*Changing Lives Through the Power of Education*

## Genesis Academy History – Addressing a Community Need

Genesis Academy, an alternative charter high school*, was originally developed by Phoenix College in 1991 to serve as a dropout prevention and college bridge program. We focused then, as we do to this day, on the academic recovery and education of those disenfranchised youth at the highest-risk of educational failure.

One of the most fundamental and early lessons learned was simply that a main cause effecting unsuccessful attempts at persevering in school, particularly high school, was poverty. Added to this economic disadvantage is the fact that most of these students had been socially promoted throughout their entire grade school careers. Marginalized both economically and academically, many potentially successful students were left bereft of confidence and vulnerable to the negative social and cultural influences that permeate their neighborhoods. We discovered that a majority of these young people, regardless of age or the number of credits earned at their former schools, lacked discipline, effective work ethics, and even the basic skills of an average 5th grader. This dangerous mix created a formidable problem for our community and an instructional challenge for our teachers. In the early '90s, there were very few stewards willing to address this problem. Genesis Academy applied for and was granted a charter in December of 1996. We have served well over four thousand families and children since then.

## The Genesis Academy Mission – Dedicated to Providing a New Beginning for Youth

*Genesis Academy serves high-risk and out-of-school youth by offering them a rigorous academic experience tailored to their individual needs. Genesis empowers its students to enter college or the work force with the skills, behaviors, and attitudes necessary to become lifelong learners and contributing community members.*

From the data acquired over the past five years, we have been able to profile each student's academic and tutorial needs. By applying the strategies outlined within this narrative, we have achieved major success: 90% of our graduates are the first in their families to attend

* See Appendix A

college; 78% of our graduates begin a post secondary career after earning their diplomas; 55% of our students are the first in their families to graduate from high school. Another finding from our collected data reveals that every student—regardless of past infractions, previous bouts of sporadic attendance, or lack of credits upon enrollment—who achieves twenty months of uninterrupted, consecutive attendance will graduate. Strategies that effect this change in student behavior and academic competency are continually evaluated and replicated.

## Efforts Conducted by Genesis Academy in the Past Five Years to Improve Pupil Achievement

Genesis Academy continues to battle the obstacles of dropout prevention and recovery. During the past five years, Genesis has become even more diligent in our implementation of strategies and programs to improve the educational success of our high-risk student population. We have lowered our entry-level age from 16 years to 14 in order to prevent end-of-eighth-grade dropouts. Five year ago we reinvigorated a program of academic intervention and probation that counsels and tutors students at the fringes of academic failure. We have constantly reassessed the programs and strategies and collected data in order to provide a more incisive yet comprehensive approach to secondary education for the high-risk student population. Though our efforts have met with commendable success, we realize there is still room for improvement. This fall (August of 2011), we will implement the Galileo assessment instrument. Not only will this particular testing model enable us to assess a student's entry grade level, but Galileo also provides a measure that determines specific areas of academic need. We will also administer this assessment three times during the academic year. The outcome as envisioned will help each instructor design a curriculum more responsive to the requirements of each student.

**Bolstering Math:** Teacher training is a fundamental aspect of any attempt to bolster our students' performance in math. Three years ago we successfully trained an instructor in Middle Grades math (AEPA/ADE certified), and under the supervision of a highly qualified math instructor, we implemented a program of targeted assistance in class and one-on-one tutorial assistance after school. In order to further this emphasis on basic math tutorial, we hired a second instructor who is also qualified in Middle Grades math instruction (also AEPA/ADE certified) and have expanded our after-school tutoring program. Enrollment in the after-school tutoring program has been and will continue to be data-driven and will be mandatory for all full-academic-year (FAY) students. Although AIMS scores have not directly reflected grade-level

achievement, the result has been that according to our formative and summative assessments, grade-level improvement has consistently exceeded the calendar grade level—most recently measured at 44% above the chronological scale (1.44 grade level improvement in one academic year).

**Bolstering Reading**: One of our language arts instructors began work in 2009 toward a reading endorsement. In January 2011, we hired another language arts instructor who is also pursuing certification in reading endorsement. Both instructors are progressing toward certification and both are currently waiting for the curriculum to be updated this July when both will resume study. Our after-school reading program has helped to increase our average independent reading level by over three grade levels in one calendar year (below 6$^{th}$ grade level to over 8$^{th}$ grade level). AIMS scores have not yet reflected this achievement, but analysis of a growth model of under-credited juniors and seniors (as well as fifth and sixth year seniors) indicates that academic achievement is evident and viable and is generally—and statistically—occurring at a greater pace than the expected pace of a single academic year.

**General Augmentation:** During the past five years, we have implemented a standards-based AIMS preparation program (both in-class and after school) that targets deficiencies specific to the individual student. All teachers now attend weekly staffing meetings in which student performance data is reviewed and appropriate strategies are enacted in order to accommodate the specific requirement of each failing student (whether failing one class or more). During these data review meetings, teachers discuss strategies for working with individual students for both academic and managerial improvement. Other collaborative efforts include:

- Teachers identify and prioritize objectives, concepts, and key vocabulary from the Standards and implement them in their curriculum.
- Math and Reading remediation are provided in all core and elective credit courses.
- Response to Intervention strategies are used for all instruction (in particular Math and Reading).
- Instructional materials are selected to be appropriate for student reading levels.

In order to better monitor and integrate Arizona Standards into course curriculum, we have provided a template for weekly lesson plans that all teachers use. Lesson plans are reviewed weekly to ensure that both the standards and curriculum alignment follow appropriate guidelines. Formal classroom observations are conducted twice per Block (nine-week term), but informal observations occur daily and in every class. Further efforts of integration include:

- Math teachers meet regularly to evaluate and analyze student achievement data.
- All faculty have been trained and meet regularly to evaluate student Reading data.

