A.1 Educational Philosophy

A. Philosophical Approach

Synergy is a Greek term whose meaning is described as the interaction of two or more agents or forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects. The strength of the entire organization is only as strong as its weakest member, and each individual member is only as strong as the rest of the organization. Synergy staff and students will learn to support each other in their learning and understand each other's differences. Everyone must be able to recognize and support differences in one another to build a strong and productive learning community. Synergy's philosophy will be founded on a set of core beliefs that will create a positive, collaborative, learning community within the school that provides exemplary instruction and best teaching and learning strategies for all students.

Mission Statement:

The mission of Synergy Public School is to ensure that all children experience a challenging and progressive child-centered educational program that fosters a love of learning and empowers students to be productive, caring and responsible citizens that are college and career ready.

Vision Statement:

The vision of Synergy is to create a school that is highly regarded for its academic excellence and for its contribution to serving children and positively impacting the community in which it operates.

Synergy's philosophical approach to improving the education of students in the Phoenix Urban core is rooted in five fundamental beliefs.

1. Schools with strong **instructional cultures** close the achievement gap for all students and ensure college and career readiness.
2. **Character and leadership education** transforms communities.
3. **Engaged families** enhance learning and academic achievement.
4. **Social and emotional development** is pivotal to student success.
5. **Collaborative and cooperative classrooms** create positive interdependence among students.

Instructional Cultures

We believe that to increase the achievement levels and close the gap for minority and low-income students, we need to focus on what really matters: high expectations, a challenging curriculum, and highly effective teachers and leaders.

- *High Expectations:*
  At our core we believe that all children - despite their socio-economic status or circumstances in life - are entitled to a high-quality education and are able to learn and succeed academically. Synergy Public School will operate under the philosophy that all children are capable of success, without exception. "Students have been shown to achieve more when they believe their teachers and society expect that they will achieve at high

levels." [1] Teachers must look beyond traditional expectations of their students and instead benchmark their students' learning against the achievement of students in the most successful classrooms in the most successful schools in the country. Given our students' potential to achieve, we will not deprive them of learning at the rate and level of students in affluent communities.

- *Challenging Curriculum:*
  Academic achievement is closely related to the curriculum. Students succeed when the curriculum is challenging, engaging, and undiluted. At Synergy Public School, the state standards are the floor, not the ceiling. A rigorous curriculum that is backwards designed and vertically aligned to advanced college-readiness standards will be used to ensure that every child is successful. Our team will work together to provide students with a comprehensive learning experience by analyzing data to drive our daily instruction, long-term planning and ongoing professional development.

- *Highly Effective Teachers and Leaders:*
  We believe that a great educator can make the difference between a student who slips through the cracks and a student who achieves at high levels; a great principal can help teachers become great educators. We know, as teachers and leaders, that we have a significant impact on student achievement. "The research demonstrates that teacher effectiveness contributes more to improving student academic outcomes than any other school characteristic and that an effective principal is central to recruiting and supporting teachers and leading school improvement."[2]

  We have developed a strategic plan to hire, develop and retain the highest quality teaching staff. They will all be expected to align themselves to the mission, vision, and values of Synergy Public School. Realizing that teachers may be at various levels of competency based on their professional experience, all teachers will be provided with continuous, ongoing training in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment and data analysis. Through professional development all staff will engage in professional growth that furthers their capacity to increase student achievement.

Character and Leadership Education

"Comprehensive, high quality character education, is not only effective at promoting the development of good character, but is a promising approach to the prevention of a wide range of contemporary problems. These include aggressive and antisocial behaviors, drug use, criminal activities, academic under-achievement, and school failure."[3] As evidenced in the section A.2, a large number of students living in the community Synergy Public School will be situated are immersed in the reality of crime in their everyday lives.

