Curricular Emphasis Narrative

The Academy of Excellence Charter Schools welcomes over 160 students each day, from Kindergarten through Grade Eight. With a dedicated faculty, support staff and a wide range of volunteers, our goal is to help students achieve their full potential as they begin their quest to become life-long learners. We foster a culture of respect and responsibility, and the academic and social growth of our children is celebrated on a daily basis.

1. **School Community:** Academy of Excellence, Phoenix Campus is a Title I School-Wide School (as evidenced by the National School Lunch program @ 98.37%) made up of 125 students in kindergarten through grade eight. The Phoenix Campus is located in an urban economically impoverished area, serving children from Kindergarten through Eighth grade. 61% of our students are African American, 32% Hispanic; 5% white and 2% Native American. 15% of all students are identified to receive Exceptional Student Services.

   The neighborhood radius that the Academy of Excellence draws students from continues to be plagued with high poverty and crime, drug-use, domestic violence, gangs, and unemployment, which are freighting and alarming. Considering these issues AOE was experiencing a mobility rate of approximately 35%, and experiences a high truancy, tardiness, and nearly a 10% absent rate. The composition of our community contributed to factors that impacted and influenced the academic, emotional, and social well being of students and families. This in turn has resulted in our school continuing to evaluate our leadership and instruction program and provide year-to-year improved learning opportunities for our students.

   The AOE Coolidge School provides educational and academic enrichment programs to students in grades kindergarten through eight. Because of small learning environments instructions tends to have greater personalization, and greater focus on active learning and problem solving. Additionally, students at the Coolidge site are grouped more in heterogeneous with flexible arrangements, and almost all students receiving the same challenging core academic curriculum. As a general rule, student achievement at the Coolidge campus has made AYP every year.

   - Community Partnership:
     Increasingly, it is evident that schools, families, and communities have to work closely with each other to meet their mutual goals. Since AOE draws student several communities, we are often viewed as a little island with no bridges to the mainland. Our families live in neighborhoods, often with little connection to each other or to us because we provide transportation for their youngsters attend.

     Our Administrative Team has acted with due diligence to connect with neighborhood entities such as agencies, youth groups, and businesses to seek their assistance and secure them as major stakeholders in our school community. All these entities affect each other, for good or bad. Because of this and because they share goals related to education and socialization of the young, schools, homes, we think that it is a must to collaborate with each other in order to minimize problems and maximize results.

     We are very proud that the Academy of Excellence, Inc. received accommodations during our Title I Cycle 4 monitoring process for our ongoing active community partnerships. (Our current

partnerships include: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., the Links' Inc., Arizona State University, ASU Prep, The Celebrity Theater, Phoenix Opportunities Industrialization Center, Greater Phoenix Urban League, Fountain of Life Church, Tanner Women's Missionary Society and numerous individuals and patrons.)

2. Educational Philosophy:

In August 2011, the Academy of Excellence, Inc. was transferred under the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools. During the transfer process it afforded us the opportunity to scrutinize the effectiveness of the leadership and instruction program of offering at our schools.

We believe that all children can learn and that each child is unique and has special talents and abilities. Our responsibility is to provide learning experiences in an atmosphere that capitalizes on nurturing these talents while challenging students to acquire new skills and understandings. Parent participation and contribution to this process is critical to student and school success.

We strongly emphasize alignment of the school's curriculum with the Arizona state standards and have begun to conduct frequent benchmark assessments to determine student mastery of the standards. (Beginning Fall 2010). We strive to allot sufficient time for reading and math instruction each day to ensure that all students reach high levels of achievement. Assessment is formative and ongoing, and students who experience difficulty mastering reading and math concepts receive immediate intervention and additional instructional time.

In all classrooms teachers use manipulative to help students understand reading and math concepts. Reading is a comprehensive literacy and phonics based program while mastery of computation is balanced with problem solving, applying mathematics, and making real world connections. Priories for student success include quality teachers, frequent and consistent parent/ teacher engagement activities, and a coherent progression of learning activities from grade to grade.

We welcome the responsibility to provide a rich learning environment for all students, one that promotes academic excellence for everyone. Literacy and Language Arts will be taught through all subjects, across the curriculum. Accordingly, curriculum and instruction will address the gifts, talents and unique learning needs of every student. Research shows that students learn best when they are engaged in curriculum that is meaningful, relevant, and authentic. Additionally, we recognize that students display a multitude of special gifts including artistic, academic, interpersonal, athletic and musical talent. The elementary years are a time to promote the academic, social, emotional, physical and aesthetic development of each child. It is also a time to build strong classroom communities in which children of different abilities and interests grow and learn together.