Over the past five years, we have intensified our efforts for monitoring and documenting student proficiency. At the point of enrollment, at the beginning of each fall term, and at the end of each school year all students are given the Math-Level Indicator and Reading-Level Indicator (Pearson) exams. Teachers also analyze weekly assessment results in order to develop accurate and individualized student plans. Often these plans are better realized in after-school, individual tutoring sessions. Further targeting the specific needs of each student, the instructional and advisory staff analyzes AIMS test results for both course offerings and student placement. As a result of these efforts, we are now ready to use Galileo benchmark testing for even more specificity.

Strategies that are used on an individual basis include:

- Academic Probation
- Parent Conferences
- After-School and Pull-Out Tutoring
- Response to Intervention
- Advisor Interventions
- Staffings (Data review teams)

Teachers meet regularly to discuss strategies to improve student academic performance. On alternate weeks, teachers also meet to participate in scheduled professional development, which includes such training as research-based classroom management skills and curriculum mapping. All advisory and instructional staff are also required to attend one

professional development conference, class, or workshop in their core subject area and one general education course, training, or workshop during each academic year.

## Processes for Conducting Analysis of Relevant Achievement Data

Over the past five years, Genesis Academy has vigorously researched and implemented various assessment tools in order to effect strategies and action steps that will facilitate a more viable and successful student academic achievement profile. We have analyzed AIMS data as it applies both school-wide and individually. Grade-level indicator exams and placement assessments have been expanded during the past five years, and in the future these placement indicators will also include the Galileo assessment tool.

We continue to research statewide and national demographics as they apply to student achievement and graduation rates, and we have appropriated that information as it applies to our clientele. We have employed advisory interviews to collect data on factors affecting attendance, and we have incorporated counseling interventions to assess the depth and pervasiveness of substance abuse and other risk-taking behaviors.

Beginning January 2011, we analyzed growth model data—information heretofore unavailable to secondary schools. While currently limited in scope, as the years progress the data will eventually reveal an even greater and clearer perspective on areas of need and strategies that will facilitate more accurate action steps toward improving student achievement. Another aspect of the process of data analysis is the information garnered at the time of enrollment. Beyond assessment exams, each student is interviewed by the advisor and registrar in order to determine the best course of instruction.

### Findings from the Data Analysis:

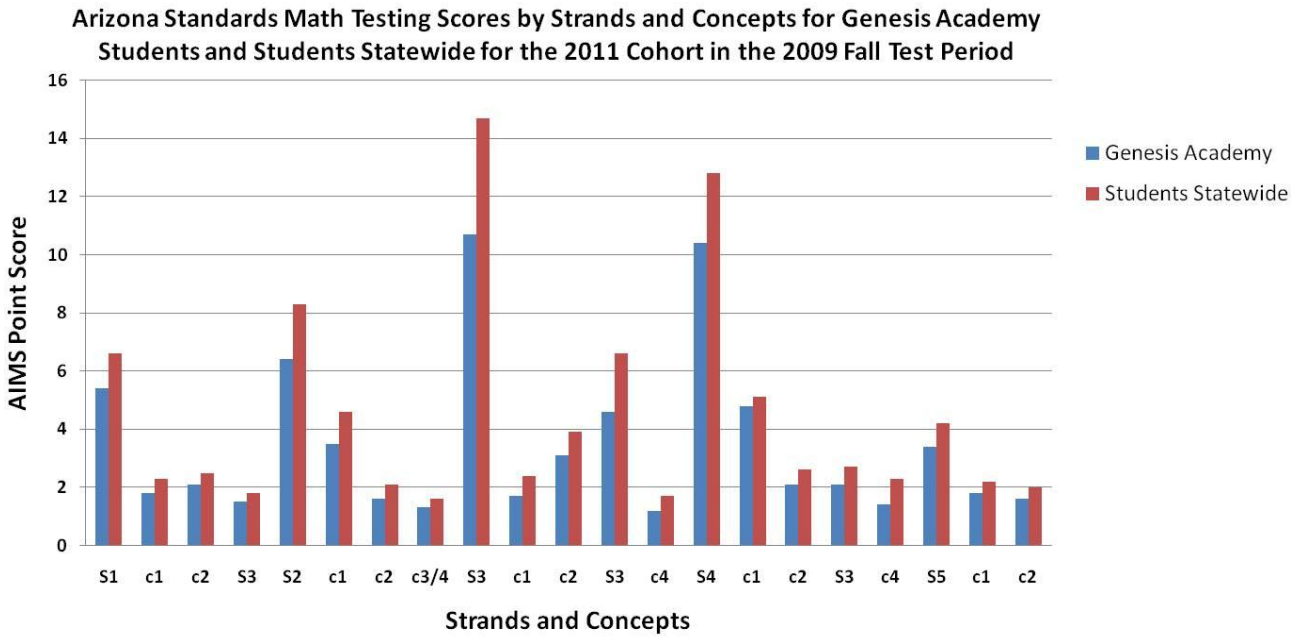
We have found that according to the Arizona State Standards, in most Strand and Concept areas our 2$^{nd}$, 3$^{rd}$, and 4$^{th}$ year seniors did much better than their cohort counterparts statewide; however, entry data identifies a student body that is severely behind grade-level upon enrollment. Not only do most entry assessments indicate a significant degree of social promotion, but most enrollees are under-credited for their cohort level as well. The average student enters below the fifth grade level in both math and reading. Other data analysis reveals:

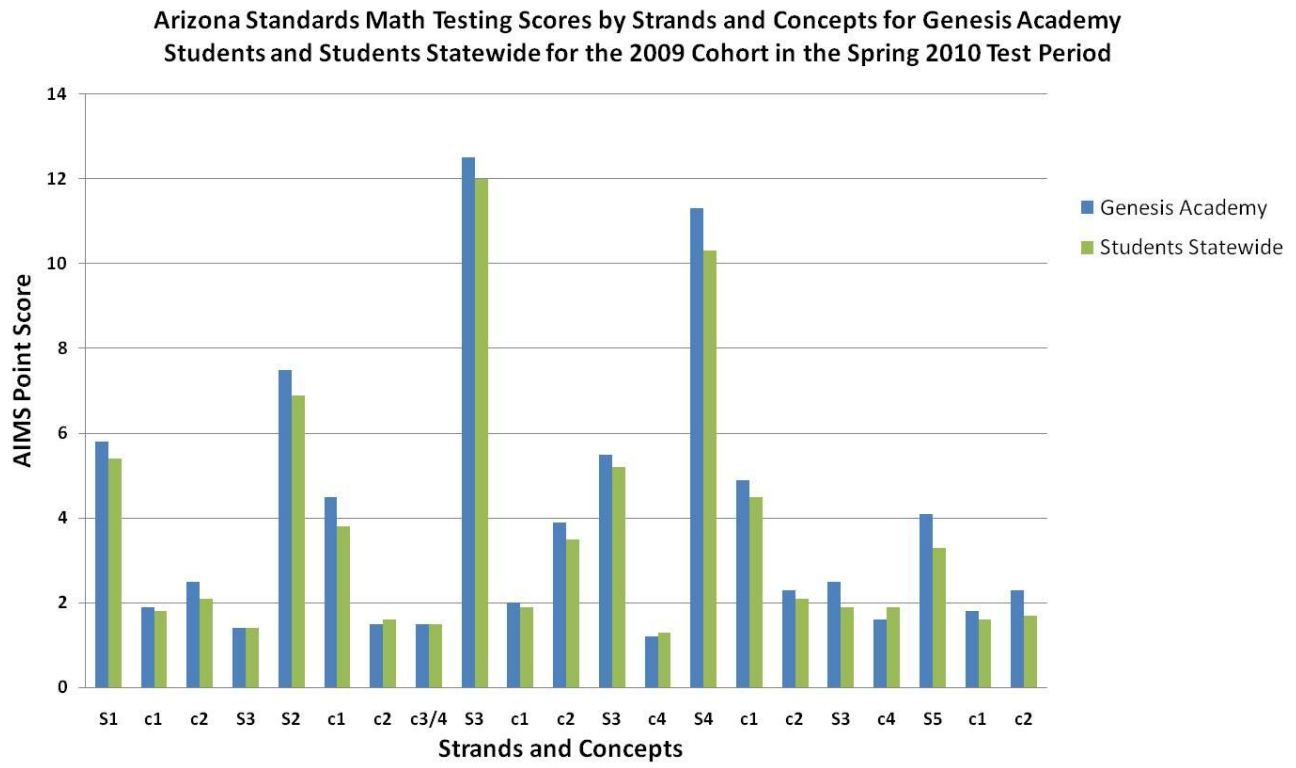
- 33% of the students enrolled at Genesis Academy have been (or are) involved with gangs and/or the juvenile justice system.
- 24% of our students work an average of 32 hours per week.
- 90% of our students reside in homes at or below the poverty level.
- 25% of our students were expelled from their former schools.
- 90% of our students are behind in academic credits upon entry.
- 81% of our student body is Hispanic—twice the national average, one-and-a-half times the state average, and according to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education statistics (2010), the ethnic group with the highest dropout rate in the nation.

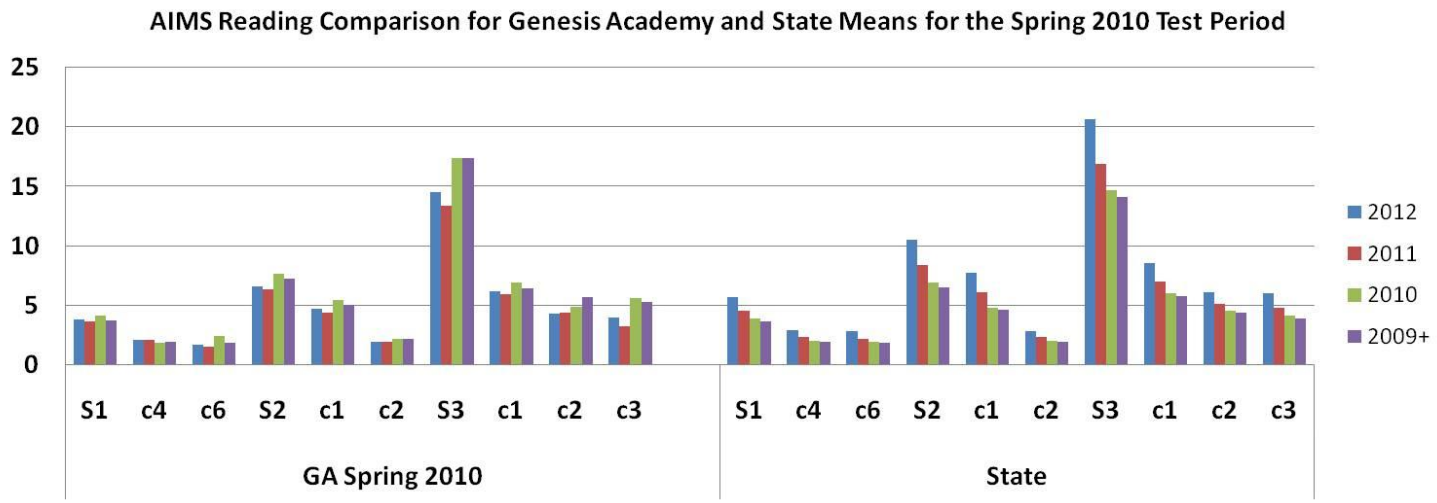
Clearly the data acquired over the past five years has enabled us to profile each student according to individual academic and tutorial needs. By applying the strategies outlined above, we have attained a significant level of success. Analysis of the data has also disclosed a need for greater and more intensive intervention. We will use the strategies that have worked in the past, but we will add to these additional strategies such as the Galileo Assessment in order to gauge the academic needs of each student with even greater accuracy and specificity than we do now.

