A. 1 Educational Philosophy

Desert Star Academy, a college preparatory school, strongly believes that every child in a community has the ability to achieve high academic success when provided with a foundation rich in academic rigor, student engagement and comprehension of basic and complex information. It is the conviction that Desert Star Academy will create a positive, collaborative learning community that will empower all students to become excelling and accountable scholars, productive citizens in their community and future leaders of society. Desert Star Academy commits to data driven analyses of standardized summative and frequent formative assessments that will be used to continually improve instruction in order to assure that each student's educational opportunities will continue to evolve at the same rate as their academic abilities grow to be successful in Jr. High, High School and college. It is our core belief that a high-quality college preparatory school will be successful when the foundation for instruction is built on reflection, coaching and modeling, mentoring and embedded professional development based on research-based, best-practice curriculum thus empowering teachers to learn and lead. The Desert Star team believes that the school is the core of the community and each person within the learning community has a responsibility to collaboratively create a learning culture and climate that holds scholars accountable for their personal growth, development and achievement.

Desert Star Academy will reach out to the community for partnerships that will provide global opportunities for each scholar to be an active member in their community and events, identifying assets that will assist the school to identify and solve problems and build upon the Academy's dimensions to serve scholars and families within the learning community.

Philosophical Approach to Educating the Target Population

Desert Star Academy will serve a diverse student population with very diverse academic skills and abilities. Many will enter kindergarten with average to below average academic and communication skills based on the cultural diverseness of the community. Upon graduating from sixth grade, each college bound scholar will be performing at or above grade level in academics, have been involved in community events and have demonstrated leadership skills among their schoolmates and community organizations. Each scholar will be able to compete at or above their peers within the state in academics, knowledge and application of technology as well as understand how they can advocate for their own personal academic destination regardless of the academic level they pose at the time of enrollment.

Desert Star Academy believes that successful accomplished scholars must excel in academics, be productive citizens within their community and be leaders among their peers. The following foundations will produce and empower each scholar to maximize their strengths to the fullest potential.

- **Rigorous Academics:** Scholars will engage in a data-driven curriculum appropriate to their learning strengths and modalities that will close the achievement gap among scholars falling below grade level and sanction excelling scholars to apply knowledge in solving global situations and problems in all content areas including Science, Social Studies. The learning community will provide a culture that supports the values established and demands excellence among all.

- **Family Involvement:** Students will participate with their families on class assignments, projects and monthly activities at the Academy that are designed to nurture and strengthen each scholar and form a parent and school partnership**.**

- **Community Partnerships:** Students will engage in community projects, events or organizations through partnerships with Desert Star Academy. Community leaders will be invited to make presentations that promote and involve each scholar in a club, organization or event.

Fundamental Principles with Rationale

Desert Star Academy will provide a learning culture of high student achievement by instilling high expectations in each scholar, providing data-driven decision-making with an emphasis on student achievement for all students in the learning community, hiring highly effective teachers and by executing effective research-based instructional methods centered on high student achievement. Desert Star Academy believes technology is a vital part of the scholar's educational experience. An emphasis will be placed on using researched-based technology equipment and practices for instruction.

The rationale for instilling high student achievement through school culture among our target population of diverse learners is based on current research by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo. A school must create a school culture by focusing on the drivers that develop the culture. He stated that many schools often talk about the influence of "culture" or "shared vision"; however, they do not discuss the "drivers" that created such vision. Desert Star Academy will implement:

1. *Introductory Professional Development*: to all teachers during July prior to school starting that will focus on the shared vision and specific action plans that will be created to ensure the vision and philosophy will be projected to all members of the learning community, supported by continued development during the monthly professional development days;
2. *Build by Borrowing:* the school director will research and present videos of various schools demonstrating best practices in other schools that would inspire teachers to create a unique culture for Desert Star Academy that will be implemented daily and adhered to strictly;
3. *Implementation Calendar*: Development of a year-long calendar and timeline of staff development, goals, assessments and analysis of the assessments will hold the learning community accountable and driven to achieve the goals. The expectations will be transparent.

