A.2 Target Population

Desert Star Academy will serve a culturally and economically diverse community south of Bullhead City, Arizona and north of the Fort Mojave Indian Reservation, encompassing the unincorporated cities of Fort Mohave and Mohave Valley, Arizona. To the north, the Fort Mohave community is comprised of small and medium businesses that are the outgrowth of Bullhead City. The southern community encompasses small family owned businesses and agricultural areas; to the distant south is the Fort Mojave Indian Reservation. This area has five schools that serve Kindergarten through eighth grade, with an approximate student population of 2,800. One of these schools is a K-8 charter school with the remaining schools consisting of three K-6 and one traditional Jr. High School of seventh and eighth graders. Mohave Valley Elementary School District #16 currently serves the K-8 student population in the immediate area of the proposed Desert Star Academy. Most of the families being served by Desert Star live within the Mohave Valley Elementary School District. A study of the existing schools indicates a severe need for a quality public school that will meet the needs of a culturally diverse community.

Demographics

The students in this area are culturally and economically diverse, many of which will be first generation college graduates. This area consists of two distinct demographics. The Mohave Valley area, the most southern portion of the community, comprises a more culturally diverse and predominantly low income population. The community borders the Fort Mojave Indian Reservation where the primary source of income reflects minimum wage employment from the AVI Casino or seasonal agricultural jobs. The transient population fluctuates from the seasonal agricultural industry with families returning to Mexico. In contrast, the Fort Mohave community consists of a predominantly white, low to middle income populace. The community is based on small to medium businesses. This area is less rural than Mohave Valley whereby families have two working parents and live in medium range housing communities. Families of this community place a stronger emphasis on education for their children according to the Mohave Valley Chamber of Commerce. Desert Star Academy proposes to locate midpoint between these two communities, thus, making the location convenient to all members of the communities and thereby serve a diverse student population. The student population of the area will on average, consist of 60% White, 20% Hispanic, 17 % Native American, 2% Black and 1% Asian. (See Chart 1). Over 65% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. 12% of these students are English-Language learners and 10 % qualify for special education services.

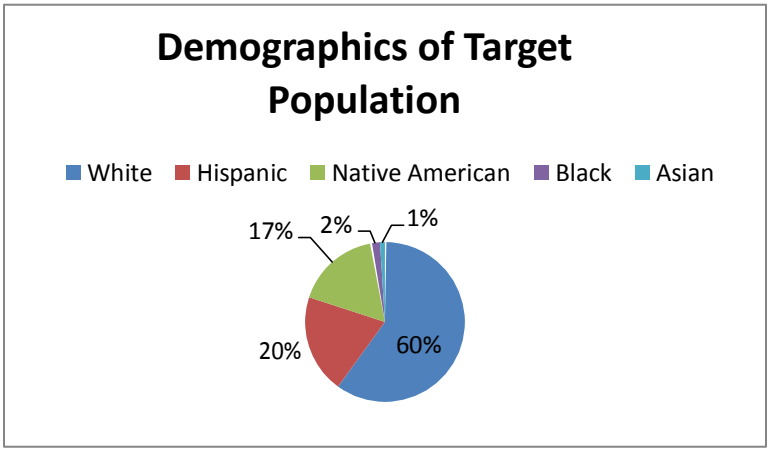

Chart 1 Source: Combined average from Arizona Department of Education Great Schools, Mohave Valley Chamber of Commerce

Educational Opportunities

An analysis of the existing schools in the area indicates a severe need for a quality public school that will offer a rigorous curriculum while meeting the needs of a culturally and economically diverse student population. As stated earlier, Mohave Valley Elementary School District #16 serves the majority of the students in Desert Star Academy's target community. The district has three elementary schools, serving grades K-6; Mohave Valley Elementary, Fort Mohave Elementary and Camp Mohave Elementary as well as one traditional junior high serving seventh and eighth grades. The only charter school in the area, Young Scholars Academy, has a four year waiting list for Kindergarten – eighth grade students. Further north, in Bullhead City, Mohave Accelerated Elementary School (MALC) has two campuses of which both have waiting lists in all K – 8 grades. The second campus, Mohave Accelerated Elementary School - East opened in 2009 with grades K-3 and has since expanded to a larger campus serving grades K-5. Waiting lists for all three charter campuses indicate that families are demanding a quality choice for their children's education. Although MALC is not in the proposed target community, it is worth noting to emphasize the need for excellence in education within the proposed target area. Parents currently living in the Fort Mohave-Mohave Valley area drive their students to attend either of the MALC campuses in Bullhead City. The waiting lists for the charter schools continue to grow each year increasing the demand for an excelling school.