## The Data

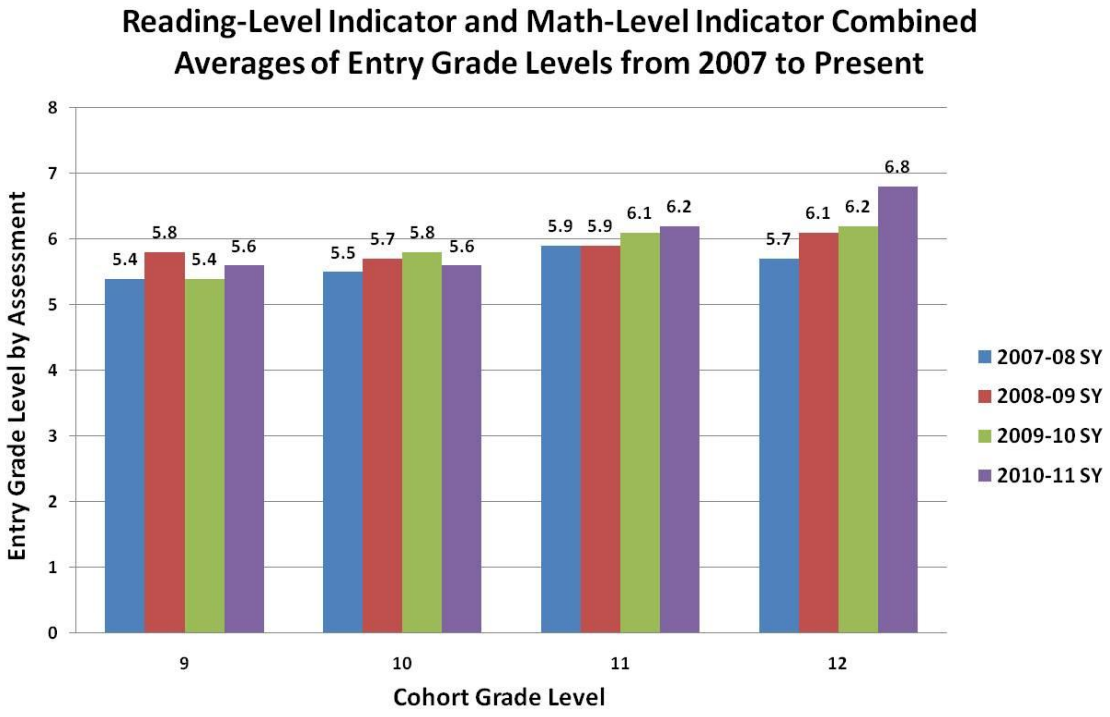
As mentioned above, our older students tend to outscore their peers statewide. The first of the graphs below compares the AIMS test scores of 10$^{th}$ graders at Genesis Academy and 10$^{th}$ graders statewide. Evident from the disparity is the confirmation of the fact that our students enter under-credited and far below grade level in reading and math. However, as exemplified in the second graph, our 5$^{th}$ or 6$^{th}$ year seniors, who were once behind their peers statewide, now exceed them in nearly every category.


Arizona Standards Math Testing Scores by Strands and Concepts for Genesis Academy Students and Students Statewide for the 2011 Cohort in the 2009 Fall Test Period
AIMS Point Score
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
16
S1 c1 c2 S3 S2 c1 c2 c3/4 S3 c1 c2 S3 c4 S4 c1 c2 S3 c4 S5 c1 c2
Strands and Concepts
Genesis Academy
Students Statewide