The learning needs of children demonstrating high achievement in academic areas will be met in the regular classroom setting through differentiated instruction. Multiple modes of Assessment are critical to understanding student needs. Teachers will work together to set high standards and support a focused school curriculum and employ a variety of strategies and learning formats to create appropriate academic challenge to ensure that every child can obtain at least one year of academic growth from one year of instruction.

Differentiated instruction will include:

- Individualized reading program
- Curriculum compacting in mathematics
- Varied groupings for instruction (small group collaborative, partner work, 1:1)
- Project based learning with a research component
- Interdisciplinary connections with technology integration
- Extensions related to topics that go beyond the prescribed curriculum

Affective Goals

- Instill awareness within each child of his/her capabilities.
- Emphasize each child's unique qualities as an individual.
- Develop each child's self-confidence and strong feelings of self worth.
- Promote feelings of personal happiness and contentment within each child.
- Teach tolerance, acceptance and appreciation for the uniqueness of others.

Cognitive Goals

- Provide opportunities that enable each child to reach his/her full potential.
- Teach essential skills and concepts in reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, science, health and technology.
- Develop and enhance artistic and creative strengths.
- Develop decision-making and problem solving abilities.
- Promote divergent thinking and higher level thinking patterns.
- Teach children to strive for personal excellence.

Assessment Goals

- Evaluate and implement assessment instruments that are designed to support and enhance student learning.
- Every student is a complex individual with a broad spectrum of abilities, skills, and knowledge.
- Utilize Assessment instruments that focus on all key areas of student learning and development: core academics, intellectual ability, social responsibility, and physical fitness.
- Assessment shall consider a wide range of relevant performance information, formal and informal, standardized and non-standardized.
- Assessment shall be based on valid standards such as grade level expectations, appropriate reference groups, and individual aptitudes.
- Assessment shall be systematically linked to analyses of teacher and school system performance and instructional improvement.
- Assessment data shall be communicated to students, parents, and community on a timely basis.
- Information on how to understand and use assessment data shall be provided regularly to the educational community.

With the support of the Arizona Department of Education School Effectiveness Team the Academy of Excellence School Improvement Team learned to refocus our planning and instructional delivery. Thus our efforts have centered on improving the reading and math instruction to have a cohesive alignment for students before transitioning into High School. The 2009 AIMS scores demonstrated that academic performance was on the rise in all grade levels and subgroups. The 2009-2010 Arizona Achievement Profile for the Academy of Excellence was ***"Performing"*** at both the Phoenix and Coolidge locations.

The Phoenix Campus scores showed a slight decline in the reading and math scores thus resulting in a drop from Performing Plus to Performing. With our all "hand on deck" effort to counteract any incidence of further academic decline the Administrative/Academic Team began to immediately assess the academic weaknesses and implement appropriate instructional remedies with Differentiated instruction, Parental participation and Student Assessment as our core components. As a result the Phoenix Campus showed a slight increase in student achievement for the AIMS 2011 scores.

- ***The Phoenix Campus was recognized by the RODEL Foundation for 44% increase in third grade Math scores on the 2011 AIMS Test.***

3. <u>Methods of Instruction:</u>

Elementary school students benefit most from instruction that is direct, moderate to fast pace and involves them in the learning process. AOE Teachers utilize techniques that promote active learning through hands on projects and manipulatives that demonstrate concepts. We present a balance between conceptual understanding, basic computational and procedural skills, and problem solving. Students are intellectually engaged in learning by reasoning, predicting, evaluating, concluding, and solving problems, skills that are fundamental for life-long learning. Key strategies include:

- A relentless focus on the Arizona reading and mathematics content standards.
- Use of a district pacing guide to ensure all key concepts are taught during the year.
- Reteaching students who do not learn after the initial instruction.

Teachers are required to develop and organize each lesson around multiple skills or topics, rather than around a single skill or topic. Each skill or topic is addressed for only five to ten minutes in any given day's lesson, but it is revisited day after day for many lessons. . . [which] promotes mastery rather than teaching for exposure. Strands make sequencing and cumulative introduction of skills feasible, and topics can be treated in depth. Concepts are arranged in a logical scope and sequence, so that several topics can appear in one lesson. This permits pre-skills to be taught before being integrated into more complex mathematical concepts.