Chart 2
Performance of Area Schools

	School A- F Rating	*Legacy Rating*	*AIMS Math Passing*	*Median Growth Percentile*	*AIMS Reading Passing*	*Median Growth Percentile*
Mohave Valley Elementary	***C***	***Performing Plus***	***70.6***	***50.0 Typical***	***70.6***	***50.0 Typical***
Fort Mohave Elementary	***C***	***Performing Plus***	***53.4***	***49.0 Typical***	***74.6***	***46.5 Typical***
Camp Mohave Elementary	***C***	***Performing Plus***	***57.0***	***55.0 Typical***	***66.8***	***47.0 Typical***
Young Scholars Academy	***B***	***Highly Performing***	***74.4***	***45.0 Typical***	***88.6***	***46.0 Typical***
MALC	***C***	***Performing Plus***	***58.8***	***71.5 High***	***63.8***	***52.0 Typical***
MALC - East	***C***	***Not reported***	***88.9***	***91.0 High***	***94.4***	***52.0 Typical***

Source: Arizona Charter Association Education Evaluator

Chart 2 indicates that all district elementary schools in the immediate target area are performing plus, "C" schools, the exception being Young Scholars Academy, which has a three year waiting list for potential students and still is only rated only a "B". There is currently no A rated elementary school in this target area. The average passing score for AIMS in Math is 67.1% and 76.46% in Reading. This presents a tremendous opportunity for Desert Star Academy to offer the local and surrounding communities another choice for public education. Desert Star Academy provides a choice for the community that will pose a rigorous academic environment and focus on developing the academic and social child with the belief system of respect, community involvement and leadership.

An analysis of the Median Grow Percentile indicates another opportunity for Desert Star Academy to provide the community with a choice for excellence in education. With the exception of Mohave Accelerated Elementary Schools (MALC) all of the schools rated have a median growth percentile between 45 and 55 individually and the six school average for Reading is 48.91 and Math is 60.25. Although this is "typical" growth, Desert Star Academy believes it is unacceptable. The data would indicate the schools are primarily focused on teaching to the middle and do not have successful programs in place to close the learning gap among low growth students and are not providing adequate instruction or challenge for the students at top of the academic growth spectrum.

Educating the Target Population

Establishing Culture

Desert Star Academy proposes to educate all students and families in the community seeking the choice for excellence in education. The target population will be culturally and academically diverse, including Special Education students, English Language Learners and special needs students who require intense academic and behavioral support. Desert Star believes that all children have an unlimited potential for learning and experiencing life's challenges. It is essentially important, as a school, to foster a learning culture of excitement and enthusiasm for learning that will develop and encourage confidence for exploring and taking risks among the scholars enrolled. The excitement and enthusiasm will be generated from the administration team and teachers, as well as the clerical and maintenance staff. Each scholar and their family entering the school will be greeted with a warm smile and welcoming words. The schools mission statement and core values will be visible in the school's entrance and throughout the school reminding all stakeholders of the commitment to each scholar and family of the school regardless of academic, social or behavioral needs. Each member of the staff has a responsibility to demonstrate to each scholar that they are loved and cared for equally and unconditionally, to reach out to parents and families to encourage participation in the school and their child's education, and finally to solicit support from the community to bring real world experiences to the classroom in order to enhance each scholar's learning experience. We model respect for each unique scholar and family in order to build confidence and excitement for learning as a collaborative team with the ultimate result of each scholar maximizing their strengths to the fullest and realizing their learning achievement is a lifelong process and commitment.

