Education Plan A.2. Target Population

Identification of Target Population

The proposed location for the Model Community Learning Center (MCLC) in Tucson is in the area between Valencia on the South, Irvington Road on the North, Palo Verde Road on the East and Nogales Highway on the West. The area sits directly in Ward 5, largely in the 85706 zip code. The students in this community have been chosen as the target population for the MCLC because they are from a diverse, urban population historically known for underperformance. They are the most in need of a quality education and are the least likely to be offered one.

Ward 5 demographic highlights include: [i]

- Highest percentage of Hispanic and Native American
- 44.3% of children 0 – 17 live below the poverty level – highest percentage in Tucson
- Per capita income level of $10,518 – the lowest in Tucson
- Highest percentage of elementary and high school students on free and reduced lunch
- Highest percentage of home foreclosures in the city of Tucson
- Highest unemployment rate
- More youth arrested than in any other ward in the city
- Highest number of residents enrolled in systems for serious mental illness and general mental health/substance abuse system
- Highest number of children enrolled in the Community Partnership of Southern Arizona (CPSA) regional behavioral health system
- More than 40% of the population 25 years of age and older has not earned a high school diploma.

A survey of schools in the area shows that approximately 25% of youth in middle school are classified as English Language Learners ranging from 14% to 51% depending on the individual school location. For high school students there are 17% English Language Learners ranging from 17% - 20% across district and charter schools. The Special Education population for the local district is approximately 14%.

The impact of poverty and urban stress creates a challenging environment. However, research on high poverty/high performing schools[ii] show that there is rich promise in this neighborhood and it is essential that the local talent be tapped and nurtured. Strongest indicators of need are found in the low rate of high school graduation and the parallel drop-out rate. The graduation rate for the local School District in our target area remains under 70% and the demographic data reports high levels of youth with less than a high school diploma. The challenge is great and the data points to a need to intervene at the middle school level.

Dropout and Graduation Rates[iii]

Historically, only about half of the students entering high school received a diploma four years later. An unusually high number of students are reported as transferring to a school outside their district including transfers to Mexico. Those transferring outside of the U.S. cannot be verified with the SAIS tracking system. While there has been some gradual improvement in the graduation rate across the last three years, the entering 9th grade had 1400 students and the highest number of graduates four years later has been around 800. The graduation rate in 2010 for the local district was reported as 69%. Subgroup graduation rates were 51% for ELL and 55% for exceptional education.

The data indicates that there was a dropout rate of 4.4% in 2008, 5.1% in 2009 and 4.2% in 2010 for a total loss of 711 students in grades 9-12 across the three year period.

Academic Achievement on AIMS in Local Area District and Charter Schools [iv]

School	FR Lunch	Reading	Read SGP	Math	Math SGP
DVHS	68%	62.6	46(T)	37	37(T)
Sunnyside HS	67%	68.2	50(T)	35.7	45(T)
Chaparral MS	84%	71.4	54.5(T)	45.4	45(T)
Sierra MS	78%	69.5	42(T)	33.9	38(T)
Math Science Success Acad K-6	59%	79.2	48(T)	75.2	59(T)
Az Academy of Leadership K-7	76.2%	100	73.5(H)	100	67.5(H)
Alta Vista HS	76%	64.8	49.5(T)	45.5	64.5(T)
Southgate K-12	90%	52.4	44.5(T)	34	53(T)
Gallego Basic K-5	55%	83.1	48(T)	78.6	48.5(T)
Los Ninos Elem K-5	80%	61.9	39(T)	56.8	38(T)
Los Amigos Elem K-5	79%	62.6	43(T)	61.4	56.5(T)
Average	74%	62.3	48.9	46.7	50.2

An analysis of AIMS results for a sample of local district and charter schools reveals stronger results for Reading than for Math. Also, there is a general decrease in math scores as students reach middle and high school. The lack of achievement in math is pivotal in determining the likelihood of graduation and college readiness. Two of the three highest performing schools have a markedly lower rate of youth on free and reduced lunch status. One, however, defies that statistic thereby providing evidence that youth in poverty can, indeed, succeed at high levels.

Initial Target Focus – Grades 6 – 9

The research from Johns Hopkins finds that "in high-poverty environments, a student's middle grades experience strongly impacts the odds of graduating from high school." [v] The change from more self-contained classrooms with one teacher to the varied classroom switches and a number of different teachers may prove daunting for students. This coupled with the physiological and emotional changes of early puberty clearly present a challenge.

The Hopkins research further reports that the major risk indicators for sixth grade include failing math or English/reading, less than 80% school attendance, or a poor final behavior grade in a core class. The presence of any one of these indicators resulted in only a 10% to 20% chance of graduating on time.