We believe that character and leadership skills should be cultivated at an early age so that students understand the concept of stewardship and ownership of their environments. When students are

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[1] http://teachingasleadership.org/sites/default/files/Related-Readings/DCA_Ch2_2011.pdf
[2] http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/great-teachers-great-leaders.pdf
[3] http://www.character.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/White_Paper_Battistich.pdf

provided with this opportunity, they experience responsible citizenship and engage positively within the community. Synergy students will learn and demonstrate the character attributes of enthusiasm, determination, self-discipline, confidence, gratitude and joy. As students develop leadership skills, they will take pride in their responsibility for tasks and positively affect the community. This increased student confidence builds accountability and can increase academic achievement. At Synergy, we will build a positive school culture around character and leadership development as well as behavioral expectations and performance. These expectations will be built upon the Ron Clark Essential 55. Students will be taught these expectations in morning meetings and they will be reinforced throughout the day.

Engaged Families

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education cited that:

"When schools and families work together to support learning: students do better in school and in life, parents become empowered, teacher morale improves, schools get better and communities grow stronger." [4]

Schools serving low income, ethnically diverse neighborhoods, must make greater efforts to welcome families, because those are the parents who often feel excluded because of differences in their ethnicity, income, and culture.[5] Synergy Public Schools will work to create a welcoming and caring school environment in which parents will feel they have a voice and a place of belonging in the community. We will use effective communication strategies such as home visits, school orientations, newsletters, websites, parent meetings, and quarterly teacher conferences to share the vision and mission of the school as well as keep parents up to date on school events and student progress. This communication will be straightforward, simple and will avoid educational jargon. Communication to parents will be in English and Spanish. We will offer a variety of parent education classes including classes that help parents support student learning at home. In addition to classes offered, the school will have a resource room for parents that will provide materials on issues of concern for parents, such as child development, health and safety, social service agencies and special education among others. Synergy teachers will always make their first point of contact with a parent a positive experience and will welcome parents as volunteer partners. Parent and Family involvement will be an intentional focus of the school, as the relationships built with parents will ensure the long-term retention of students.

Social and Emotional Development

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) are common among children living in low-income environments and are a profound problem in the state of Arizona according to the National Survey of Children's Health. Over 26% of children in Arizona between the ages of 0-17 have already experienced at least one adverse childhood experience and 31% have experienced two or more. These numbers are significantly higher than the national average. An adverse childhood experience is trauma that takes place in a child's life and can include physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, alcohol/drug abuse in the household, domestic violence, emotional or physical neglect or an incarcerated household member. These types of experiences create what is known as toxic stress.

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[4] http://www.ncpie.org/
[5] http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR5-3/mcdermott.html

Toxic stress can lead to poor mental and physical health. The more ACE's a child has in their life the greater risk they have for developing cancer, depression, diabetes, and heart disease. For students who have these adverse experiences it takes stable, nurturing relationships with caring adults to reverse the damage.[6] We know that students entering our doors will have faced many of these traumas; therefore, we will create a trauma sensitive school and safe learning environment to foster the physical, emotional and mental well being of all students.

At Synergy Public School, the environment that is created and established will be one that supports a school community that is physically and emotionally safe, well disciplined and conducive to learning. Based on Synergy's target population, we know that our students are faced with many physical and emotional safety concerns every day. If the basic human needs of feeling safe and secure, both physically and emotionally, are not met, it is extremely difficult to prioritize focus on a rigorous curriculum and high academic demands. Synergy Schools will use a Trauma Sensitive and Positive Behavioral approach to remove the barriers to learning that occur when behaviors are disrupting the learning community. Instead of using a piecemeal approach of individual behavioral management plans, a continuum of positive behavior support for all students within the school will be implemented in areas including the classroom and non-classroom settings (such as hallways, buses, and restrooms). Behavioral expectations and routines will be developed and taught to all students ensuring consistent expectations across the school. The behavior model will be multi-tiered to ensure a high level of success for all students and allow for individual behavioral needs to be met.[7] In addition, Synergy schools will work to link child-serving and community agencies to Synergy Schools and its families to support academic, emotional, behavioral and social success of the students.