Small Group Instruction

Establishing the culture does not stop at the entrance of the school as each teacher will continue the commitment to school culture, the beliefs and values of the school in each classroom. The scholars will be educated in small group settings using the RTI (Response to Intervention) Model. The RTI model will allow necessary support for scholars to fill education gaps as well as enhance the curriculum for the scholars excelling above grade level standards. The RTI model will be an important aspect of meeting individual academic needs of the scholars and in some cases eliminating the need for special education services. Educating to the individual scholar is the foundation of academic excellence at Desert Star Academy. Highly effective teachers hold the key to individual scholar success. In addition to following the RTI model, each teacher will provide a nurturing and loving learning environment. By modeling behavior, the teacher will encourage the scholars to participate in oral activities that are followed by praise and reward, building the scholar's confidence and desire to contribute to the learning environment.

As each scholar develops confidence and trust in themselves, peers and teacher within their learning environment their knowledge and desire for academic success will soar. The scholar's academic abilities will grow from knowledge based learning to application and ultimately to solving real-world problems. Within each small group, assessments will drive the curriculum and content differentiation. As the scholars advance their skills and performance on the assessments they will be moved to another group with more challenging skills, activities and expectations. Using Core Knowledge throughout all learning groups will embed rigor into the curriculum by offering a student centered learning strategy. Core Knowledge provided opportunities for each scholar to gain knowledge in content areas that they will use to achieve a more in-depth comprehension of the

curriculum and use the knowledge and mechanics to solve real-world problems. The small group differentiated instruction will allow the teacher to spend one-on-one time with students falling below the bar and need more support to achieve the standards. The collaborative groups will also promote cooperative learning whereby the students will learn from each other and have an opportunity to be group leaders at an early age thus ensuring the school mission and vision are embedded throughout the learning process.

Class Size / Teacher to Student Ratio

Small class sizes will be instrumental in educating the target population who are culturally and economically diverse. A maximum of 20 students will comprise the Kindergarten and first grade classrooms. Desert Star Academy believes that this is a critical age for developing early language, reading, writing and math skills. Based on the individual skill of the young scholars, small group instruction will meet the needs of the diverse ability levels by slowing or accelerating the rate of instruction to empower each learner to make appropriate growth. These two class rooms will have a full-time teacher and share an instruction assistant.

The remaining grades will be capped at 25 scholars per teacher. Small group instruction will be consistent throughout the Academy. One teaching assistant will be shared among the second and third grade teachers and one assistant to be shared among the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teachers. The small student - teacher ratio and overall class size meets the needs of the target population by allowing the teacher to provide more intense and one-on-one instruction to the students who are far below the grade level standards. In two of the three district schools in the immediate target area only 55% of the students passed the AIMS Math portion. In reading, an average 70% of the students passed. This analysis indicates the students will need more remediation and instruction from the teacher. A smaller class size will also bridge the learning gaps among the diverse culture of the scholars who are not as fluent in the language. Class size of 25 students will be the model for third and beyond grades. The rationale for this size is based on the fact that the scholars who start with Desert Star Academy will be at or above grade level upon reaching the third grade thus allowing the teacher more time to instruct the scholars that are not as diverse in academic skill. The students new to the school in third through sixth grades will be among the minority.

Appropriate and rigorous instruction embedded with high academic expectations plays a vital role in the next stage of academic excellence at Desert Star Academy. Accelerated growth goals will be planned to close the achievement gap for low level scholars while aggressive mastery goals will be implemented to challenge the college bound scholar. Teachers will model, lead, instruct and assess each scholar frequently to achieve the ambitious goals. The scholars will be responsible for achieving a level of mastery of the Common Core Standards. High academic standards will be expected of all learners regardless of their initial achievement and skill level. Small group instruction based on the RTI model will ensure scholars of high academic success. Differentiate instruction within the learning groups will challenge each learner to excel to the next level based on current performance. The high groups will use synthesis of information to create their own projects and complete assignments within the teacher requirements with little direction from the teacher, whereas the lower level groups will have more instruction, guidance and support from the teacher until their skills and knowledge is developed to complete more rigorous assignments. The differentiation will be based largely on Bloom's Taxonomy of learning and the scholars will be driven to continually achieve the higher order of thinking skills. As the skills are acquired, the learning groups will be revised to continually challenge each learner.

