A.3 Program of Instruction

Overview of Instruction

The vision at Desert Star Academy is to promote academic excellence among all scholars in the community through a rigorous data-driven program of instruction. It is the goal to deliver a learning environment that will meet the needs of diverse learners and provide for the diverse learning styles and modalities empowering each scholar to achieve high academic standards. It is vital to set high standards for appropriate behavior by encouraging respect for self, peers, teachers, staff and others. The use of technology will be an integral component of the educational process, engaging students and preparing them for the future. The above vision will be achieved through a program of instruction which will focus on four categories.

- **Data-Driven Core Curriculum** focused on all content areas of Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, Physical Education, Music Visual Arts, Character Acquisition and Technology. The curriculum must be comprehensive and of high quality to provide a foundation of prior content knowledge and experience in which scholars will build upon throughout the development of elementary education and beyond. The Core Knowledge Sequence will be the framework in which all content areas will align with the Common Core Standards and ensure all scholars master the Common Core Standards in every grade, kindergarten through sixth.

- **Formative and Summative Assessments** are aligned to the Common Core Standards to measure scholar achievement and mastery of the standards. Classroom teachers will assess each scholar's learning achievements in regard to the Common Core Standards through a variety of assessments to include teacher designed end of unit assessments and projects, school designed end of quarter criterion referenced assessments, and summative state required assessments, the Stanford 10 for second graders and Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) for 3rd through 6th grades. Regardless of the type of assessment, analysis and review must follow each assessment to adjust instruction and curriculum to meet the learner's needs.

- **Professional Development** embedded into the teacher's job endows each teacher with the resources and experience necessary to deliver quality curricula to each scholar. The comprehensive professional development plan will begin upon hiring each teacher and will continue daily, monthly, and annually throughout the teacher's tenure at Desert Star Academy. It is the belief of Desert Star Academy that quality teachers must have training and support to: teach highly effective lessons for mastery, accurately assess each student within the content areas and the Common Core Standards, and develop enrichment or remediation plans for individual scholars based on their strengths and learning modalities. Professional development topics will be identified, developed, scheduled, presented and evaluated as the result of collaboration between the school director, instructional leaders, content experts and state and Arizona Charter Schools Association sponsored trainings.

Core Knowledge offers a scope and sequence for specific, shared content clearly outlined in the Core Knowledge Preschool and Core Knowledge Sequence for K-6. This grade by grade guide to important knowledge provides academic excellence and higher literacy skills for elementary scholars. Desert Star Academy will align the Core Knowledge Sequence to the Common Core Standards and build a strong, solid, specific, shared core curriculum that will educate scholars with a strong foundation of knowledge in the early grades (K-2). In the middle grades (3-4) the knowledge instruction is in far greater depth as the scholars explore global topics through research and presentation, demonstrate increased fluency, write clearly and accurately and solve equations and problems using growing and thinking skills throughout the core content areas. Fourth graders will also discover their home state of Arizona. In the upper grades (5-6) Core Knowledge will provide a challenging and enriching learning curriculum that will inspire academic excellence among the scholars. Scholars will develop high-level academic skills and strong character as they continue to follow the Core Knowledge sequence through discussion, interaction, collaboration, reflection and evaluation. Students will become advance learners who will think critically and solve problems as they connect the classroom topic with real life community experiences. Core Knowledge scope and sequence allows classroom teachers to align the Common Core Standards and blend character education curriculum, thereby, educating the whole child to excel in academics and grow in social experiences within their community. *Core Knowledge website at: www.coreknowledge.org*

English Language Arts

The Language Arts curriculum, aligned with the Common Core Standards, will follow the Core Knowledge Sequence for grades K–6. The MacMillan McGraw-Hill "Imagine It" and "Treasure" series provides resources for diverse learners to rapidly accelerate their reading and writing skills. The program will also provide enrichment resources for excelling students. The high-quality instruction coupled with explicit student practice activities ensures that all scholars will experience high academic achievement and grow into life-long learners despite their original starting point of skills and abilities. Each scholar will develop competency of the Common Core Standards by mastering the five components necessary to be successful readers. The components consist of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension which will provide each scholar the foundation to read and comprehend all genres of text as they apply to the classroom instruction and real world experiences. Kindergarten and first grade are the foundation years when each learner will master phonics, phonemic awareness, word study, high frequency words, fluency and comprehension. With support each will determine meaning of text and identify fiction or non-fiction functional text. Scholars in the second and third grades will focus on high word frequency, comprehension, oral vocabulary, spelling, grammar and written communication. They will determine and communicate text meaning without support. Phonemic awareness and fluency will be present within the instruction to fill learning gaps, however the scholars will build upon the foundation knowledge as they become proficient readers and writers with the ability to comprehend functional text and communicate ideas orally. Emergent writing will develop into concrete ideas with a single theme. The third and fourth grades will identify key ideas and details, read closely to

