A. Educational Plan

A.1 Educational Philosophy

A.1 a) Philosophical Approach to Improving Pupil Achievement

Section A of our application details Tucson Country Day School's philosophical approach to increasing student achievement in the target population. Our educational philosophy forms the foundation for our operating principles. Both the educational philosophy and operating principles underlie our Program of Instruction and are created strategically to meet the needs of students in the target population.

Tucson Country Day School's educational philosophy stems from the following core beliefs:

- Every student can succeed, and it is our responsibility to ensure that every student does.
- Our priorities are the academic, social, and overall welfare of students.
- Innovation, inspiration, and motivation profoundly impact teacher effectiveness and student growth.
- Students, parents and colleagues deserve to be treated with dignity, honor, and respect.
- Parents/guardians are deemed as partners with the school in their child's education.
- Professionalism and teamwork contribute to the success of the school.
- Shared leadership, responsibility, and accountability contribute to shared successes.
- The professional development of staff is paramount to the competitiveness of the school.
- Excellence is achieved through high standards and expectations.
- The culture of the school thrives when a supportive and positive atmosphere exists.

Our educational philosophy begins with the belief that every student is a Champion and every child should be given the opportunity to rise to their greatest potential. We believe in developing the whole child, and while we have a strong emphasis on academics, we emphasize the development of social excellence too. Our philosophical belief that every child can succeed provides the setting for improving student achievement. As John Dewey said, "The aim of education should be to teach the child to think, not what to think." When children think, they learn. When children know others believe in them and their ability to succeed, they begin to believe in themselves and they do succeed. We believe in aiming high and teaching children to aim high too. We want them to know they should always shoot for the moon. In the words of Les Brown, "Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you will land among the stars."

Our comprehensive program of instruction is designed to enable parents, community members and educators to assume the risks, and to create innovative and more flexible ways of educating children. This philosophical vent permits our committed community to address the needs of all students regardless of circumstance or condition. Our uniform policy puts all children on an even playing field. When they walk through the front gate, each child is a Champion with the ability to achieve to their highest potential.

Human beings are learners and all people learn all the time. We recognize that learning is a social process, taking place through interactions among learners. Interacting with others of different styles and perspectives enhances learning. Learning and self-esteem are enhanced when the learners appreciate each other's unique talents and accept each other as individuals. Thus the importance of social excellence where students, staff and parents interact in an environment that is respectful, inviting and supportive.

Our educational philosophy is supported by our school mission:

> "Tucson Country Day School is dedicated to providing an educational environment where children, regardless of race, nationality or creed, can grow and learn in an atmosphere of respect and understanding. We strive to develop the unique qualities of each child through positive reinforcement, research-based instructional practices, exposure to comprehensive, relevant curriculum, and experiences that inspire each student to view himself or herself as a successful learner."

We have 46 years of demonstrated success using this philosophy: 32 years as a private school and 14 years as a public charter school. We are currently a solid B-rated school under the State of Arizona school ranking system and were Excelling and Highly Performing under the old legacy system.

A.1 b) Principles Fundamental to Program Instruction

The over-arching goal of Tucson Country Day School is to foster academic excellence through an integrated process of instruction. Cognitive and valuing skills are developed daily through integrated activities in learning areas within the school and community environments. Continuous progress practices are evaluated as learners accomplish goals and objectives in all disciplines to attain mastery of essential skills.

Learners are at the very center of the Tucson Country Day School curriculum. Lifelong learning is the overarching goal for learning processes in all areas of the curriculum, and certain learning objectives are inherent in all learning activities. The learning environments provide choices to support differing learning needs and styles, and enable each learner to develop skills and interests within their own context while expanding these to include others. Learning is enhanced and promoted through the inquiry process. Inquiry implies involvement and involvement leads to understanding. Involvement in learning implies the possession of skills and attitudes that permit a person to find answers to questions while learning as they go. To accomplish this, it is important that

instructional strategies use real-world approaches that incorporate information and materials students interact with on a daily basis and put students on the path to meaningful learning each day

Progress in each of the learning areas is identified through a combination of portfolios and formal records according to the essential skills established by the Common Core State Standards in math and English language arts, and the Arizona State Standards for subjects such as science, social studies, physical education, art and music. Benchmark assessments are used in all subjects to monitor student progress and to modify and adjust curriculum based on the needs of individual students. Assessments to identify gaps in learning and monitor progress are administered at specified times and actions are taken quickly based on results obtained.

Students are taught core subjects using varying learning styles. Staff is trained in the shared inquiry method of education and combines this approach with direct instruction. The learning environment reflects the educational choices necessary to support the learning style of each student. Teaching is supported through staff development, active and engaged Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and the provision of the necessary equipment and resources that give teachers the flexibility to teach in the style that best suits them and their students.

Our target population is students and families who are looking for something the traditional school system typically lacks or cannot provide – a belief that academics and social excellence are both important and should be held in high regard in the school setting, and an educational program that provides access to core academic courses as well as non-core courses like physical education, band, orchestra, art, and technology, and after school program like interscholastic sports, drama, choir and garden club.

School should be a place where a child can flourish in both academic and non-academic classes; where they are surrounded by enthusiastic, caring and encouraging teachers; and where the school as a whole has a focus on both academic and social excellence, and the development of the whole child.

