APPENDIX J

A. Curricular Emphasis Narrative

1. School Community: To understand the school community it is critical to understand the reason our charter school was created. During the mid 1990's Pima County, and more specifically Pima County Community Services Department, reviewed its intake data covering thousands of youth who applied to the department for employment training and emergency services. The number of youth who had dropped out of high school in the area far surpassed the published local drop out rate and in certain south Tucson and tribal areas approached 40%. Further analysis of data from individual youth interviews and needs assessments showed that the students who had to be turned away from job training for not meeting the County academic criteria (minimum 9th grade on the screening test) shared the following characteristics:

a) 51% were homeless or nearly homeless
b) 82% had dropped out of high school
b) They had an average academic level of that fell 4 grade levels below the minimum threshold of 9th grade in reading and math required to enter County employment training programs (average performance level was 5th grade in reading and 4th grade in math)
c) 98% were below the poverty level and had been unsuccessful at obtaining and/or retaining entry level employment
d) The average age of the youth was 18. They had completed 3 credits toward their high school diploma, and had been out of school for 1 ½ years.
e) Those out of school had attended three previous high school programs before dropping out.
f) They wanted to return to school to earn their high school diploma, but could not find a place where they met re-entry criteria since they had so few academic credits and were now older
g) 84% had other barriers such as a juvenile arrest record, were parenting, were aging out of foster care, or had poor school attendance records or disciplinary infractions. (We have a close partnership with juvenile court for placing youth transitioning from detention.)

Pima County's response was to assemble a volunteer team of experts in educational innovation and interventions to improve academic achievement, counseling at-risk youth, and vocational/employment training to develop an unique model program that would reconnect out-of-school youth to high school successfully and forge a path to sustainable employment and post-secondary education. After four years of preparation, the team looked to the fledgling charter school movement and designed a charter high school program that would provide a successful alternative for this target population of 16 to 21 year olds who had not been successful in traditional schools. The design incorporates best practices proven to re-connect out-of-school youth to school, ensures that they meet the

outcomes to significantly raise their academic levels in the core subjects, master the essential high school standards in all the subjects, and provide on-the-job training in which students apply academics to real world experiences under the supervision of school and workplace mentors.

In the year 2000, Pima Vocational High School (PVHS) opened the original site forming a small school community campus. The contract with the State provides for one school with up to 5 campuses each housing 50 students in small learning communities. Teachers selected for their expertise in differentiated learning strategies teach classes of 15 students utilizing direct instruction. Students master the core Arizona State Standards and raise their reading and math levels from the 5th grade average to at least 10th grade level shown by passing the AIMS 10th grade tests.
This school was one of the few charter schools that did not experience negative backlash from the large district high schools seeing us as "competition". On the contrary, PVHS has become an established referral destination for district dropout prevention counselors to send students who were not passing their own alternative school programs. PVHS has graduated 380 formerly out-of-school youth who met all requirements for high school graduation including passing all the AIMS tests. Data from the last three years' indicate that 77% of graduates have obtained employment and/or enrolled in post secondary job training programs or college. PVHS was accredited by ACA in 2010 for the full 5 year term.

2. Educational Philosophy:
The fundamental philosophy of PVHS is to provide a welcoming academic and vocational program environment within a very small school community. Direct instruction is provided by outstanding youth-friendly teachers skilled in connecting with, engaging, and retaining our target group of youth. Class size is 15 students. As an alternative school with the majority of students presenting with multiple social barriers to school completion, an integral component is the Youth Specialist/counselor at each small campus. He or she advocates for and connects students to support services and additional academic interventions provided by our network of community partners serving homeless, parenting, court-involved youth well before an lapses in school attendance. Discipline policy is based on non-punitive, one-to-one conferencing with youth, and prevention strategies like weekly advising, relevant lessons, the vocational curriculum and intensive year long professional staff development.