determine what the text and author explicitly states and be able to make logical inferences from it. They will cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. As the scholars develop mentally and gain academic knowledge they will determine central ideas, themes and author's purpose for writing text. Scholars will analyze the development of plot, character and themes as well as interpret and summarize with ideas and detail. Upon graduation from the sixth grade, Desert Star Academy scholars will independently integrate knowledge and ideas to craft and structure words into complex forms of written text with variety and purpose. Their reading skills will develop and grow in complexity to effectively read and analyze formal pieces of literature and informational text independently with accuracy and proficiency. The RTI model and differentiated instruction will ensure all scholars mastery of the standards and preparation for college bound curriculum in Jr. and Sr. high school.

The "Imagine It" series by McMillan-McGraw Hill will be used for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten in conjunction with Core Knowledge to ensure the young scholars master the foundation. In addition, take home decodable books and activities are provided to make the home connection. Desert Star Academy values the impact of the home connection on the scholar's learning experience. The curriculum equally provides emphasis on phonics and the use of sight words in the early emergent reading process. The "Treasure" series by McMillan-McGraw Hill will provide a strong Language Arts curriculum and develop strong reading and writing skills for the elementary scholars. The program consists of Interactive Read-Aloud and Literature Discussion, Shared and Performance Reading, Writing About Reading, Oral, Visual and Technological Communication and Presentation, Word Study, Phonics, Spelling and Leveled Reading Library to meet all academic levels of the Desert Star Academy scholar. Technology is embedded within each unit of instruction for both the classroom learning and the home connection. Technology creates excitement and engagement among the learners and promotes real world learning and discovery to the classroom. Technology also provides resources and tools for scholars to begin creating their own resources to analyze real-world situations and problems.

Capstone digital library will also provide an additional resource to support the technology priority of the school and bring digital media to the scholars. The library will consist of titles for all grade levels and be a resource for novel and literature study to the upper elementary scholars. The digital library will be accessed from home so that each family may take part in literature education. This home connection aligns with the educational philosophy of Desert Star Academy.

Mathematics

The Common Core Standards will drive the mathematics instruction and build upon the Core Knowledge sequence. Saxon Math will be the primary resource used to cognitively guide instruction with the use of various manipulatives and technology resources to assist each learner in developing a mastery of each standard. The instructional approach consists of the teacher teaching a lesson with a guided instruction approach using research based methods and materials. In the early years the scholars discover and solve math problems in a concrete

approach using a variety of techniques for sorting, counting, and ordering numerals. The math instruction will promote inquiry and discovery of the foundations and the necessities of mathematical concepts and procedures. The first of eight mathematical concepts will be taught (see eight components below). The young scholars will make sense of problems and persevere to solve the problem. The curriculum will move from a concrete approach to pictorial representation and to abstract concepts in the second grade. In the third grade Saxon becomes a textbook approach where scholars learn techniques for solving algebraic thinking and in-depth problem solving. Scholars will apply strategies and justify their reasoning through written and oral presentations. Differentiated instruction remains consistent in all grades; however it is vitally important in the upper grades. The methods will provide an accelerated approach for lower level scholars needing to fill learning gaps while a more complex and real world problem solving approach will be the method used for the excelling scholars at or above grade level. Multiple resources will be added to the instruction to ensure all scholars master the Common Core Standards and develop an in-depth understanding of mathematical concepts and mechanics while gaining automaticity in solving global problems. Desert Star Academy believes each scholar should have a complete understanding and be able to apply past mathematical knowledge to the following eight components:

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively
3. Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others
4. Model with mathematics
5. Use appropriate tools strategically
6. Attend to precision
7. Look for and make use of structure
8. Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning

Science and Social Studies

Literacy in science, history/social studies, and technical subjects will adhere to the Common Core Student Standards and build upon the Core Knowledge Sequence. The Core Knowledge Sequence will provide teachers with high quality instruction resources for science and social studies. The teachers will utilize research-based approaches to support each scholar as they become life-long writer, speaker and listeners and they are able to demonstrate with increasing fullness and regularity these capacities of the literate individual. Desert Star Academy believes each and every scholar should have the opportunity to experience a range of content areas. The Core Knowledge English Language Arts program incorporates multiple content objectives into an integrated learning experience. Teachers will utilize multiple researched based resources to develop grade appropriate lessons allowing each scholar to develop writing, speaking and listening skills. Students are engaged and open-minded readers, writer and listeners. Scholars will collaborate in learning groups as they develop a strong content knowledge and comprehend and critique their work and that of their peers. Technology and digital media will guide the scholars to understand various perspectives and cultures to comprehend and evaluate complex text throughout the Science and Social Studies disciplines. It is the goal for each scholar to become an independent self-directed thinker and learner,

researching topics through multimedia resources and conveying the findings to a variety of audiences though text, oral and written presentations.