For high school youth the single most paramount obstacle to academic success is the ability to successfully navigate the ninth grade, the other academic transition year. In fact, performance in Algebra has become known as the new "gatekeeper" to high school graduation. That coupled with high enrollment numbers and higher teacher-to- student ratios leads to a sense of depersonalization in many secondary school settings. Academic success in ninth grade is so highly predictive of eventual graduation that without support at this critical time, over one third of all dropouts are lost in this transition year. Up to 40% of ninth grade students in areas with the highest dropout rates repeat ninth grade, but only 10 – 15% of those repeaters go on to graduate.

College Readiness

Academically, the indicators associated with college entry were reviewed. First the number of students taking the SAT and ACT is very low. This, in itself, suggests that the academic preparation for college is lacking. For the two large local high schools only 190 out of 1400 participated in the SAT in 2009 and 82 sat for the ACT that year. For the SAT, average district score was 431 for writing as contrasted with 497 for Arizona and 493 for national Average. The average district score for math was 446 as compared with 521 for Arizona and 515 National Average. The district average for Reading was 437 contrasted with 516 for Arizona and 501 National Average.[vi]

Program of Instruction Supports Target Population

Clearly, this is the area of Tucson that has the greatest number of challenges in all aspects of life and the area that has the highest need for the kind of powerful educational and community enriching opportunities that a strengthbuilding community school can offer. The goal is to develop just such a school using expertise in StrengthBuilding, a proven academic approach, community collaboration and partnership development.

The research from Johns Hopkins informs us that "in high-poverty environments, a student's middle grades experience strongly impacts the odds of graduating from high school." However, the Hopkins research also showed that students who exhibit negative

indicators in the middle grades are resilient. That resiliency positions these young people for what is referred to as "at promise." Indeed, by acknowledging and building on the strengths of these students (StrengthBuilding), incorporating the community resources vital to their support (the community school) and developing rigorous yet relevant academic opportunities (project-based learning) in a place where relationships are the foundation for learning, it is possible to achieve high levels of success through the Program of Instruction as described. Creating a community school, grades 6 – 9, and the impact it has on the population it serves demonstrates how the program of instruction, at its very foundation meets the needs and benefits the target population and the community it serves.

In order to help students reach the higher levels of learning associated with Quadrant D (highest levels of Blooms Taxonomy applied to real life situations) in the Rigor & Relevance Program of Instruction Framework that serves as the foundation for the academic program, the design teams will work across two grade levels as teachers stay with their students for two consecutive years to build learning on sustained relationships. During the start-up year the grade 6 and 8 teachers will be the constants. Beginning with year two the students will be able to stay with the same team of teachers for two consecutive years. One team will work with grade 6-7 and the second team with grade 8-9. Students will be able to engage in academic work at their core curriculum level through accelerated learning as needed. This will allow for both enrichment and remediation through applied differentiation Response to Intervention (RTI) as the school will provide a fully inclusive model for all students regardless of special needs or language acquisition status.

Class Size and Student-Teacher Ratio

With the community school partners in place, all entering students will benefit from a full academic, health, social and language screening to assure that appropriate services are initiated upon enrollment. The service delivery model will be a fully integrated program with separate service specifically limited to support labs and related services that may be specific to identified student need. Each academic design team will have the benefit of a qualified special education teacher who will teach as part of the team. The absolute limit on class sizes (25:1), plus the community partners to support each class, and the multi-grade approach with a small team of teachers in inter-discipline instructional blocks will provide a more optimal learning environment for struggling learners. Teacher teams will be able to group and re-group students rapidly based on the three week formative assessment schedule. Because the school focus is on project-based learning, all students will benefit from participation in "mainstream" project-based classes and experiences.

The ongoing process of StrengthBuilding Training and Coaching and the involvement of community school partners with a long history of working with challenging populations will also serve as the vehicle for school improvement and the foundation for design team collaboration agenda. The teams will be expected to review student progress on a continuous basis guided by observation of student work and benchmark assessments

conducted every three weeks. This information will then be used to guide differentiation of instruction and academic intervention steps. This is pivotal to the school belief that all students, regardless of "ability" or current English Language status, will be fully integrated in the regular instructional and social programs.

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[i] www.census.gov; www.zipdatamaps.com/85706
[ii] Reeves, D. High Performance in High Poverty Schools: 90/90/90 and Beyond. Center for Performance Assessment, 2003
[iii] Arizona Department of Education website; Sunnyside Unified School District Research Department Report, 2011
[iv] Arizona Charter School Association Website
[v] Balfanz, R. Putting Middle Grades Students on the Graduation Path: A Policy and Practice Brief. National Middle School Association, Westerville, Ohio
[vi] Gear Up Report for Sunnyside District Administrators, 2010