A.1 Educational Philosophy

a) Approach to Improving Pupil Achievement

The purpose of establishing the New America School-Phoenix (NAS-Phoenix) is to provide excellent learning opportunities that improve academic achievement for immigrants, English Language Learners (ELL) and academically underserved students in an environment sensitive to their needs. In short, NAS-Phoenix will exist to close the achievement gap which currently exists among Phoenix area high school students (see section A.2. Target Population). While this goal will be challenging, as the McKinsey Report on Education (2009)[1] posits, it is certainly achievable:

> Over the past 35 years… national aggregate achievement has generally increased. And while a large racial achievement gap remains, it has narrowed by about one-third over the past 30 or 40 years. In the past 15 years, moreover, many states, such as New Jersey, have managed to shrink their racial achievement gaps to some extent... The Union City, New Jersey, district, for example, has shown remarkable progress, which may offer lessons for reformers nationally. New York City, the country's largest district, has shown since 2003 that the traditionally lowest-achieving group, poor black students, can improve meaningfully.

NAS will bring to Phoenix those research-based best practices that have closed the achievement gap in its Colorado and New Mexico schools for immigrants, English Language Learners, and academically underserved students.

NAS-Phoenix recognizes that if students are to succeed in an increasingly complex and global society, they must be equipped to pursue some form of education beyond high school. In Arizona, 85% of above-median wage jobs will require some form of post-secondary education. However, only half of Arizona's high school graduates are qualified to enroll in a state university; of those who enroll in community college, 60% will require remediation.[2] The purpose of NAS-Phoenix is to change that statistic and deliver a world-class education to prepare its students for success.

Mission

The mission of The New America School-Phoenix (NAS-Phoenix) is to empower immigrants, English Language Learners and academically underserved students with the educational tools and support they need to maximize their potential, succeed, and live the American dream.

Vision

NAS-Phoenix will embrace student diversity; develop the skills students need to make responsible choices; teach the 21st century skills students need to succeed academically, personally, and professionally; empower students with the knowledge and confidence necessary to transfer academic knowledge to the real world; and provide English language competency to assure student success.

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[1] http://mckinseyonsociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/achievement_gap_report.pdf
[2] Source: Expect More Arizona

Belief statements

- We believe all students are responsible for the choices they make, and we will help our students develop skills to make responsible choices
- We believe in students' individuality and celebrate the diversity they bring to our school
- We believe all students can learn to respect one another and themselves and transfer this respect to their personal and professional lives
- We believe that students should understand the practical purposes of what they are learning, and understand how to apply their knowledge and skills throughout their lives

Guided by these beliefs, NAS-Phoenix will create an accessible program that allows non-traditional students the opportunity to grow academically in a challenging and supportive environment. Using best practices, we will empower students to acquire the language skills, knowledge and confidence necessary to be productive members of their community. NAS-Phoenix shares best-practices in secondary school reforms, with a common focus on: key, research-based goals and an academic mission; small personalized learning environments; respect and responsibility among students, among faculty, and between students, and faculty; time for staff collaboration and for including the wider community in the education partnership; technology as a tool for designing and delivering engaging, imaginative curricula; and, rigorous academic standards.

Envisioned as an innovative new option for underserved, low-income, and ELL students, NAS-Phoenix will provide opportunities for urban youth to explore and pursue civic, community, cultural, and career aspirations and to prepare themselves for success after high school in a supportive and academically challenging environment. Our student-centered philosophy reflects the school's unwavering commitment to high expectations for everyone in our learning community, standards of academic excellence, and to supporting students to be 'future-ready' in an increasingly global, competitive, and diverse world.

NAS-Phoenix also recognizes that to foster student success, in addition to the academic skills the school will cultivate, we also need to help students gain the crucial life skills necessary to flourish in the broader society. These skills include how to be effective in groups, how to manage anger, how to problem-solve and how to communicate effectively. The school will explicitly teach these life skills to at-risk youth through character building programs such as Restorative Justice and Discovery. NAS-Phoenix also understands that students who are new to this country often suffer culture shock and experience difficulty adjusting to living in the United States. As such, NAS does more than just teach the core competencies required for high school success; we support and instruct students who want to learn about American life and culture. To engender a sense of community involvement and civic responsibility, NAS requires community service as a condition of graduation.

b) Fundamental Concepts

Five keys fundamental to the school's success underpin everything NAS-Phoenix does, from lesson and outcome design to teacher professional development to supporting students as they adjust to new ways of life. These keys will guide our curriculum alignment to the Arizona standards and benchmarks:

1. NAS-Phoenix students will be engaged in challenging, project and theme based curriculum to develop academic concepts leading to English acquisition.
2. NAS-Phoenix teachers will draw on students' backgrounds—their experiences, cultures, interests, and languages—to support all social and academic content.