We believe that by addressing the academic, social, emotional, and safety needs of our students, we are creating an environment that can reverse the negative impact that living in a high crime low income community can foster. At Synergy School, students will be held to the highest of expectations because that is what they deserve. The staff will work to encourage, motivate, and guide students so that learning can be maximized everyday.

Collaborative and Cooperative Classrooms

"Learning is a social activity. This social dimension is a critical aspect in the learning process for people of any age. People learn in communities. Together, they accomplish more than as individuals and they have more fun in the process. Students are no different."[8] Cooperative Learning is a style of learning that allows students to work together to accomplish a specific goal. It is one of the most powerful tools teachers have in providing the level of engagement and academic and social support their students need to be successful. Cooperative learning develops positive interdependence among students. Positive interdependence is the belief by each individual that there is value in working with other students and that both individual learning and work products will be better as a result of collaboration. Positive interdependence is linking students together so one cannot succeed unless all group members succeed. Group members have to know that they sink or swim together.

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[6] http://azchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/ACEs.efinal.pdf
[7] https://www.pbis.org/school/primary-level
[8] http://www.successforall.org/elementary/powerful-instruction/our-instructional-design/cooperative-learning/

Based on the work of Dr. Spencer Kagan, cooperative learning is designed to increase academic achievement, improve social skills and social relations, improve thinking skills, and reduce discipline problems.[9] The research on cooperative learning indicates that cooperation, compared with competitive and individualistic efforts, typically results in (a) higher achievement and greater productivity, (b) more caring, supportive, and committed relationships, and (c) greater psychological health, social competence, and self-esteem (Johnson, D, 1993). Cooperative learning will be a consistent component of classroom instruction in every Synergy classroom.

SYNERGY COMMITMENTS

The value system for Synergy Public School will be built upon 6 C's. These values will define the culture and mindset of all those who enter its doors.

- Committed to Instructional Excellence
  We will prepare a rigorous and engaging curriculum that will be delivered by extraordinary teachers and driven by innovative leaders.
- Committed to Collaboration
  We will provide learning opportunities to teach cooperative and collaborative skills to prepare students to work with a variety of people.
- Committed to a Child-Centered Environment
  We will create a warm caring environment that nurtures the needs of the whole child.
- Committed to being Community Focused
  We will build strong partnerships with parents and community because we know it takes a village.
- Committed to Building Character
  We will develop character strengths to create well-rounded individuals who demonstrate enthusiasm, determination, self-discipline, confidence, gratitude and joy.
- Committed to Continually Learning
  We will be driven by the belief of on-going staff and student development creates lifelong learners.

B. Fundamental Principles of Synergy Public School's Program of Instruction

Outlined clearly in A.R.S. § 15-181, the fundamental purpose of charter schools is to "increase student achievement." Keeping that in mind, Synergy Public School has constructed a Program of Instruction that will maximize student achievement for our target student population through:

1. The development of a rigorous and engaging curriculum
2. The delivery of a rigorous and engaging curriculum by highly effective teachers using best instructional practices.
3. Data-driven instructional decisions that promote academic excellence for every child
4. More Time=More Learning
5. Creating opportunities that will allow everyone to innovate and "Think Differently"

[9] http://www.kaganonline.com/about_us.php

1. The development of a rigorous and engaging curriculum

To ensure that all children experience a challenging and progressive child-centered educational program the Arizona College and Career Readiness Standards (AZCCRS) will be used to provide the baseline academic skills and content a student must possess to be grade level proficient. Our system to develop this curriculum includes a process for creation, implementation, evaluation and revision in order to meet the unique needs of educationally disadvantaged students throughout the year. Synergy Public School's Curriculum Team will utilize Backward Design from the AZCCRS to create aligned assessments and a scope/sequence in the subjects of Math, English Language Arts, Science and Social Studies. First the standards will be deconstructed into the skills and knowledge necessary for students to successfully meet these standards. Once there is a clear understanding of the standard, a backward design approach to curriculum development is what will be used. Next, assessments will be constructed to demonstrate mastery of the AZCCRS; these assessments will be task analyzed to construct learning objectives that unfold in a logical sequence. Designing the scope and sequence from the formal assessments will ensure tight alignment and measurement of student achievement.