Rationale for Target Population

The rationale for the hand-on inquiry based curriculum is due to current research that states we have an obligation as educators to prepare our learners to compete in the global economy. The National Common Core Standards formulate the need for such diverse and in-depth curriculum. The standards call for a rigorous curriculum in order to foster independence, build strong content knowledge, critique, value evidence, understand perspectives of diverse cultures, and capably use technology and media. Our analysis indicates that across all Common Core domains, strands and clusters, only one-third to one-half of the 11th grade scholars are reaching a college and career readiness level of achievement (corestandards.org). For each Common Core domain, strand, and cluster, the percentages of Caucasian scholars who met or exceeded the performance of college-and career ready scholars were uniformly higher than corresponding percentages of African American or Hispanic students (corestandards.org). These results indicate that we must begin immediately to strengthen teaching and learning in all areas of the Common Core, with particular focus on raising college and career readiness rates of African American, Hispanic and other underserved students. Desert Star Academy, Inc. anticipates a scholar population of 25% Hispanic and African American population that would benefit from the proposed program of instruction.

Researcher Bob Pearlman in "Rethinking How Students Learn", stated that you can visit a number of schools in the United States with beautiful well groomed buildings and classrooms where you see the same old 700-900 square foot classroom, superbly designed for a teacher to stand in front of the classroom where 30 students are sitting neatly in rows of desks, taking notes, listening to the teacher and doing worksheets. He further points out the brutal fact that you can visit a school in England and see the innovations being created and emerging for students who are prepared for work in our global world. He states the necessary need for the United States to re-create and build classroom structures where learning is moving away from teacher-directed whole group instruction to create student-centered work in the classroom.

The student-centered small group instruction will create a high academic learning culture to meet the needs of our proposed scholars. Mrs. Montgomery, the school director, has 15 years of education administration and teaching the proposed scholar population. She has had scholar success in the small group instruction classroom as evidenced by scholar achievement on AIMS. Over a three year period the special education academic scores rose from 16% passing AIMS to 45% passing AIMS in reading and similar gains in math under her direction.

Desert Star Academy, Inc. will have a target population of students who are currently in classrooms of 'teacher focused' instruction. The schools are not performing by the rating of "C" rating in the nearby school district. The proposed population of Desert Star, Inc. will have higher academic achievement in the student-centered, small group instruction classroom.
Core Knowledge, a hands-on inquiry-based curriculum will meet the needs of the scholars who come to us with limited knowledge or experiences, and those who have a wealth of knowledge and can achieve through self-motivation.

Desert Star Academy, Inc. will meet an unmet need in the community for our target population by providing a different kind of instruction that is lacking in the surrounding school district; one of innovation, future thinkers, writers, mathematicians, and readers.

High Expectations for Student Achievement

Desert Star Academy will set and hold high expectations of each student and family upon entering school. Each student will be assessed and aggressive learning goals will be assigned to each student based on their individual skills and academic abilities. Family meetings will be conducted with the teacher and student to deliver the goals and expectations to all students in the learning community falling below grade level assuring that the learning gap will be closed within a one to two year timeline. Meetings will also be held with students and families of the excelling scholars to continue the high growth rate. The school - family partnership will ensure "every student" will graduate at their respective grade or above grade level within two years, depending on the severity of academic skill deficiencies the scholar exhibits at the time of enrollment. It is the conviction of Desert Star Academy to empower each scholar with the knowledge and skills to ultimately be successful in college.

The teachers will be responsible for analyzing where the students are at the time of entry and hold each student accountable for their achievement through constant communication with the students and families regarding student progress. The learning partnership will motivate and encourage each student to rise above and accomplish the learning goals assigned, ultimately creating a student with motivation to set and achieve high levels of academic success.

Student Data-Driven Decisions

Desert Star Academy will foster a data-driven culture among the learning community. The collaborative reflection of student data will be promoted and scheduled daily, weekly and as needed along with post summative assessments at the close of teaching units and themes. Bi-monthly staff development meetings will allow for the administration and the teaching staff to share new ideas, resources and methods to increase each staff member's effectiveness in regard to maintaining and achieving high student growth and classroom achievement.

During the first week of staff development, prior to the opening of school, administrators and teaching staff will review and assess formative data from the previous year's scores to group each class of students using the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Teacher notebooks will also be distributed to begin recording student assessment and goal information to be used throughout the year to track student growth and achievement. Time will be allotted weekly for teachers to reflect and plan for student achievement based on daily, weekly or unit summative assessments.

Formative assessment held at the beginning, middle and end of the year will be reviewed at staff development work days to adjust lessons and class activities as necessary. Staff development work days will also address problems and concerns that arise to collaboratively resolve the problems and address concerns.