3. Methods of Instruction: Over the past 10 years PVHS has implemented numerous best practices proven successful in reconnecting out-of-school youth to improved academic achievement and standards-based mastery. These include:

a. Instruction within small school communities of 50 students per campus, and 15 students per class – students who have dropped out of school feel marginalized when they return to school. Our very small learning communities provide a safe, welcoming space where "everyone knows their name" and they are missed when

they are absent. For most of our youth, this community is the most stable part of their week and students who have had attendance rates of 50% or less in previous schools soon reach 80 to 85% . This in turn supports mastery of academic standards and increased academic achievement.

b. Direct Instruction in classes of 15 students or less – Our students learn extremely well within the dynamic of a well-run direct instruction format. The opportunities for discussions, interactive and cooperative learning, and debates teach excellent life and work skills needed by our students. Many have not done well in "lecture" type classes or self-paced packet or online schools in the past.

c. Curriculum mapping by each department which integrates core standards, Bloom's higher level thinking strategies, relevant instructional methods, and multiple types of assessments directly aligned to the objectives/standards – Our typical newly enrolled student is 17 or 18 years of age, has about 3 academic credits, and basic math and reading skills at 5th grade level. Presented With these significant and varied gaps in learning, there is often a tendency in other programs is to teach almost exclusively at the knowledge level of Bloom's taxonomy. Good curriculum mapping ensures that each department and teacher consistently uses the older students' vast life experience and thinking abilities within each lesson to reach higher levels of Bloom's. This keeps them engaged in their learning and clearly able to track their academic mastery and progress.

d. Total integration of SEI/SDAIE strategies for pupil engagement and retention- Older students with initial below-level reading and math skills make significant academic progress when all teachers consistently utilize word walls, individual white boards, graphic organizers, paired learning, carousels, etc. to engage students in learning

e. Technology integration into direct-instruction format – Most of our students do not have computers in their homes and have limited access to public labs.

f. 200-Day, year round calendar, extended day, work experience placements, 6-week course durations – These all support the additional instruction needed by our students. The 6 week courses allow students to see their success right away through course completions.

g. Year-long Professional Development - Empowers teachers to master the above strategies and best practices

4. Methods of Assessment: Appropriate assessments and data driven instruction have been both critical to our strategies and also have presented us with the greatest challenges given our target population and mission.

ADE has had difficulty evaluating our school-wide progress mainly because of our small school size and the transiency of our student population. These factors have made it difficult to report our progress even utilizing the new Growth Model.

PVHS has met AYP for several years, has always been "Performing" in AZLEARNS, and yet we are in SI of School Improvement. The reasons are due to the years we have not met AYP. And this status is a factor of the student population we choose to serve: Students whose graduation is not counted as part of the graduation rate when they graduate from us at age 19, 20, and 21;
Or, students who enroll with us never having passed one of all of their 10th grade AIMS until they have been with us for a couple of years; As seen in our PMP attached later in this package, we have tried many ways to gather AIMS data to be the most helpful to our teachers, students, and families. We believe we have finally developed a simplified yet very useful tracking format seen in the example on the next page. This format is clear, and tracks the students who have been with our school for a minimum of 7 months of instruction before taking the AIMS tests. We find this gives us a better school wide measure of student growth related to the AIMS.

The most important assessments for individual students continue to be the daily methods implemented by our teachers to check for understanding and mastery in each classroom. As of 2010, we are having great success with the Curriculum Associates' system: Diagnostic Online Math Assessments (DOMA) and Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DOMA). These are aligned to the AIMS standards and provide assessments quarterly. Both students and teachers value the data from this system which also includes intervention materials. Another assessment we utilize is New Century Education Program. Older high school students take charge of their own education by being regularly informed of their progress during weekly advising classes and portfolio building. Often in the past they were not informed of their assessment results, progress in classes, or academic transcripts.

5. Remediation Plan: Remediation is an essential part of our daily activities and is not relegated to a separate part of the day or week. Students have opportunities for re-teaching many times during each class. In addition, all teachers provide one-to-one and small group time at lunch time, after school. Mastery checklists utilized by every teacher ensure that remediation happens as soon as the student and/or teacher needs more help. Also any student can enroll in an AIMS prep class to sharpen basic skills.

6. Promotion and Retention Plan:
Our school is ungraded. Any student aged 16 to 21 takes classes as needed to complete their requirements for graduation. Our students who have been out of school have unpredictable gaps in required credits. What is critical is mastery of each class's outcomes to pass the class. A student may take a class any number of times to master the outcomes. No one is "retained".

7. .Class Size: Class size has been explained above as one of our essential instructional strategies. All class sizes are limited to 15 students.