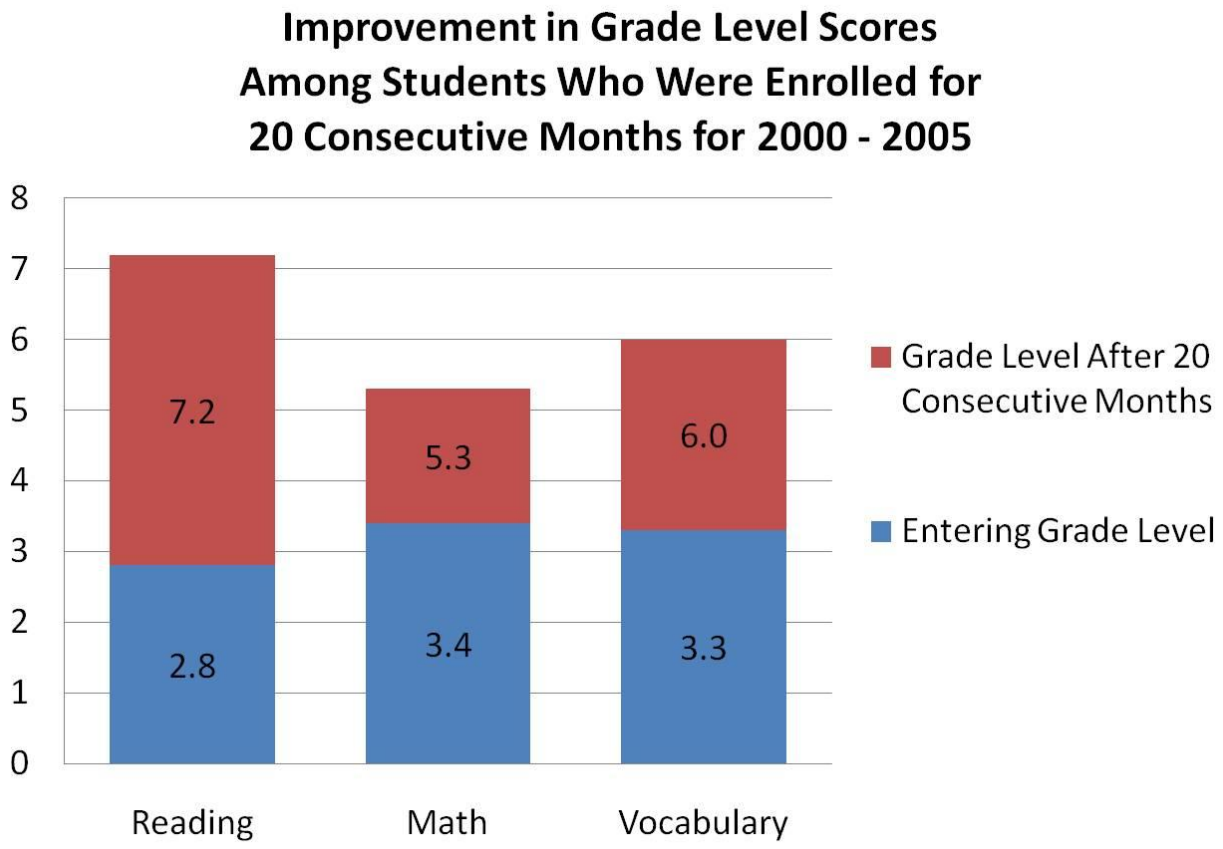

Arizona Standards Math Testing Scores by Strands and Concepts for Genesis Academy Students and Students Statewide for the 2009 Cohort in the Spring 2010 Test Period
AIMS Point Score
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
S1 c1 c2 S3 S2 c1 c2 c3/4 S3 c1 c2 S3 c4 S4 c1 c2 S3 c4 S5 c1 c2
Strands and Concepts
Genesis Academy
Students Statewide



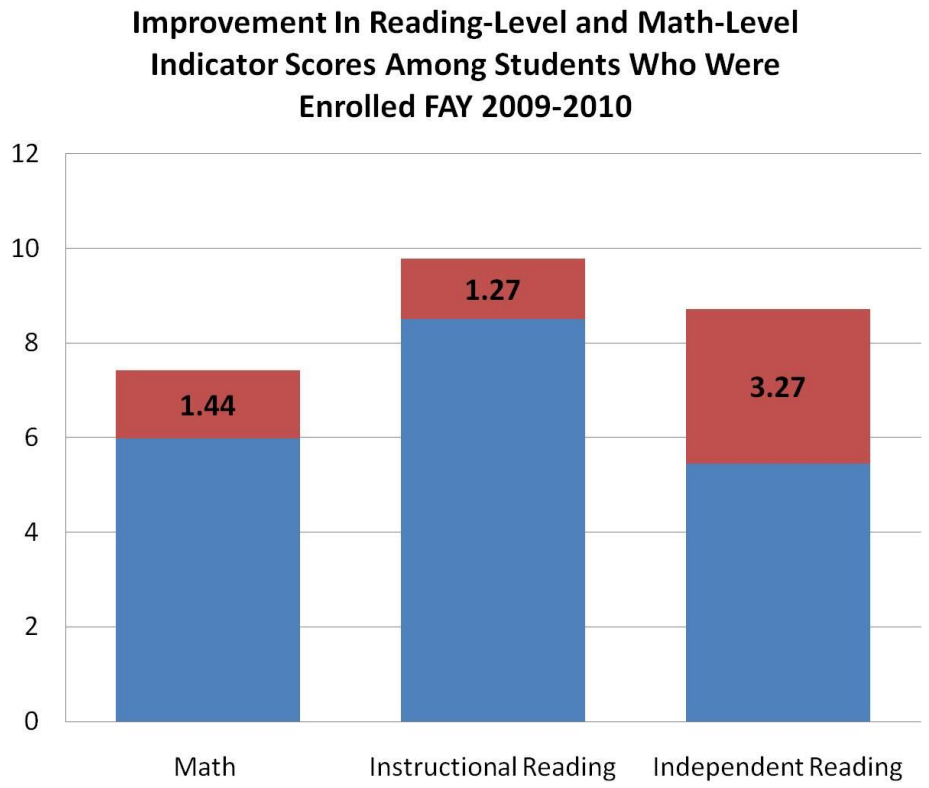

Although many students enter at reading levels in the 3rd and 4th grade range, the average entry level as determined by the Reading-Level Indicator assessment reveals that most students enroll—at every grade level—far below a 9th grade level in reading. The graph below displays the average entry level in reading for all cohorts over the past four school years (SY).



As mentioned in the narrative, a student who achieves a record of twenty-months consecutive enrollment not only graduates but also improves significantly in all areas of academic standing. The graph below indicates entry grade levels in reading, math, and vocabulary for students who achieved the 20-month threshold.



