Narrative

Thank you for the opportunity to apply for an amendment to our charter. Please find below our rationale for adding grades, the implications for our mission, philosophy, and instruction, our proposed policies and procedures for content mastery and course promotion, an overview of how coursework would be managed, and implications for school staffing.

Rationale

Our school has recently had the opportunity to upgrade to an improved facility. One reason we saw a need to add grades was to better serve the needs of the immediate community, which currently has a K-6 school. Adding grades 7 and 8 to our existing program would provide students with a bridge of instruction between educational options in their local community.

Another compelling reason to expand grade levels was to create an opportunity for greater continuity in the educational program. In order to support the academic standards that provide the framework for accountability and school improvement, it is critical that students have a structured path through the standards. We seek to provide a program that ensures middle school students are fully prepared to perform in grades 9-12, earn a diploma, and make a successful transition toward their postsecondary goals.

Mission, Philosophy, and Instruction

Sonoran Desert School's mission is "to uphold as its highest priority each student's right to achieve meaningful academic success, and therefore the right to prosper emotionally and to prepare intellectually for adult roles. SDS offers a self-paced, challenging curriculum featuring computer applications and individualized instruction to meet the needs students who would benefit from learning in an innovative, personalized school setting."

Adding grades would allow us to help students to prepare to function as self-directed, participatory learners who are able to meet the challenge of excelling in grades 9-12. Our implementation of the school's vision emphasizes using persuasion rather than coercion to motivate student performance. Our mission is also predicated on the concept that students should share responsibility for their own learning. Students should also understand how cause and effect results in natural consequences for choices and actions. Students should also learn in ways that fit a modern world that is defined by sweeping advances in information and communication technologies, resulting in an increased need for prioritization, problem-solving, and communications skills.

We believe that a key reason the charter movement has been successful is because it offers students educational choices, so our approach to instruction is intended to provide an alternative to that found in a traditional school. The structure of our school requires students to be active and responsible in their learning to be successful, and the school's

teachers act as facilitators to help students reach their goals. To complete a self-paced, challenging curriculum, students use a detailed course plan to manage course requirements. A selection of structured classes is also offered to accommodate classes that benefit from direct instruction and group work. Technology is currently integrated into all of the classes at Sonoran Desert School.

Achieving a high school diploma is a crucial rite of passage as well as a stepping-stone to future success. The middle school years should prepare students to be successful at the high school level. This preparation should include the skills, habits, and attitudes that will help students become self-disciplined learners who understand and act upon the reality that education is crucial to improving their lives as individuals as well as contributing to society as a whole.

Mastery and Promotion

All coursework will be based on and aligned to the Arizona Common Core State Standards. All course mastery and grade-level promotion with be based upon the completion of standards-based course requirements that include formative and summative assessments that measure competency on these state standards.

Coursework that is the basis for mastery and grade-level promotion will include the following summative assessments:

- Chapter or selection tests
- End-of-unit tests
- Mid-term exams
- End-of-term or semester exams
- Benchmark assessments

Course level assessments will be verified by performance on our state's summative assessment, Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards.

School staff will implement formative assessments to continuously monitor incremental progress toward mastering course objectives, including the following:

- Summaries and Reflections
- Lists, Charts, and Graphic Organizers
- Visual Representations of Information
- Collaborative Activities
- Projects
- Surveys
- Questioning Guides
- Self-assessments
- Checklists
- Observations
- Worksheets
- Pop Quizzes

- Journals

Formative assessments should be designed not only to assess student work, but also to provide feedback that will show students how to improve and evaluate their own performance. Formative assessments that provide feedback include the following:

- Pretests
- Evaluation rubrics
- Self-assessment rubrics
- Writing process
- Completion checklists

Feedback on student successes should be acknowledged in a variety of ways, including the following:

- Positive progress reports
- Report cards
- Student graduation announcements
- End-of-term celebrations
- Honor roll
- Student achievement awards

Coursework

To support of state and federal initiatives to improve performance through increased organization and accountability, all coursework will be based on and aligned to the Arizona Common Core State Standards.

Course Offerings

Grade 7 Classes	Grade 8 Classes
Language Arts 7A & 7B	Language Arts 8A & 8B
Mathematics 7A & 7B	Mathematics 8A & 8B
Science 7A & 7B	Science 8A & 8B
Social Studies 7A & 7B	Social Studies 8A & 8B
Health 7A & 7B	Health 8A & 8B
Computer Literacy 7A & 7B	Computer Literacy 8A & 8B
Art 7A & 7B	Art 8A & 8B

Proficiency Level for Course Credit

For each required class, course requirements will be converted to a cumulative percentage score and assigned a grade based on the following scale: 90-100=A; 80-89=B; 70-79=C; 60-69=D; 59 and below=F. Students must achieve a cumulative score of 60% or better to earn course credit.

Acceptance of Transfer Credit

Students who were previously enrolled in a private school, charter school or school district shall be eligible to transfer credits earned in courses or instructional programs at the previous school or school district. Administrators will analyze transcripts and course descriptions to determine whether a credit earned by a student who was previously enrolled in another school will be assigned as an elective or core credit.

Any such students will be provided with a list that indicates which credits have been accepted as an elective credit and which credits have been accepted as a core credit. Within ten school days after receiving the list, the student may request to take an examination in each particular course in which core credit has been denied. The school will accept the credit as a core credit for each particular course in which the student takes an examination and receives a passing score (60% or higher) on a test designed and evaluated by a highly qualified teacher in the school who teaches the subject matter on which the examination is based.

Staffing

All teachers at SDS must be highly qualified. To be deemed highly qualified, teachers must have the following:

- A bachelor's degree
- Full state certification or licensure
- Proof that they know each subject they teach

Teachers must prove that they know the subject they teach with one of the following:

- A major in the subject they teach
- Credits equivalent to a major in the subject
- Passage of a state-developed test,
- An advanced certification from the state
- A graduate degree

Current teachers with a bachelor’s degree and a state secondary certification (grades 6-12) will not require a change in staffing, but they will require professional development to address the instructional and curricular requirements of the added grades. If enrollment requires the recruitment of additional staff members, recruited staff will also be required to meet the Highly Qualified federal guidelines.