Character Education

To remain consistent with the mission to educate productive citizens in the community and develop leaders, Desert Star Academy will teach character acquisition in each classroom. Every scholar will comprehend and demonstrate the six pillars of character from kindergarten through sixth grade. "Character Counts" will be the resource in which each teacher will select themes and topics to teach in the classroom. Banners with the six pillars will be displayed throughout the school reminding scholars and parents of the relevance and importance of each trait. Each scholar will engage in service activities, as a method of developing an understanding of each pillar and demonstrating comprehension and application in the real world. Each scholar will comprehend that every choice made defines the person you are going to be and how each choice will impact the community. Character education will be taught periodically through the writing block. Each month of the school calendar will focus on the six pillars of character traits. Each classroom teacher will incorporate Character Counts lessons throughout various lessons. Desert Star Academy will host a community service activity quarterly that will incorporated the character lessons with the community involvement to ensure each scholar will make the connection of character education, community involvement and making good choices.

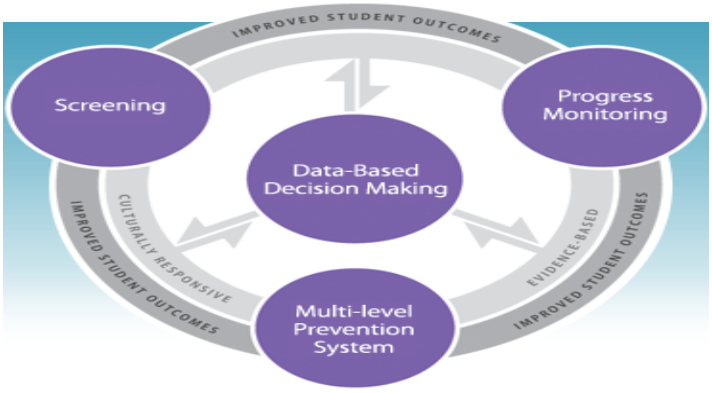
Special Education and English Language Learners

Desert Star Academy's learning community will consist of scholars with a range of learning abilities and special needs. Approximately ten percent of the population will be special needs students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and 8 to 10 percent will be English Language Learners (ELL). The responsibility of identifying, educating and assessing these scholars lies with all members of the Desert Star Academy's Staff. Differentiated instruction will provide a method to motivate, encourage, remediate or enhance the curriculum to ensure all scholars receive the support needed to grow and attain academic and emotional achievement necessary to meet grade level or IEP goals and objectives. In the case of gifted and talented scholars the differentiated instruction will enhance learning strengths ensuring each scholar will continue to grow and achieve academic excellence year after year. Core Knowledge, Imagine It, Treasurers and Saxon Math were selected due to the research based leveled and differentiated resources each offer the classroom teacher and scholars. The programs are comprehensive in content, viable and offer remediation tools and activities as well as promote critical thinking skills for scholars at all levels. It is the responsibility of the teacher to utilize the resources to inspire each scholar to reach their fullest potential. Small group instruction will provide flexibility in grouping scholars based on intellectual ability, learning style, strengths, and achievement needs for each to attain maximum growth. The leveled small group instruction will also provide support and intervention for young scholars to develop and progress with their peers without being qualified for special services.

Methods of Instruction

RTI Model (Response to Intervention)

Desert Star Academy believes scholars learn best when grouped with peers of similar strengths and skills. The RTI model ensures scholars receive high quality, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, assessment, and evidence-based intervention. Comprehensive RTI implementation will contribute to more meaningful identification of learning and behavioral problems, improve instructional quality, and provide all scholars with the best opportunities to succeed in a challenging learning environment. The RTI model includes a support system where low level learners receive more comprehensive support system for longer amounts of time. Desert Star Academy will implement the RTI model as part of the intervention process of identifying scholars with disabilities.



http://www.rtimodel.com

Differentiated Small Group Instruction

To remain consistent with the mission, leveled small group instruction will be the primary method of direct instruction. Small group instruction allows teachers to differentiate the curriculum for children with similar needs or academic levels. The flexible groups allow the educator to instruct at various levels and provide one-on-one instruction where needed for remediation, benchmark or to enhance and teach concepts above grade level for the excelling scholars. Differentiated small group instruction builds confident listeners, speakers and ultimately learners to solve real-world situations and problems. The confidence is built by allowing scholars to speak in a small comfortable group of like peers rather than the entire classroom of peers. Teachers can inspire and challenge learners to reach new levels of academic excellence.