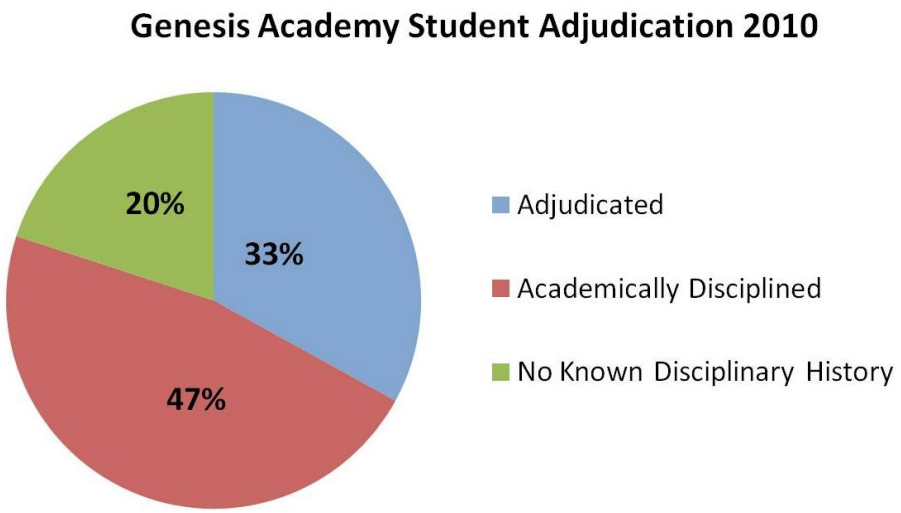
Even before the 20-month threshold is met, on average students improve in reading and math well beyond the expected one-year of academic growth. The graph below demonstrates the degree of academic growth of students who were enrolled without interruption for one Full Academic Year (FAY) during the 2009-2010 school term.

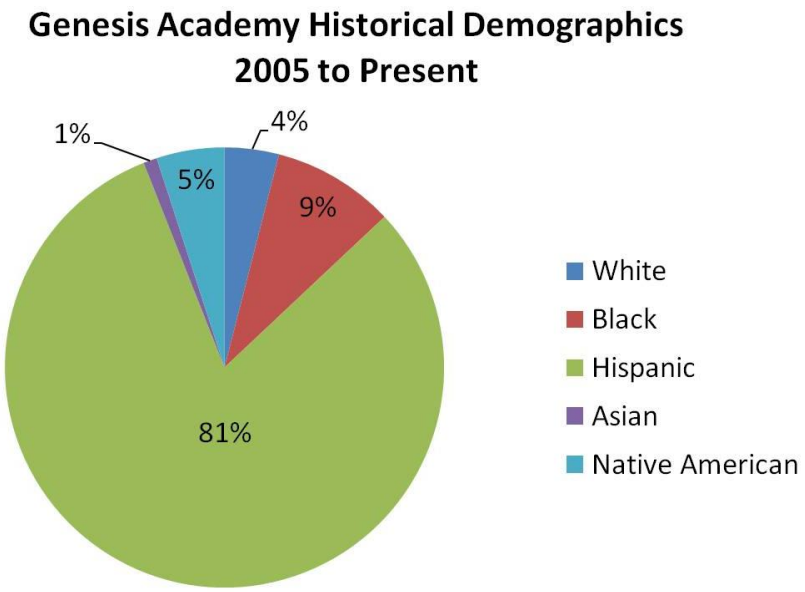



## Demographic data analysis

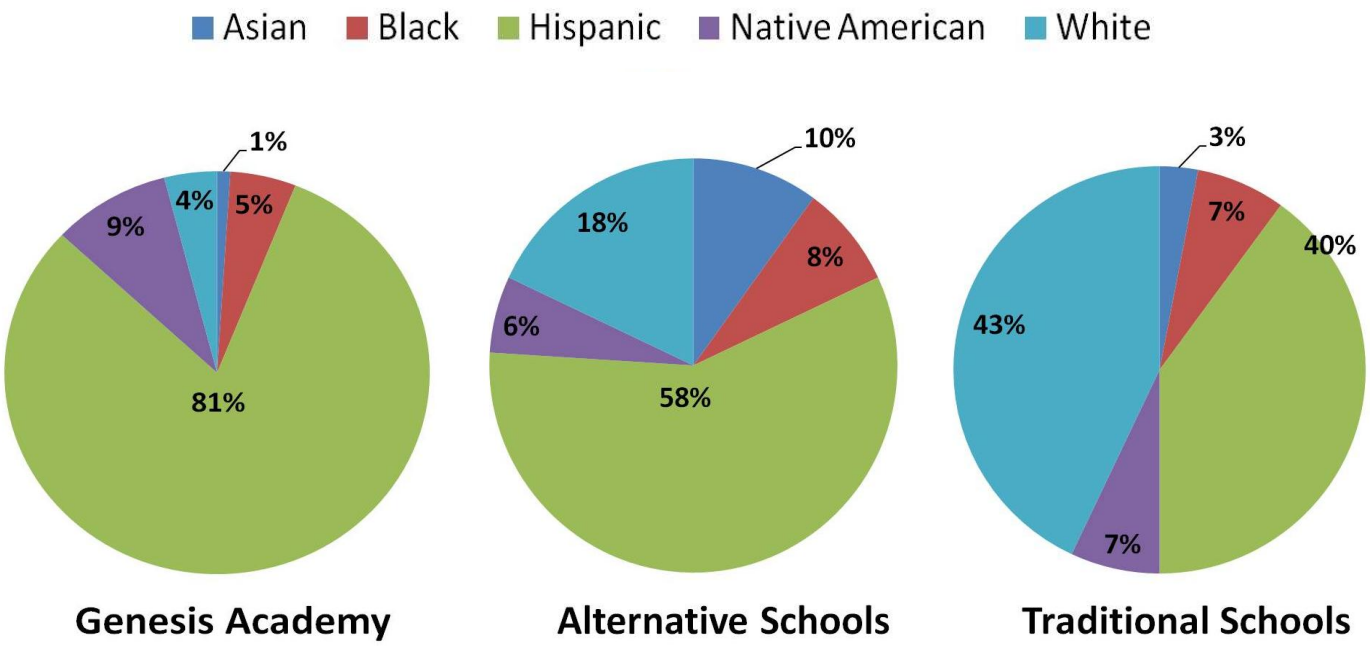
Significant among the data collected over the past five years is the profile of the students who have enrolled at Genesis Academy and the contrast between the demographics of our school and other high schools statewide and nationally, both traditional and alternative. The first graph below separates our student body by factors of adjudication and known disciplinary history. Aside general ethnic distinctions, young persons adjudicated are those students most at risk of dropping out of the academic system. The following graphs depict the demographics of Genesis Academy, other alternative high schools, and traditional high schools statewide. Clearly the student body attending Genesis Academy represents one of the most at-risk student populations enrolled at any secondary institution. This realization should

underscore the success of the strategies that we have enacted, but this observation should also emphasize the need for constant critical review and implementation of more intensive strategies in the future.



