievement effects" and that "schools with years that are 10 days longer are associated with average student achievement that is 0.2 standard deviations greater."[41]

CASA Academy will increase instructional hours in both the school day and the school year. In addition to extending the school year to 200 days, 20 days more than the state mandates (the state mandates only 180 days), CASA Academy will extend the school day as well. Instead of providing a mere half-day schedule for kindergartners, as the state mandates, CASA Academy will provide a full-day program for its kindergartners by lengthening the kindergarten day by 5 hours. CASA Academy will also increase the average school day by 1.5 hours for first, second, and third grade students.

Class Size and Student-Teacher Ratio

CASA Academy will permit a class size of no more than 25 students, maintaining a student to teacher ratio of 25:1 or less. This will ensure that students are in a classroom situation where their teacher can address individual student needs and manage the group effectively. One statewide study, cited in the American Educational Research Journal, found that smaller class sizes correlated directly with higher student achievement and that "administratively, smaller classes reduce teachers' responsibilities for paperwork and record keeping, allowing them to allocate more time to instructionally relevant activities."[42] This study found "a significant benefit accrues to students in reduced-sized classes" and that "there is evidence that minority students in particular benefit from the smaller class environment."[43]

Additionally, students will spend time each day during the Daily Five reading block in small reading groups of no more than six students. Due to the fact that many students will be entering at academic levels lower than their more affluent peers, CASA Academy has prioritized academic intervention groups and small group instruction to ensure that instruction specifically targets this underperforming population.

[39] "5 States to Increase Class Time in Some Schools." *USA Today*. Gannett, n.d. Web. 18 Jan. 2013.
[40] "Schools, Achievement, and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. N.p., 2001. Web. 18 Jan. 2013.
[41] "New York City Charter Schools." *Education Next*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Jan. 2013.
[42] "Answers and Questions About Class Size: A Statewide Experiment." American Educational Research Journal, n.d. Web. 28 Jan. 2013.
[43] Ibid.