A.1 Educational Philosophy

Open Doors Community School's (ODCS) mission, vision and values guide the philosophy of the school and are rooted in the mission and programs of Arizona Youth Partnership (AzYP), the applicant's parent organization. The mission and values of Open Doors Community School are outlined below and represent the culmination of 20 years of prevention education and academic success programs delivered by AzYP in rural and underserved communities throughout Arizona. The approach includes the Community Schools model and the Core Knowledge Sequence as the basis for program of instruction. The methods of instruction include Essential Elements of Instruction and cross-curricular thematic units and values that align with the mission of AzYP.

Mission and Values

Mission Statement: Open Doors Community School equips students for improved academic achievement as they unlock their promise through an integrated focus on academics, life preparation skills and family/community engagement.

We value students and their ability to make choices for success; both academically and for all aspects of life. Students will receive daily reinforcement in the classroom and after school, using Positive Action Curriculum, a proven evidence-based program for improving academics, behavior and character.

We value a partnership with students, families, educators and the community that offers resources for **student success** to open doors to a healthy, positive and enriched educational experience.

We value effective communication skills for students. Open Doors Community School (ODCS) students will learn to communicate with purpose.

We value teamwork as a blueprint for strategy, communication, leadership and cooperation, which will contribute **to student success** inside and outside of the classroom.

We value instructional methods that apply the Core Knowledge Sequence. The Core Knowledge Sequence is based on the simple idea that knowledge builds on knowledge. It includes a body of lasting knowledge and skills that will support great reading comprehension, critical thinking and academic success.

We value teachers who ensure student success through creative and effective instruction and who will passionately join our efforts to strengthen families and communities. Open Doors Community School teachers will be dedicated to the school mission and open to learning and growth so that their professional knowledge contributes to a positive and successful outcome for all students. ODCS teachers will be equipped to use student achievement data to direct their classroom instruction and remediation to promote student growth and success. ODCS teachers will be professional decision makers trained in the Core Knowledge Sequence.

Open Doors Community School will offer students an extended school day for remediation, pro-social involvement, and constructive life success programs using Positive Action Curriculum.

Positive Action Curriculum is a proven evidence-based program for improving academics, behavior and character already utilized by AzYP staff. Partnering with Marana Health Center, Marana Community Food Bank, and established AzYP prevention programs, students will have access to basic needs such as food, medical care, and other preventative programs that will empower, support and strengthen at risk students and their families from this rural, low economic area.

Community Schools Model

ODCS philosophical approach is based in the Community Schools Model. This model has shown to be effective with the target population of rural, low income students. A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities.

The Community School Model is based on the following principles:

- *Foster strong partnerships*—Partners share their resources and expertise and work together to design community schools and make them work.
- *Share accountability for results*—Clear, mutually agreed-upon results drive the work of community schools. Data helps partners measure progress toward results. Agreements enable them to hold each other accountable and move beyond "turf battles."
- *Set high expectations for all*—Community schools are organized to support learning. Children, youth and adults are expected to learn at high standards and be contributing members of their community.
- *Build on the community's strengths*—Community schools marshal the assets of the entire community -- including the people who live and work there, local organizations, and the school.
- *Embrace diversity*—Community schools know their communities. They work to develop respect and a strong, positive identity for people of diverse backgrounds and are committed to the welfare of the whole community (Coalition for Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership, 2011).

Program of Instruction Overview

The program of instruction at Open Doors Community School will use the Core Knowledge Sequence to plan instructional core content. The Core Knowledge Sequence aligns with the Common Core Standards which will be the basis for the curriculum at ODCS. The program of instuction will include the Essential Elements of Instruction, and cross-curricular thematic units. Teachers will use the Essential Elements of Instruction to plan lessons. The Core Knowledge Sequence will help teachers plan the thematic units. ODCS methods of instruction line up with our school values: improved student success, teamwork, communication, merged disciplines, data driven decision making, and community partnership.

Rationale for Approach and Research

The approach of ODCS will support the needs of the proposed target population. Economically disadvantaged students such as the students in rural Marana are more likely to have gaps in basic content knowledge needed to succeed in academics. The Core Knowledge and thematic units

have been shown to close the learning gaps for disadvantaged students. According to an article about enhancing interdiciplinary instruction in general education, the fundamental characteristics of thematic unit instruction work for all students (Gardner, Wissick, Schweder, Canter, 2003). In the Core Knowledge Sequence, disadvantaged children, like all children, are exposed to a coherent core of challenging, interesting knowledge. This provides a foundation for later learning, but also makes up the common ground for communication in our diverse society. As the core of Open Doors Community School's curriculum, it is intended to provide a coherent, content specific foundation of learning. It was developed to allow flexibility to meet local needs which makes it a fit for the rural, low income population that ODCS will target.

The Community Schools Model is research-based. Evaluations of twenty initiatives nationwide confirm that community schools have a positive impact on what matters most to students, parents, communities and schools. A recent coalition research brief, concludes that:

- Student learning improves
- Student attendance improves
- Students have improved behavior and youth development
- Parent and family participation – in their children's education and in the school – increases
- Families have more opportunities and support in caring for and helping to educate their children, and in contributing to their community.

Community Schools generate other positive outcomes as well. Improved safety and security, increased community pride, stronger relationships between school and community, and greater utilization of schools and other public services and facilities all reflect the broader "community-building" role of community schools. Community schools and their students come to be seen as valued resources, and communities feel a great stake in and accountability for student success (Coalition for Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership, 2011).

The Core Knowledge Sequence is a research-based curriculum that was created by the Core Knowledge Foundation in 1986. The Core Knowledge sequence benefits the student as well as parents and the community. It has been shown to enhance accountability and parental engagement by providing a clear outline of what children are expected to learn in school and provides a common ground for communication–in school and in life. This directly relates to the values and mission of ODCS as well as the community schools model.

Research studies have showed the effectiveness Core Knowledge in several locations throughout the United States including Oklahoma City, Colorado, Virginia, and Maryland. Each of these studies showed that Core Knowledge increased test scores, vocabulary, increased student engagement and showed high teacher satisfaction (Abele, Iver, Stringfield, McHugh, 2000).

In addition to test results in Core Knowledge schools, research has shown that students with more cultural literacy tend to do better in school. Two distinguishing features of Core Knowledge are that it attempts to lay out a core curriculum that can provide common ground for all students, and that it insists on introducing academic subjects and rich content in the early grades. International evidence suggests that there are good reasons for both of these policies.

Experience of the Parent Organization

Arizona Youth Partnership has a 20 year history of implementing researched based, community based programs and is uniquely equipped to implement the Community School Model that addresses barriers to learning faced by students and their families. AzYP, founded in 1990 as Pima Youth Partnership, has a successful history of managing multi-year federal, state, and local grants and contracts. These include grants from the Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Administration of Children and Families, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), and Center for Mental Health Services. AzYP has administered eight (8) federal prevention grants that include family strengthening, Drug Free Communities, Community Based Abstinence Education, Healthy Marriages, community development, youth violence prevention, abstinence-based education, and life skills in 23 rural communities across 9 counties in Arizona.