Oral Comprehension Strategies

The whole-group instruction setting will provide lesson overview and activities. The small-group instruction setting is based on the RTI model and children's varied developmental needs and will be the primary mode of lesson delivery. The strategies focus on the core components of effective emerging reading instruction: Speaking and listening, oral vocabulary and comprehension, concepts of print and emerging writing. Based on the cognitive taxonomies

and language structures of researchers including Weiner, Piaget, Vygotsky, Gardner, and Bloom, the strategies integrate visual and tactile support with language use. The concrete support is reduced incrementally at each level until only verbal and print interactions are needed. http://www.breakthroughliteracy.com This method empowers the culturally diverse scholars discussed in section A.2 an avenue to academic excellence.

Cooperative Learning Projects

Cooperative Learning Projects will provide scholars a style of learning that allows learners to work together to achieve a common goal. Scholars will use listening; speaking, reading and writing skills to demonstrate comprehension of an instructional concept or standard. Leaning groups are flexible to produce greater academic achievement, productivity and self-confidence. Cooperative learning groups will meet the needs of the culturally and academically diverse scholars attending Desert Star Academy. All scholars will work collaboratively to solve problems, create presentations and demonstrate comprehension.

Assessment Plan

Desert Star Academy's team of teachers and School Director will meet in July to review a scholar's achievement and assessment records for the purpose of grouping scholars using the RTI model and successful lesson differentiation. Collaboratively planning to improve scholar academic status involves data collection and analysis, creating a plan, implementing the plan, reviewing data and revising the plan for academic excellence. Academic excellence will be achieved only when a comprehensive formative and summative assessment plan is implemented and revised frequently. Each scholar, upon enrolling into Desert Star Academy will present the previous year's AIMS results or the student will be assessed by Desert Star staff to establish a benchmark. If the scholar is below grade level or if the AIMS assessment indicates an "approaching" or "falls far below" in any or all areas, the scholar along with their parents and School Director will create an achievement plan to close the learning gap in two years or less. In contrast, the excelling student will also have a plan to work above grade level to continue the learning growth rate. Desert Star is committed to the following assessment cycle: Assessment- remediation – progression – mastery.

Formative Assessment

Desert Star Academy has selected the Acuity Assessment as the means to assess each scholar continuously throughout the school year. Developmental reading assessments will be administered weekly throughout all grades and a running record will be kept to assess fluency progression. Saxon Math also provides assessments embedded into their resources. Assessments will be analyzed to drive data and determine leveled reading groups. Desert Star Academy believes academic excellence can only be obtained when goals are continuously being achieved and advancing to the next level. Teachers will assess scholars daily to ensure progression to mastery. Assessments include formal and informal observations with rubrics, oral answers, project presentations, formal and informal written assessments, performance

assessments and self-assessments in the upper grades. Assessments will be embedded throughout daily lessons, journal prompts, collaborative learning groups and projects, as well as real-time formative assessments that will drive data conversations. Each teacher will create a notebook recording assessment data and progression toward mastery for each student. Teachers and learning teams will make decisions based on the continuous flow of data to monitor, and revise the instructional program as needed. Determinations will also be made in regards to the learning growth rate for each scholar.

The Acuity Software assessment will be given to all students at the beginning, middle and end of the year to determine base and diagnostic decisions regarding individual instruction. The results will be topics for staff development meetings to determine the effectiveness of lessons and classroom instruction and any additional enhancement or support for each student. The system will produce student reports and resources for interventions and enrichments. Data from this system will drive instruction to dramatically improve achievement outcomes for low level scholars while challenging and empowering excelling scholars to progress further.

Summative Assessments

The summative assessment plan options will be presented by the school director in July and then be developed as a collaborative team to drive, monitor, progress, revise and master the Common Core Standards and various content instruction. The summative assessments plan is vital to ensure all scholars are achieving high levels. All data from the summative assessment will be linked to the formative data results to determine the effectiveness of the instruction and to what degree the scholars are progressing toward mastering the standards. Results of the data will provide critical information to the school director to be used for staff development, for support resources and supplemental services to motivate support and encourage the entire learning community to achieve school, professional and scholar goals.