The curriculum will be rigorous and engaging because:

- Sequenced lessons that are aligned to the end-of-lesson assessment will maximize student learning. Students will be engaged because there will be a clear link between the instruction of the lesson objective and formal assessment.

- The Gradual Release of Responsibility instructional framework will be used. The Gradual Release model purposefully shifts the cognitive load from teacher-as-model, to joint responsibility of teacher and learner, to independent practice and application by the learner, making the learning rigorous and engaging.

- Students will work collaboratively on projects that culminate with a product or presentation that allows them to apply their learning in a real world context.

- Students who master each taught objective have the immediate opportunity to apply and extend the rigor via online learning during the intervention block daily. Pacing will be individualized using an online adaptive program such as Front Row Education, Dreambox, or IXL that strategically increases the learning velocity of advanced students, and on-level students who are ready to work ahead. This progressive approach not only allows teachers the ability to adapt and differentiate lessons but also provides students with necessary tools that will help them to become responsible for their own learning.

2. The delivery of a rigorous and engaging curriculum by highly effective teachers using best instructional practices.

According to the Center for Public Education, student achievement is more heavily influenced by teacher quality than by students' race and class. This is especially true of students from low-income families. [10] At Synergy, we recognize that teacher quality is key in student success and are dedicated to recruiting and retaining extraordinarily passionate and talented teachers. Synergy

[10] http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/Teacher-quality-and-student-achievement-At-a-glance/Teacher-quality-and-student-achievement-QA.html

Public School defines a highly effective teacher as an educational professional who has demonstrated performance success through student achievement data, evaluation data, and passion for a growth mindset.

A highly effective teacher incorporates Best Educational Practices to maximize student learning. Synergy Public School's teaching staff will employ the following strategies:

- Backward Design in Lesson Planning: Teachers will utilize Understanding Backward Design to the determine student mastery, create units, and formulate common assessments in the Professional Learning Community (PLC) at Synergy.
- Cooperative Learning: Synergy Public School will utilize cooperative learning opportunities from the Kagan methodology to encourage and structure student collaboration.
- Gradual Release of Responsibility: Synergy teachers will plan all lessons using this model to ensure that students are supported in their acquisition of the skills and strategies necessary for success.
- High-yield instructional strategies: Teachers will incorporate high yield strategies based off of Robert Marzano's research. Strategies will include but not be limited to vocabulary building, feedback and praise, graphic organizers, goal setting, and summarization. [11]
- ELL strategies: Synergy will use the following strategies to support its ELL students; vocabulary and language development, metacognition and authentic assessment, explicit instruction, modeling graphic organizers and visuals. It is important to note that these are all good teaching practices that support all students in accessing a rigorous curriculum.
- Differentiation: Synergy Public School will differentiate content, process, or product according to students' readiness, needs, and Individual Education Plan (IEP) for students receiving special education services.

3. Data-driven instructional decisions that promote academic excellence for every child.

To assess the academic progress of our students, we will utilize a comprehensive system of assessments that includes informal daily checks for understanding; weekly formative standards based assessments, content-based unit assessments, and interim criterion-referenced assessments-i.e. Galileo. Assessment data will be analyzed in reference to Arizona College and Career Ready Standards. Analysis of all assessments will provide the basis for our process of evaluating instructional effectiveness and adjusting curriculum accordingly.