Hire Highly Effective Teacher

Recruiting, hiring, developing and retaining highly effective teachers will be top priority among the administration team at Desert Star Academy. Only applicants passing the rigorous evaluation and interview process will be hired to instruct and mold young scholars. The rigorous evaluation process will include an observation, review and verification of credentials, submission and review of past effective lesson plans and an in-depth interview of past successes of family communication and student involvement as well as student achievement successes. It will be the ultimate responsibility of the teacher to develop and foster a community learning partnership with each student and family. The teacher will also solicit community support and participation during selected and appropriate lessons. It is the belief of Desert Star Academy that student achievement will be maximized with the student, family and community for a common cause.

Effective Instructional Methods

Desert Star Academy teachers will strive to develop and implement effective and diverse instructional methods. It is vitally important that each student within the learning community receive instruction according to their strengths, modalities and needs. Upon graduation from the sixth grade, each student will be able to articulate their own education goals and plans for Jr. High, High School and beyond.

Reached-based practices in Differentiation and Multiple Intelligences in small group settings will allow the target scholar population success and higher academic achievement. Differentiation in conjunction with Bloom's Taxonomy will meet gear the lesson to the scholars skill level allow each scholar to be successful and gain confidence in learning to achieve higher educational standards. The scholars will be grouped with peers of equal or slightly higher skill levels. Each lesson will use the appropriate level from Bloom's Taxonomy based on the skill level and academic needs of the scholars. Small group instruction will allow a smaller teacher to scholar ratio to individualize and improve the quality of instruction within the classroom. This approach will also make the multi-grade classroom more effective for each scholar.

Small Group Instruction

Small group instruction and the RTI model will be established in each classroom. The students will arrive to Desert Star with diverse needs, strengths and cultures; it is the responsibility and duty of the learning community to meet the individual student's needs with rigorous curriculum and expectations. Students will be grouped within the classroom by ability during the reading

and math blocks. This practice will allow students to excel beyond the grade level to allow the teacher an opportunity to re-teach skills that will close the learning gap among students.

Research Based Instruction

Teachers will use research-based practices to ensure student mastery of the Common Core Standards during this instructional time. Differentiation, Multiple Intelligences and Bloom's Taxonomy will be effective methods. Each lesson will be assessed daily for effectiveness and to drive the day to day education process. Assessments will consist of collaborative and individual projects, oral question and answer, short answer or other content specific assessments.

Individual Tutoring

Individual supports will be implemented into the daily schedule for tutoring or enrichment activities. The supports will be in addition to a core curriculum of reading, writing, math, science and social studies. Desert Star Academy believes all learners would benefit from science and social studies incorporated into the curriculum and not just for the excelling or upper end of the students, as is practiced in the local district schools.

Projects and Activities

An integral part of the instruction process is informal reinforcement of teaching concepts. Individual and group projects will be planned daily to reteach or enrich the learning process. The activities will empower students to develop communication skills, work as a team, and demonstrate mastery of a given concept or standard.

Core Values

- All scholars will use their strengths to grow emotionally and academically to achieve excellence.

- Desert Star Academy will provide a learning culture where excellence is the standard.

- Each scholar will learn in a safe, nurturing environment where self-confidence will be developed and where the scholar is encouraged to take risks, accept challenges and learn new concepts.

- Collaboration among scholars, teachers, families, and community partnership are responsible for educating a college bound scholar to achieve excellence.

Creating a learning environment where the values of collaboration, citizenship and leadership are practiced among staff and scholars will build a close learning family where scholars will use their strengths to grow emotionally, academically and globally. The core values will be displayed in the entrance of the Academy where students, parents, and guests are reminded of the values being established and pursued within the building's walls. Teachers will incorporate

daily character education activities into various lessons and activities. Monthly school community activities will be planned that will provide scholars an opportunity to become involved in their local community. Lastly, it will be the responsibility of the administration team to be knowledgeable of community events and opportunities in order to encourage and support the young scholars to become members or participants. Invitations will be extended to such organizations to hold sign-ups or registration at Desert Star Academy. Such organizations as the Boys and Girls club, 4-H or youth sports organizations will be a vital partner in grooming the future leaders.

All scholars will have leadership responsibilities within the classroom starting with the kindergarten classes. The older scholars will model leadership characteristics through a mentoring program. Desert Star Academy will model community awareness and citizenship by sponsoring community service events, monthly gatherings where scholar participation will be tracked. The Desert Star learning community will create, develop and empower each scholar to excel academically and personally in order to positively impact their school, community and world.