**Demographic Comparison of Math AIMS Testers**
**Spring 2010**




- **Response to Intervention**

Genesis Academy has historically practiced a comprehensive program of Response To Intervention (RTI). As clearly demonstrated, not only has analysis of our demographics consistently revealed a student profile considerably different than most traditional high schools in our area but also significantly different than most other alternative high schools as well.

Over the past five years, the instructional staff at Genesis Academy has met bi-weekly throughout the academic year in order to assess student achievement. Degrees of failure, disciplinary interventions, attendance, and overall academic standing are targets of focus. Each "failing" student is assessed course-by-course, and—depending upon the outcome of assessment—a coordinated plan of intervention is formulated, frequently involving the collaborative work of several instructors. Data from these initial forays of intervention are communicated directly to both the school administration and parents.

If these first attempts of intervention do not succeed with measureable academic (or related) improvement, the student is interviewed by the Instructional Specialist and Academic Advisor and most often placed on Academic Probation. The terms of Academic Probation include mandatory tutoring, mandatory attendance and punctuality, and weekly intervention meetings with each course instructor.

In addition to student assessment and academic review, each instructor's weekly lesson plans are reviewed for adherence to appropriate and relevant Arizona State Standards. Formal teacher evaluations are conducted throughout each Block (nine-week quarter) as well, and the results are reviewed with each instructor, the Instructional Specialist, and the Academy Director. Informal classroom observations are conducted multiple times daily to include as many classroom sessions as possible, and data from these informal observations are shared with the entire staff on a general level and each instructor on a more personal, specific level. In order to further cultivate professional development, each instructor is required to attend at least one off-campus training conference in core course preparation and practice and one course in generalized instruction methods and classroom management.

Realizing that current efforts may be effective to a degree and properly focused but still may prove to be somewhat insufficient, Genesis Academy has contracted with School Curriculum Specialists to collaborate with the Professional Development Team (Instructional Specialist, Director, Academic Advisor, and all Instructors) for review and training in such areas as curriculum alignment and curriculum mapping. This will not only improve and augment our academic efforts but will also prepare us for adopting Common Core Standards in the future.

Furthermore, we have acquired the Galileo assessment program for a broader, more comprehensive method of understanding the grade-level and core-content competencies of our enrollees. This program will also help to facilitate a more targeted curriculum for students with greater deficiencies in some content areas than others.

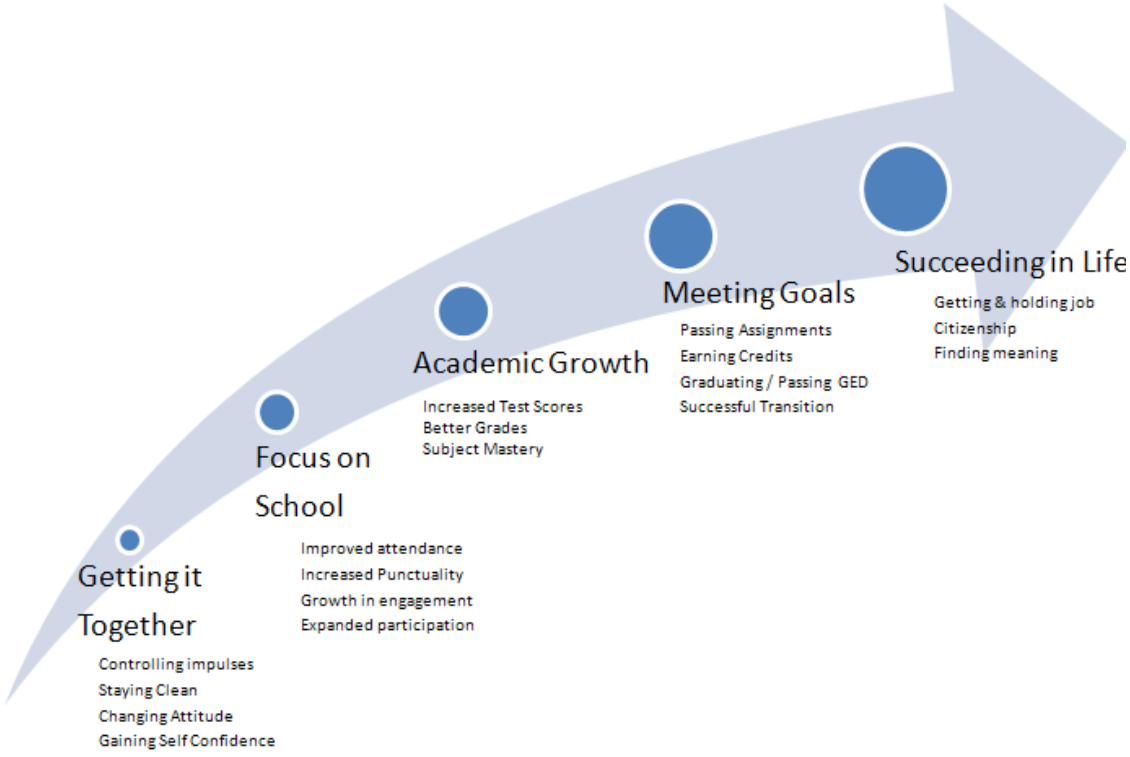
## Lessons Learned

- **Attendance is Vital**

Further compromising our efforts at academic acceleration and success is the fact that many (over 60% by statistical record) of our students have a documented history of poor attendance and poor punctuality at their prior schools. For 85% of the individuals tracked for attendance and punctuality, improvement has occurred in both areas since attending our school —but a greater percentage of improvement is a target of our future efforts of intervention. Furthermore, Genesis Academy continues to accept a significant number (over 22% by latest data) of enrollees who have been rejected and/or denied access to traditional and other alternative schools for disciplinary reasons. Seven members of our 2010 graduating class were such individuals, and three of them are currently enrolled in an institution of post-secondary education.