Weekly and daily assessments will be given to each scholar within the group to determine the level of in-depth understanding. As the comprehension grows with the content rigor so will the academic achievement of each scholar.

Family Involvement

Desert Star Academy acknowledges the family as the first source of learning and instruction. That process should not stop when each scholar begins school. The family must remain an important asset throughout the learning process. Desert Star's commitment to the family will be demonstrated monthly during school hosted parent meetings that will inform parents of the methods and activities within the classroom. Events will also be hosted where the entire learning community will gather for social events providing an opportunity for each scholar to present their academic accomplishments to their family. In addition to the social gathering, parents will have an opportunity to network with each other and the school staff to promote collaboration and commitment to the educational experience that is so richly embedded in the school culture at Desert Star Academy. Parents will also be encouraged to participate by volunteering during school events such as carnivals, book fairs, and literacy nights or as a volunteer in the classroom. The family activities will continue to grow and contribute to the unique lifelong learning culture at Desert Star Academy.

Desert Star Academy believes the community strongly needs options for academic excellence within the community. We believe the Academy will offer this choice to families that is currently lacking in the local school district and other educational opportunities available. Desert Star Academy is the choice for academic excellence that will educate and prepare each scholar to be successful in college, to be a positive citizen in their community and a future leader in society.

Meeting the Needs of Target Population

Market analysis and academic performance of local schools indicate Desert Star Academy, Inc.'s target scholar population is academically and culturally diverse. The small group instruction and the RTI (Response to Intervention) model addressed in the Program of Instruction will meet these diverse scholar needs of the Mohave Valley area. The School Director, Mrs. Montgomery has had student academic success using the RTI model and small group instruction at a charter school with similar diverse population. Special Educations AIMS scores improved 30% over a three year period from 16% passing in reading to 45% passing in year 2005-2008. After analyzing the most current AIMS scores Desert Star Academy, Inc. will instruct students from schools were the range of passing AIMS score vary from 53% to 70% in Math and 66% to 88% in Reading.

The nearby school district has an average of 27 students per classroom teacher. The smaller class will meet the needs of the target population by addressing individual learning gaps with each scholar promptly. The AIMS results indicated the scholars coming to Desert Star Academy are diverse in the range of academic achievement. The small class meets the scholars' needs by allowing the teacher to teach to identify and teacher to scholar strengths. The small group instruction will allow the teacher the opportunity to tutor each scholar and close the learning gap.

The initial assessment and grouping of scholars according to the RTI model will allow small groups of scholars to be grouped together with similar academic skills. Small group instruction will allow the teacher to effectively teach to specific scholar's strengths and weaknesses. The low level students will be encouraged to achieve higher standards beginning from a lower academic level and the

advanced scholars will be challenged to independently problem solve and learn skills of analysis and higher order thinking skills as presented in the upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Market research indicates that the proposed scholar population will come to Desert Star Academy, Inc. with a wide range of academic abilities based on reported AIMS scores.

Individual academic achievement will improve consistently among all of the Desert Star Academy, Inc. scholars based on the program of instruction. Within each small group, the teacher will instruct, assess and move scholars in and out of small groups based on their individual academic success. The small group setting will provide individual instruction to scholars from the teacher as well as from peers during group activities and projects. In the RTI small group setting the teacher through data analysis can reteach and provide alternate instruction immediately to each small group or scholar. Movement among scholars from one group to another can also be implemented based on scholar success and mastery of standards. Small groups may also be formed with scholars of different academic skills to allow peer to peer teaching. Small group instruction allows each scholar a variety of methods and strategies to ensure high academic success among. The teacher has the flexibility to instruct and assess scholars more frequently and individually using the designated program of instruction. The program of instruction meets the needs of the proposed scholar that comes from large classroom sizes, whole group teacher-centered instruction and diverse cultural backgrounds.