A. EDUCATION PLAN

A.1. EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

A.1.a. Seneca Preparatory Academy's Educational Philosophy

Seneca Preparatory Academy's Mission Statement.

We believe that every child can learn, and with The Right Educational (RE) System can go to college and succeed; and ultimately can become successful in life and positively contribute to society.

The mission of Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) is to develop and run a high-quality elementary school using The Right Educational (RE) System; and thus provide students with high school, college and career readiness.

We believe that with The Right Educational (RE) System college education is made accessible to all, and especially to the traditionally underserved minority and poor populations that have always had limited access to adequate education.

By being in service in underserved areas, Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) strives to increase scholastic achievement and close the achievement gap in those areas; and thus bring a message of hope and encouragement to those who live in these areas.

Seneca Preparatory Academy's Educational Philosophy

The overall objective of Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) is to provide the underserved target area students with the type of high-quality scientifically-based elementary school program that is traditionally not available in poor and/or high minority areas. The implementation of this high-quality program will lead to an increase in scholastic achievement and to a decrease in the achievement gap in the underserved area. As a result, this educational program will provide its students with high school, college and career readiness at the elementary school level.

Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) educational program called The Right Educational (RE) System is based on the belief that every child can learn if put in an environment conductive to learning. The RE System is anchored on the successful development and implementation of the School's RTI-Early Intervention Reading & Math Program and its associated programs. This latter program is the center-piece of Seneca Preparatory Academy's Performance Management Plan (PMP) whose objective is to develop and implement the School's RTI-Early Intervention Reading & Math Program 18 to 24 months after school start.

The Right Educational (RE) Program is best described by the School brand message:

"Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) is a Unique K-6 Tuition-Free Public School, with Full-Day Kindergarten.

SPA is a High-Quality College-Preparatory International School that focuses on the Basics; uses Small Class Size, and --- Common Core State Standards, SRA Reading Mastery Signature Edition, Singapore Math and Core Knowledge Curricula, Direct and Differentiated Instructions, Cooperative Learning, Understanding by Design, a RTI-Early Intervention Reading & Math Program, and a Comprehensive Assessment and Monitoring System --- to provide a Body of Shared Knowledge, Linguistic and International Awareness that prepare Students for High School, College and Career Readiness at the Elementary School Level.

Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) targets underserved communities but prepares all students for a Lifelong Learning Experience and Success in the 21st Century."

A.1.b. Rational for Seneca Preparatory Academy Educational Approach

Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) has the following two main reasons for developing and using The Right Educational (RE) System as the School educational program. First, The RE System was inspired from the personal life experience of a few members of this project. Second, The RE System will use scientifically-based educational programs and processes known for increasing academic achievement in schools in general; and in some cases, for decreasing the achievement gap in socio-economically disadvantaged communities in the US and abroad.

A review of the following five topics provides an expanded view of SPA's rational for using The Right Educational (RE) System:

(1) A Study of the Origin of The Right Educational (RE) System;

(2) A Study of the Common Characteristics of Educational Programs that have successfully Close the Achievement Gap in Underserved Communities;

(3) A Study of the Use of Early Intervention Literacy Programs in Closing the Achievement Gap in Underserved Communities in the US; and

(4) A Study of Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) Program of Instruction.

A Study of the Origin of The Right Educational (RE) System

The idea of starting a high-quality scientifically-based college preparatory elementary school in a disadvantaged area comes from three observations that Dr. Jean-Claude Abougou made some

time ago that led him to believe that every child can learn if the conditions that are conductive to learning are created for him or her.

The first observation was made when Dr. Abougou was attending the University of Arizona. Jean-Claude and a group of French-speaking students realized that even with the linguistic challenge of being English language learners (ELLs) from poor developing countries, students who graduated from French primary and secondary schools entered American universities ahead by at least one year in university general knowledge. Jean-Claude and his friends attributed their scholastic success to their experience with the very rigorous French elementary and secondary school systems.

The second observation was made a couple of years ago when Dr. Abougou asked a group of four teachers from a southern Arizona school district to explain why African American students usually seemed to perform poorly as compared to their Caucasian counterparts. To his amazement, without hesitation and in unison the four teachers said that it was a question of expectation; that is, no one expects these students to succeed and they comply by performing poorly in school. Dr. Abougou then wondered what would happen if someone had expected the Black students to do well in school. The answer was clear: they would indeed do very well.

The third observation came from a report made in "60 minutes" on February 24, 2008 on the National System of Youth and Children's Orchestras of Venezuela known informally as "El Sistema" or the System. For the last 32 years, the System has rescued more than 250,000 children from the poorest barrios of Venezuela and trained them to play in orchestras around the world. It has produced star musicians such as Gustavo Dudamel who at 27 became the youngest conductor and Music Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Gothenburg Symphony in Sweden.