Teachers review, reinforce and practice reading and math skills with students in the following ways:

- **Active Engagement**
  Research shows that elementary students will learn more if they can have fun while working. Therefore our Administration and Teachers have implemented strategies that give our students many opportunities to interact with each other about what they are learning. These strategies include: Partner reading, think pair share and writing workshops and other cooperative activities that give students a chance to practice concepts and allows the teacher to assess their understanding.

  AOE Teachers also help our students by allowing them to engage in hands on learning. For example, when introducing the concept of multiplication, the teacher can assign partnerships and give each team a bag of seeds or beans and have them pull out the targeted number and place in a row. If multiplying by two, the teacher can have the kids add two seeds to the row. This helps students with math skills and shows them that adding and multiplying are directly related.

- **Small Group Instruction**
  Differentiated instruction is utilized in every classroom and is considered an effective technique that benefits elementary students because it recognizes that children have different ways of learning. AOE

differentiates through small groups that are based on ability as well as learning styles. Depending upon class size, there may be four or five groups with three to five children in each one. Grouping is flexible with opportunities for change as students master new skills.

Small group interventions also are effective for struggling students. Teachers work with a group that is struggling with a specific skill, such as letter sounds or addition facts. An intensive instruction session that focuses on one or two targeted skills helps students by making it possible for them to stay on track with the rest of the class.

- **Individualized Educational Opportunities and Planning**
  Our teachers have been specifically interviewed as to their ability to be a positive role model and counselor to the student. The teachers spend time getting to know each of their student's families to include their values and family situation. The teacher then gets to know the student on an individual basis to gain understanding as to strengths, weakness and learning style. From this information, the teacher, student, and parents create a year-long plan for the student. This plan is reviewed regularly and discussed at parent/teacher conferences. The underlying goal of this focus area is to provide students with enriching academic experiences that encourage them to reach their highest potential.

- **Character and Leadership Development**
  As we put our educational program together, we believe that it is critical to address the character development of our students. Teachers and staff work with students on a daily basis to encourage positive interactions in the AOE community.

- **Web Based Instruction**
  In an effort to harness the power of technology to deliver truly individualized instruction tailored to each student's unique needs AOE has implemented the Academy of Reading/Math programs. This program provides a rich set of web-based tools for intensive training in reading foundations, along with assessments and ongoing progress monitoring and reporting for Response to Intervention environments.

- **Literacy Instruction/Phonemic Awareness:**
  Research shows that phonemic awareness is the most powerful predictor of success in beginning reading, and for most children, a necessary prerequisite for learning to read. In fact, children who do not develop phonemic awareness do not go on to learn how to read. A balanced approach combining language- and literature-rich activities develops proficiency in reading.

  AOE provides staff development focusing on effective literacy instruction at all grade levels. Research supports the adoption of the following staff development opportunities:
  Phonemic Awareness and Balanced Literacy for Kindergarten and Grades 1-8 Teachers
  Phonemic awareness is the understanding that spoken words are composed of a limited number of identifiable, individual sounds (or phonemes). Children in the beginning stages of learning to read should be taught to recognize and manipulate onsets (the beginning consonant sound of a word or syllable) and rimes (everything in the word after the initial consonant sound). As children learn to use letters to represent words, they need to think about the sounds that compose the words.

- **Saxon Math:**
  The single most important factor in our math performance is the stressing of the foundation of each mathematical concept. All concepts are first taught with manipulatives such as counters of various types, base ten Blocks, fraction strips, and the like. The skill lessons and exercises increase in complexity with each lesson, affording sufficient time for students to become acquainted and comfortable with the skill, therefore making the application of the skill deliberate and uncomplicated. This teaches the students exactly what they are calculating and why.

  Teachers follow the suggested lesson design provided by the Saxon math program which begins daily with a calendar math lesson, a problem-solving lesson, and computation. Math facts are also part of this lesson with emphasis on practicing the facts in ways other than just pencil and paper timed drills. Also, concepts are taught in a sequence that enables skill scaffolding for learners.

  Utilizing and building on these effective strategies each year engages the student and teacher in a high level of learning.