Fundamental to the success of our efforts of intervention is the focus we have directed towards twenty months of continuous enrollment. Although some students experience residual sporadic attendance, once they have begun an academic journey of uninterrupted attendance their academic success has been assured. Demonstrating the strength of this strategy is the following graphic which methodically outlines the steps required for secondary academic success and post-secondary success.

# Academic Evolution and Ascension of a Typical Genesis Academy Student




*(Adapted from Don Dixon handout provided at an Arizona Charter School Assessment Network meeting on 9/29/10)*

- **Community Building Enhances Student Success**

Under the auspices of our non-profit umbrella corporation, Genesis Program, Inc., we have developed a strong network of private and public sector partners who are instrumental in our program's continued prosperity. These community collaborations have allowed us to expand and strengthen our academic programs and enhance our students' opportunity for secondary and post-secondary success:

- **The Whole Story – Beyond a Random Cohort**

One cannot simply segregate a random—or even small targeted—selection of test scores in order to measure the true performance of a school. The significant and most accurate assessment of any high school is the quality and success of its graduates. Genesis Academy creates life-long learners and contributing members of our community. Our many success stories serve as testament to the quality of our program:

- 19 of our graduates are employed in well-paying positions at Arizona Public Service. APS actively recruits our graduates who are trained in GIS (Geographical Information Systems) mapping software.
- One of our graduates is a full-time employee at the City of Phoenix in the GIS Department.
- More than thirty students have interned in the City of Phoenix Educational Programs over the last 20 years; several went on to full-time positions with the City.

- One of our graduates received the Cesar Chavez Leadership Award at ASU.
- One of our graduates was named ASU's Outstanding Liberal Arts Graduate in 2005.
- One of our graduates was awarded the Dorrance Scholarship.
- One of our graduates was awarded the Nina Mason Pulliam Scholarship.
- One of our graduates is a practicing attorney in Phoenix.
- One of our graduates, Class of 2007, graduated in May 2011 in the first successful class of the ASU Downtown Campus.
- In the last two years we have had eight Obama Scholars.

Over the past fourteen years, Genesis Academy has graduated 402 students and has served as an academic intervention mentor to countless others. The majority of these students were the first in their families to earn high school diplomas, and many were also the first to continue on to a program of post-secondary education. Several Genesis Academy graduates have gone on to successful post-secondary education and vocational careers (including advanced degrees) and are now life-long learners and contributing community members.

- **The Genesis Vision – Constant Growth and Improvement**

Genesis Academy is truly a participant-driven program, constantly evolving to meet the needs of our community. Although our organization began as a program to serve families residing primarily in the metropolitan Phoenix area, our long-term vision is to replicate our model throughout the greater community. Genesis City is the term we use for our holistic approach which includes educational programs and ancillary support services. Together this network of proven intervention strategies works for disenfranchised youth and their families. We know that there are many other areas in the larger community where the "Genesis City" concept would serve as a much needed recovery model for dropouts both real and potential. Our Board of Directors, on-site administrators, and instructors are dedicated to ensuring that Genesis Academy remains in the forefront of tackling Arizona's dropout problem head-on. Our vision is to continue improving lives through the power of education in this generation and in generations to come.

***Appendix A***

# Arizona's School Accountability System 2009

## *Technical Manual*

Tom Horne
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Arizona Department of Education

*Volume I: AZ LEARNS Achievement Profiles*

Research & Evaluation
Arizona Department of Education
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Achieve@azed.gov

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# 11. AZ LEARNS Achievement Profiles for Alternative Schools

In 2004, the ADE published profiles for alternative schools for the first time. Alternative schools are defined as schools that meet the Board-approved definition as schools whose sole and clearly-stated mission is to serve specific populations of at-risk students. Alternative school status is granted by application to the ADE. A.R.S. §15-241 makes an allowance for a "parallel" evaluation method for alternative schools. When AZ LEARNS achievement profiles were first issued in 2002 the Board determined that alternative schools would not receive an achievement profile using the conventional AZ LEARNS methodology, and that ADE should develop an alternate method for evaluating these schools.

## Definition of an Alternative School

The following is the definition of an alternative school as approved by the Board of Education in 2002. In 2009 there were 114 schools that were granted alternative school status.

1. A school operated by a school district must have adopted a mission statement that clearly identifies its purpose and intent to serve a specific student population (please see criterion three) that will benefit from an alternative school setting. A charter school must be expressly chartered to serve a specific student population that will benefit from an alternative school setting.

2. The educational program and related student services of the school must match the mission or charter of the school.

3. The school must intend to serve students exclusively in one or more of the following categories:

    - Students with behavioral issues (documented history of disruptive behavior)
    - Students identified as dropouts
    - Students in poor academic standing who are either severely behind on academic credits (more than one year) or have a demonstrated pattern of failing grades
    - Pregnant and/or parenting students
    - Adjudicated youth

4. Any school offering secondary instruction for academic credit used to fulfill Arizona State Board of Education graduation requirements (in part or in full) must offer a diploma of high school graduation.