The Venezuelan musical System shows that learning to play classical music is not the exclusive dominion of the rich and powerful; that a destitute street kid from Caracas, Venezuela can, "under the right conditions", "under the right system" learn to play classical music well enough to be become the Music Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Now, can this kid also succeed in school? Can the Venezuelan musical success be duplicated in the area of elementary and secondary education? The answer is yes but only "under the right conditions", under what Dr Abougou calls "The Right Educational (RE) System" or "The RE System".

The Right Educational (RE) System is a unique practical approach to education. Its curriculum and instructional methodology were originally inspired from the French educational system since The RE System uses direct instruction, a rigorous challenging basic curriculum and high accountability for school stakeholders. However, The RE System is also very different from the French system since it (The RE System) believes in children's innate ability to learn regardless of their economic, social or ethnic background. The RE System provides the favorable physical, mental and scholastic framework that helps students succeed academically.

A Study of the Common Characteristics of Educational Programs that have successfully Close the Achievement Gap In Underserved Communities

The Right Educational (RE) System is modeled after the following four groups of educational programs that have been designed to successfully bridge the achievement gap in high minority and/or low-income areas in the US or used successfully abroad in underdeveloped countries:

- The French primary and secondary education system;
- The educational systems used by Carl C. Icahn Charter School, NY and the rest of a small group of innovative charter schools -- such as KIPP Academy, TX; Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, MA; and Cesar Chavez Academy-Pueblo, CO -- recognized by the US Department of Education for successfully closing the achievement gap in several low-income and/or high minority areas in the US (US Dept of Education, 2004 & 2007);
- The educational approaches advocated by the Arizona Charter Schools Association through its Quality Standards and its landmark study *Success Measured* (Gau & Gemelli, 2008); by Arizona State University Morrison Institute for Public Policy's publication *The Six Keys to Successful Latino Schools* (Waits et al., 2006); and by the Arizona Department of Education's *Seven Correlates of Effective Schools* (ADE, 2009); and by
- Harvard University's Charter School Coherence Model (Merseth et al, 2009).

An evaluation of the above four groups of highly successful educational programs identify the common characteristics shared by these schools that define their success in underserved communities. Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) will embody these common characteristics that are defined as following:

1. A Strong and Dynamic Leadership.

At Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA), this characteristic is exemplified by the presence of an energetic and dynamic champion, Dr. Abougou, who will be working with a group of high-energy teachers, engaged in SPA activities and eager to implement the school educational program.

2. A Safety and Orderly Environment.

This success characteristic will be demonstrated by SPA strong beliefs in safety, security, self-respect, and respect for others.

3. A Climate of High Expectation for Success.

Hard work, longer school days, perseverance, and accountability for all will be the law of the land at Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA).

4. Continuous Improvement and Scientifically-Driven Decisions and Processes.

Instruction at Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) will be provided through technologically- and data-driven decisions and processes; and student progress will be continuously assessed and monitored.

5. A Positive Home-School Relationship.

SPA will work hard and diligently to gain support from parents, teachers, major stake holders and the community.

6. A Clear and Focused Culture.

Seneca Preparatory Academy culture is defined by a fundamental belief in service; by children's innate ability to learn, high expectations, transparency, teamwork, and a never-give-up attitude.

The School culture will play a critical role in the success of Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) because SPA culture is the magical cement that will hold the other five common characteristics of successful schools together. As shown in Exhibit 1 of the Harvard University Charter School Coherence Model (Merseth et al, 2009), the school culture will provide the coherence and coordination needed between the school mission; and its people, structures and systems, to ensure the successful implementation of the RE System that will lead to positive student outcomes.