3. NAS-Phoenix teachers will organize collaborative activities and scaffold instruction to build students' academic English proficiency. Teachers will be trained in Sheltered English Instruction and employ active learning techniques.
4. NAS-Phoenix teachers will create a culture and climate where confident students will value school and themselves as successful learners.
5. NAS-Phoenix teachers will have an Arizona teaching license[3] with an ESL endorsement.

c) Rationale and Experience

NAS-Phoenix educational concepts are inspired by the teaching and learning model of the International Charter High School at LaGuardia Community College in New York City. The founding principal, Yvonne Watterson, and Governing Council member, Amanda Patrie, have visited the school and instituted many of its principles and practices to create the now highly performing, "A" ranked GateWay Early College High School in Phoenix.[4] International Charter High School, in operation for more than 20 years, is composed entirely of immigrants and has proven its effectiveness through impressive rates of attendance, graduation, and post-graduation enrollment.[5]

To equip all students with the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural skills necessary for success at and beyond high school or the world of work, NAS-Phoenix will design and implement instructional practices with an unwavering commitment to the following principles also adopted by International Charter High School:

- Limited English proficient students require the ability to understand, speak, read and write English with near-native fluency to realize their full potential within an English-speaking society
- In an increasingly interdependent world, fluency in a language other than English must be viewed as a resource for the student, the school and the society
- Language skills are most effectively learned in context and emerge most naturally in purposeful, language-rich interdisciplinary study
- The most successful educational programs are those that emphasize high expectations coupled with effective support systems
- Individuals learn best from each other in heterogeneous, collaborative groupings
- Career oriented internships facilitate language acquisition as well as contribute a significant service to the community
- The most effective instruction takes place when teachers actively participate in the school decision-making process, including instructional program design, curriculum development and materials selection[6]

The NAS-Phoenix philosophy allows students to identify their own 'end-of-unit' learning outcomes. Teachers use these outcomes to design lessons and activities within a meaningful and personalized educational plan.

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[3] NAS-Phoenix recognizes that Highly Qualified teachers are also permitted to teach at Arizona charter schools. However, NAS-Phoenix will give preference to those candidates that are licensed in Arizona.
[4] Newsweek ranks GateWay as America's 6th top high school for low-income students (http://www.gatewaycc.edu/press-room/gateway-early-college-high-school-ranked-6th-nation)
[5] www.lagcc.cuny.edu
[6] The International High School at LaGuardia Community College

The school's mission and philosophy are reflected in its daily practices. To that end, a Newcomer Center puts into practice the concepts fundamental to the school's program of instruction: students with little or no English language skills need extra support as they adjust to a new life and language in a new country. The Center offers self-contained support for those students who speak little or no English, and will provide targeted intensive language and cultural support to students who need it most. Newcomers spend up to four hours a day in a sheltered classroom designed to jump-start their English learning. This effective and natural English Language Acquisition immersion also allows them to continue to develop subject-matter knowledge and skills as they acquire English. The Center also provides Newcomers with needed support as they go through culture shock and the adjustments involved in living in a new country and speaking a new language.

Students will receive appropriate support in the Center based on data that includes: PHLOTE survey, AZELLA test scores, age, and participation in formal education. Once students are ready, as set forth in Arizona law[7], they transition into English Language Acquisition (ELA) II and regular language arts courses, as well as regular content courses such as history, science, and math.

In developing the NAS model for instruction, considerable work was done in examining best practices for our target population. Some research-based best practices can be gleaned from the work of Carolyn Derby who identifies similar effective instructional practices for teaching English Language Learners. Also the work of August and Hakuta (1977) reviewed many studies of effective schooling for ELL. Many of these concepts have been implemented in the practices described above.

The overall New America School philosophical approach to improving pupil achievement in our target population has been effective at other NAS schools, which serve a similar population. NAS utilizes the nationally recognized Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA) Virtual Comparison Group (VCG) analysis to gauge our relative performance as a school system. Rather than compare one school to another, VCGs compare similar students. To clarify, each NAS student is categorized by his or her demographic characteristics and fall Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) score. NWEA then compares each NAS student's individual growth—fall to spring—to students across the country who are similar demographically and at a similar beginning academic level. VCG data released by NWEA in July 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014[8] show that NAS students perform substantially better than their Virtual Comparison Group:

- NAS students achieve greater growth than similar students at other schools: the NAS student population advance more grade levels fall to spring than demographically similar students who start the year at the same academic level
- A greater percentage of students achieve growth at NAS than similar students. To clarify, if 10 NAS students and 10 similar random students were tested, a greater number of the ten NAS students would grow academically than the 10 similar students
- NAS students achieve greater growth than similar students regardless of the students' skill levels upon entering NAS. Both the students entering NAS with the lowest skill levels and the students at higher skill levels exhibit greater growth than similar students
- On average, *students in every subject at every NAS Colorado campus grew academically*

[7] ADE website

[8] Data only available for three NAS Colorado schools. 2011 was the first year NWEA conducted a VCG analysis of NAS.