4. **Methods of Assessment:**
   Assessment is integral to all planning, teaching and learning. Assessment enables our teachers to provide evidence that can be effectively reported and understood by the whole school community and it takes into account a variety of learning styles, multiple intelligences and abilities. Teachers are mindful of the particular learning outcomes on which they intend to report, prior to selecting or designing the method of assessment, and inform the students of these objectives. Effective assessments allow parents to develop an understanding of the student's progress. They allow students to demonstrate a range of knowledge, conceptual understanding and skills while sharing their learning with others.

   Assessment is ongoing, allowing teachers to re-teach as needed. Differentiation within the reading and math block occurs via varied instructional strategies and tools including small group instruction. Teachers use assessment for learning; engage in ongoing staff development to improve their own effectiveness, and plan with one another to ensure consistency and high expectations. Teachers analyze the data available to them and make adjustments as necessary to be sure students are learning what is necessary to meet standards.

   Evidence of or student progress includes: samples of student work; portfolios; observations of students' understanding, thinking and performance; student reflections; student self and peer assessment; rubrics; exemplars; records of test/task results; journals; conferencing; running records; formative assessments, selected responses (e.g. tests and quizzes); open-ended tasks (original responses); checklists; anecdotal records AIMS and DIBELS test results.

   Report Cards and Parent/Teacher Conferences
   AOE Student report cards are sent home at the end of the each quarter October, January and the end of the school year. Teacher/Parent conferences are held in October and January. Progress reports are sent out weekly, biweekly or monthly whenever necessary. Student led conferences are held before the end of the school year in order for parents to learn about the goals students have set for themselves and the work they have done. A student's portfolio is the centerpiece of their learning and achievement.

Beginning in the fall of 2012, AOE will implement the ***Parent Teacher Training Program*** **(PTTP)** program where Teachers and Parents will work as a team to develop strategies and activities to support the individual learning for each child. In the fall of 2011 we experimented with an activity and achieved great participation from parents. Through these efforts, parents are learning to become a driving force for increased school achievement by increasing their involvement in their children's instruction both at school and at home. We are helping parents to communicate with our schools on a continuing basis about their children's progress, discipline, and achievements.

Good communication between the home and school is vital to ensuring students success. For this reason, parents are encouraged to contact the individual teachers whenever concerns regarding their child's progress arise.

5. **Remediation Plan:**

AOE uses multiple measures for data analysis to determine areas of student competencies in reading and math and the need of emphasis for identified students. There is a lot of collaboration and discussion about identified students in order to determine the best avenues for effecting progress. The school also intervenes as early as possible and makes every attempt to involve parents in every aspect of the student's educational process. We make sure that intervention includes frequents parent/teacher communications, suggested home strategies, extended day tutoring opportunities and Summer Workshops to services as many learning needs as possible.

It is the responsibility of the Classroom Teacher and the SPED Director to formulate a remediation plan for each student (Learning Education Plan LEP). Informal assessments are used in preparing the LEP focusing on reading and/or math instruction. The DIBELS Assessments are given in August, January and April the K-6 grade students as a pre and post assessment to evaluate student progress. Informal assessments are ongoing throughout the period of service. Classroom Teachers communicate closely with the SPED director to coordinate and plan effective instruction for students extra assistance. Communication with parents is just as important so that the school/family partnership will be successful.

6. **Promotion and Retention Plan:**

Students are normally promoted from one grade to the next based on successful mastery of the required academic material. If the student falls below mastery Teacher, SPED Director and Principal in consultation with the Parent or Guardian will decide if the student: is qualified for promotion; must do a summer program to be promoted; or must repeat one grade.

AOE reserves the right to retain students based on failure to successfully master required academic materials. Physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development may also be considered. Retention is not considered a form of punishment, but is based on the belief that students are more likely to succeed if they master certain skills before proceeding onward.

AOE will make every effort to have ongoing and open communication with parents concerning possible retention. Parents may be informed of school concerns at any point during the academic year and the school has an obligation to discuss concerns with parents at the earliest possible time and no later than the end of the first semester. This stated, no final decision on retention will be made before

the final month of school. The parents of students enrolled who do not show improvement will be advised to seek out suitable educational institutions to meet their children's specific needs.

7. **Class Size and Assigned Enrollments** - Enrollments are consistent with both class-size standards and total enrollment requirements as set forth in the Charter Contract. Student enrollment in individual classes is consistent with the following guidelines:

GRADES	***MINIMUM STANDARD***	***DESIRABLE STANDARD***
K-2	**25**	**20**
3-4	**27**	**22**
5-8	**30**	**25**