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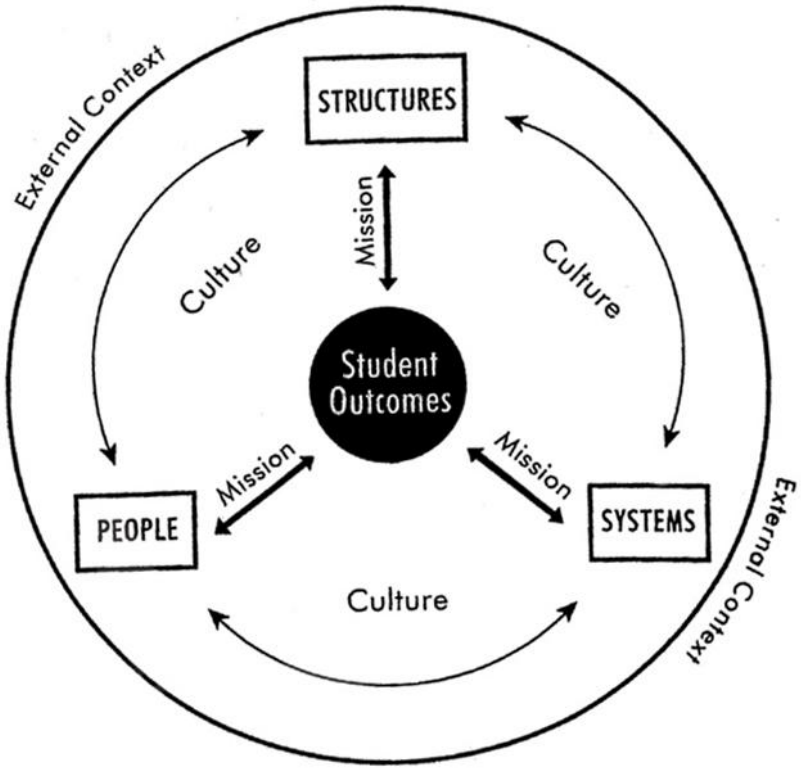

Exhibit1. Harvard University Charter School Coherence Model.

A Study of the Use of Early Intervention Literacy Programs in Closing the Achievement Gap in Underserved Communities in the US.

Early Intervention Literacy Program Helps Close the Achievement Gap

Seneca Preparatory Academy (SCA) will use an education-centered early intervention reading and math program to bridge the achievement gap in its underserved elementary school-age students.

The Perry Preschool and Abecedarian early education longitudinal studies have shown that with education-centered early intervention programs, poor children affected by the achievement gap (defined as the lack of school readiness) can start school more prepared to learn. In the specific case of the Perry Preschool Program, the positive effects of early intervention were sustained more than 30 years after the program ended (Schweinhart, 2003).

RTI-Early Intervention Literacy Programs Helps Close the Achievement Gap

Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) will develop and use an RTI-based high-quality early intervention literacy program to meet the IDEA 2004 federal law needs that requires children to receive a scientific, research-based intervention (such as response to intervention, RTI) prior to referral to special education. In addition, RTI use is recommended in Arizona because ARS 15-704 legislation requires that K-3 schools use screening and diagnostic assessments, and scientifically-based reading curricula; and provide intensive instruction for 3rd graders not meeting standards.

The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD) defines "Response to Intervention (RTI)" as "an assessment and intervention process for systematically monitoring student progress and making decisions about the need for instructional modifications or increasingly intensified services using progress monitoring data (Johnson et al., 2006)".

Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) will also develop and use its RTI-Early Intervention Reading & Math Program for the following reasons:

First, it is SPA belief that RTI plays an essential role in closing the achievement gap and should be incorporated in the Performance Management Program of schools involved with underserved communities.

Second, RTI leads to the early identification of students with learning difficulties and/or specific learning disabilities; thus it provides an opportunity for early intervention before the identified students fall academically behind their peers.

Third, RTI intervention leads to a decrease in the number of students referred for special education since placement is based on ability to learn.

Fourth, RTI intervention reduces the over-identification of minority and disadvantaged students with having specific learning disabilities.

Fifth, RTI integrates general and specific education expertise, document effectiveness of instruction for all students, and align student needs with effective instruction.

Sixth, RTI leads to the development of a continuous, powerful professional development program; thus to the formation of a highly trained intervention team.

Study of Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) Program of Instruction

Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) will use a scientifically-based program of instruction with tools and processes with a proven record of success in the traditional and/or in the underserved diverse classroom. SPA will use the following instructional tools and processes to increase achievement and decrease the achievement gap in the target community:

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will Help Close the Achievement Gap

The use of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will help SPA reach its main goal of bridging the achievement gap in the target area since first; the new standards are based on evidence and research. Second, CCSS represent the expectations and skills that K-12 students need to master to succeed in college and careers. Third, CCSS include a rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills. Fourth, the new state standards embody the strengths, lessons and experiences of the 48 states educational standards from the 48 states involved in the CCSS initiative. Finally, CCSS are informed by top-performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in the global economy of the 21st century (ADE, 2010a).

High-Quality Reading Language Arts and Math General Curricula will Help Close the Achievement Gap

For general reading instruction, Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) will use SRA Reading Mastery Signature Edition, a scientifically-based comprehensive basal reading program that uses direct instruction and addresses all five essentials components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (CKF, 2011). SRA Reading has been used successful with RTI in underserved elementary school populations in the US (PS-396, 2008).

Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) will supplement it reading curriculum with Core Knowledge language arts instruction. Core Knowledge is a rich challenging research-based curriculum that has been used successfully to narrow the literacy gap in high-minority and/or low-income schools in the US. Wedman and Waigandt (2004) study of the performance of 22 Core Knowledge schools across 13 states shows that schools with high percentage of non-Caucasian or less affluent students consistently score well above the national average (above 60th percentile). Presently, Core Knowledge is used to effectively close the achievement gap at Carl C. Icahn Charter School and Cesar Chavez Academy-Pueblo; two charter schools recognized to be the most successful schools to close the achievement gap in the Nation (US Dept of Education, 2004 & 2007).

Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) will use Singapore Math (SM) for math instruction in daily 90 minute- block time. Recently, the interest in Singapore Math (SM) has increase substantially since in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) -- a study conducted and published every four year to measure trends in math and science achievement in 48 countries -- Singapore has been in the number-one spot since 1995 while the US has ranked only slightly above the international average (SDE, 2010).

Research-Based Methods of Instruction will Help Close the Achievement Gap

- *Understanding by Design*

To develop high-quality instruction that will help increase scholastic achievement and bridge the achievement gap in the target community, SPA will also use Wiggins and McTighe's Backward Design Model from Understanding by Design (2005) to design and provide Common Core State Standards-driven lesson plans.

- *Direct Instruction*

In addition, Seneca Preparatory Academy (SPA) will use direct instruction in small classes since Project Follow Through (FT) showed that this instructional modality helps develop basic skills (reading, writing and math) in historically disadvantaged and poor elementary school students in the US (Grossen, 1995; Follow Through, 2010).

- *Small Class Size*

SPA will gradually and fully develop small classes in primary grades (K-3) by Year-2 or 3. The use of small class size will benefit SPA students since the landmark STAR and SAGE studies have shown that kindergarten and elementary school students in small classes uniformly outperformed those in larger classes; and that minority and inner-city students benefited the most from small classes. In addition, these studies have shown that small class size works synergistically with direct instruction (DI) and reinforces its (DI) effectiveness (Fin & Achilles, 1999; Molnar et al., 1999).

- *Differentiated Instruction*

The School will use differentiated instruction as recommended by ADE to provide instruction tailored to meet the specific educational needs of all student groups within all 3-RTI tiers (ADE 2010b). Differentiated instruction recognizes that students learn in different ways and start school at different levels of school readiness. Therefore differentiated instruction is appropriate for schools for underserved populations since it serves their unique learning needs, backgrounds, learning styles, and interests. (Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson, 2001; Downey, 2009).

- *3-Tiered RTI Instructional Delivery System*

The use of a 3-tiered RTI instructional delivery system to provide differentiated instruction to all students is particularly well suited to increase scholastic achievement and bridge the achievement gap in SPA diverse classrooms where students will enter school at various levels of school readiness. Firstly, all SPA students will receive Tier-1 general instruction in 90 min and 135 min daily block respectively with Singapore Math and with SRA Reading Mastery and Core Knowledge ELA. Secondly, studies have shown that close to 20% of Tier-1 SPA students will not achieve success with the core curricula and will be moved to Tier-2 instruction, where in addition to general core instruction; they will receive 30 to 60 minute/day/3-4x wk targeted differentiated instruction in small groups. Thirdly, about 5% of Tier-2 students will not be successful in Tier-2 instruction; they will be moved to Tier-3 for intensive, individualized instruction (Johnson et al, 2006; ADE 2010c) or will be referred to special education services.

- *Cooperative Learning*

Cooperative learning is a student-centered instructional approach that can be used to close the achievement gap in underserved schools like SPA. In cooperative learning, students set in small mixed-ability groups work together, assist and support each other with the goal of reaching a share learning goal. SPA will use cooperative learning because this instructional strategy has been used successfully: (a) to promote positive student interaction in school with diverse classrooms (Gillies, 2007); (b) to enhance student learning and scholastic achievement in reading, math, science, physical education and in other areas; and (c) with special needs, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and those at risk of academic failure (Friend & Bursuck, 2009).

Comprehensive Assessment and Monitoring System will Help Close the Achievement Gap

SPA will use its Comprehensive Assessment and Monitoring System to continuously assess and monitor student academic performance, and drive a CCSS-based high quality instruction. The Comprehensive Assessment and Monitoring Instruction will be made of the following three sub-systems: (1) The RTI Combined Model Problem-Solving System; (2) The Balanced Assessment System; and (3) The Common Core State Standards Curriculum Mapping and Alignment Plan. Several studies have linked increased school performance to higher frequency of student performance assessment and monitoring.

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