4. More Time=More Learning

According to the National Center on Time & Learning, one successful way to improving student outcomes is to increase the length of the day and provide a varied curriculum. The study found that when students in low-income areas are given more time, test scores improve between 11 and 24 percent. [12] It is not enough to simply increase the amount of time students are in school; it is critical that the time be used effectively with students engaged in rigorous high quality learning

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[11] http://ideas.aetn.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/3834/Teachscape_HY_catalog.pdf

[12] http://national.deseretnews.com/article/1537/longer-school-days-mean-better-grades-studies-say.html

activities. Synergy students will participate in an extended learning day in comparison to their local school district peers. The school day will begin at 8:00 am and conclude at 4:00 pm. Students will spend a minimum of 90 minutes daily in reading that is at their instructional reading level as well as 65 minutes of English Language Arts instruction and 65 minutes of Science and Social Studies curriculum. A minimum of 65 minutes daily in math instruction will be given. A critical component to accelerating student learning will be a daily 30-minute intensive intervention program. During this time, teachers will specifically target student deficits or enrich students performing above grade level. In order to support students in becoming contributing members to a community, they will receive 45 minutes daily instruction in explicit character building values and interpersonal skills. "Art, music and physical education are increasingly cut from other schools yet have been shown to improve students' educational experience and can lead to greater academic achievement."[13] Synergy will provide student's daily opportunities to engage in physical education in Year 1 with arts instruction added in Year 2. Finally, a blended learning model using an integration of face-to-face learning with technology-based digital instruction will be used throughout the day to maximize time for personalized student learning and allow teachers to streamline their instruction to help all students reach their full potential. Synergy staff will design a schedule, academic curriculum, and structured support based on the needs of our students using data. The use of data ensures that we make informed decisions that allow us to urgently pursue academic results on behalf of our students.

5.Creating opportunities that will allow everyone to innovate and "Think Differently"

As written in a recent Forbes article, "Today knowledge is ubiquitous, constantly changing, growing exponentially… Today knowledge is free. It's like air, it's like water. It's become a commodity… There's no competitive advantage today in knowing more than the person next to you. The world doesn't care what you know. What the world cares about is what you can do with what you know."[14] At Synergy Public School students and staff will be challenged to innovate and think differently in order to apply learning and knowledge beyond just soaking up information. Students will gain competencies including critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, agility and adaptability, initiative, accessing and analyzing information, and curiosity and imagination.

In addition to innovative ways for students to access and use the curriculum, Synergy classrooms will be innovative as well with a flexible classroom design. Flexible classrooms give students a choice of what kind of learning space works best for them, and helps them to work collaboratively, communicate and engage in critical thinking. Alternative seating has been shown to increase attention and promote self-regulation, leading to improved classroom behavior and academic performance. Alternative seating strategies in classrooms could include standing desks, floor seating, cushions such as the Disc 'O' Sit Cushion, and therapy/exercise ball as well as traditional desks, chairs and tables.[15] Synergy will provide learning environments that meet the needs of today's diverse student.

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[13] https://preuss.ucsd.edu/highlight5.html
[14] http://www.forbes.com/sites/ericaswallow/2012/04/25/creating-innovators/#423224d53d7a
[15] soundideas.pugetsound.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1113&context=ms_occ_therapy

C. Rationale for selected approach for the target population.

With the poor performance of local schools, high poverty rate and limited education amongst families, the academic needs of the local targeted community are compelling. The majority of district schools in the target community yield less than stellar achievement results, with 84% of the school ratings falling into the C or D category.[16] This data and further analysis presented in section A.2, Target Population, clearly indicate that more highly effective primary schools are necessary to improve student achievement within our target population. The majority of students are not receiving an education that will prepare them for the rigors of college, career, and life and most students are not even receiving a consistently adequate education. Synergy's selected approach for the targeted population is grounded in best research principles and practices that are proven effective in working to close the achievement gap. Our beliefs and school model are entirely built around the low-income population that we intend to serve based on the research presented throughout this section.

The founding school leaders of Synergy Public Schools together have a combined total of 40 years in education and have worked their entire careers serving students in low income high need communities. Through the use and implementation of the above-mentioned principles, best instructional practices, strong programs of instruction and participation in high quality leadership training programs, the founders have experienced continued success in raising student achievement with the targeted population. Their work and educational experiences have fueled their passion to create a charter school to meet the needs of families living in the Phoenix urban core.

D. Our mission statement/Alignment to narrative

The mission statement of the target population section A.2 directly aligns to the narrative above in A.1.

[16] https://www.azreportcards.org