To this end, we are the Tucson Country Day School Champions where *every* student is a Champion.

As a school, we have developed a number of processes and practices that create and sustain collaborative, cooperative and safe environments for all stakeholders. We have a "whatever it takes to make it happen" attitude that is reflected throughout our campus. We recognize the value of working together to solve problems and create successes. As a staff, we recognize the importance of students owning their behaviors so they can see when they are cooperating and working together, and when they are not. We want our students to be able to think about their actions and reflect about what they did well and what they might have done differently. To this end, self reflection opportunities for students are used in many classes across all grade levels. Reflections increase student focus and on-task behavior leading to a safe and cooperative environment, and give

students the opportunity to use higher thinking levels as they analyze their behavior and accomplishments.

We strive to recognize the needs of individual students and to work cooperatively and collaboratively to remove barriers. Our schoolwide focus on teaming also demonstrates our commitment to cooperation and collaboration. Grade level teams work together to design curriculum and plan activities for their students. Our Expectations team works together to ensure that all parents, students and staff are on the same page when it comes to schoolwide behavior expectations. Our team of coordinators work together to share information with their teams, to address and resolve issues as they come up, and to make sure that the school environment is conducive to learning for all students.

TCDS fosters positive interactions, respect, cooperation and collaboration between students and adults, and promotes a healthy peer climate among students in a number of different ways. First and foremost, our school Expectations document keeps all stakeholders – faculty, staff, parents and students – on the same page as far as what is expected at TCDS. Students are encouraged to self-reflect on their own behavior and to make changes as needed to comply with our schoolwide expectations. Students feel comfortable reminding each other about our expectations and will tell a student who is not meeting the expectations that they are not acting like a Champion which usually results in the student correcting his or her behavior.

We use a common language and cues to guide our students towards order, respect and cooperation. Our Expectations document is a critical resource for sharing a common language that keeps communication and misunderstandings. One common cue we use staff and students lets us quiet a classroom, our staff and 700 students in less than a minute. All students and staff know that when a person raises their hand, it is time to stop talking, hold still and raise their hand too.

All students are encouraged to build sustainable, caring relationships with other students, teachers and adults. This is done in many ways. As a school community, we see the value of working and playing together. While we need to be serious and learn, we know that we can have fun doing it. We also recognize that one of the most important things we can do is to get to know our students and build a relationship with each one of them. When students feel valued and know their teachers care about them, they feel empowered and want to work hard to please their teacher.

Our teachers and staff develop relationships by spending time with their students. Classrooms are often open before and after school and even at lunch time, allowing students to come in and seek assistance or just talk to their teacher. Our Courageous Bystander program encourages students to stand up for what is right. They are taught to speak up when their peers are not demonstrating Champion-like behavior and to seek the assistance of an adult if they do not feel comfortable speaking directly to the student. Students are comfortable going to their teachers for guidance and help.

Participation on sports teams, and in after school clubs and programs is another means by which students are encouraged to build relationships with other students, teachers and adults. As students work together, relationships are formed and grow. The Comic Club, Sci-Fi, Girls on the Run and Garden Club are all clubs that are facilitated by staff for the benefit of students. Our strong and sustainable relationships with students are evident in the fact that our Alumni returning to TCDS on a regular basis

At TCDS, all of our staff – teaching and non-teaching, support and affect the school culture. We all follow the same expectations document and strive to meet the same expectations on campus. Our non-teaching staff say good morning when they walk around campus. They attend staff development, participate in Champion Days, serve as leaders on our House teams, and participate when the school wears Matter of Pride and I'm a Champion shirts. Our school crossing guard gives a "High 5" to every student who walks by and wants one. Like the teaching staff, non-teaching staff are involved and friendly.

A 1c) Rationale for Target Population

Our Champion Pledge, recited often by our students at our daily Flag ceremony, serves to reinforce our educational philosophy and addresses the heart and soul of who we are and who our target population is:

> I am a Champion, I am an individual.
> I make mistakes so I can learn, I learn so I can succeed.
> I succeed so I can help others. I am somebody.
> I will become the person I want to be. I will act like a Champion in every way.
> Because I am a Champion, today is the day I will succeed.

We embrace all students and seek out and celebrate their differences as well as their similarities. We look for students who are looking for something just a bit different than what their neighborhood school is able to offer them. We address the needs of the whole child and offer school supported programs that develop each individual student to their highest potential.

We know we are meeting the needs of our target population for a number of reasons.

- Our retention rate for students as we look at the next school year is 95%.

- 93% of the parents who completed a recent survey said they are "Very Satisfied with Tucson Country Day School"

- 91% of the parent who completed the survey said they "Enthusiastically recommend Tucson Country Day School to other families" and more than 90% of our new students come from referrals.

- Academically, 82% of our students who took the AIMS assessments met or exceeded

- Quarterly benchmark assessments in math and reading for all grade levels show significant student growth for most students from one benchmark to the next

- Students who are not at grade level or not making adequate progress are identified by their teachers using classroom data, benchmarking and DIBELS testing. They are then given more in-depth diagnostic assessments using the DRA and placed in our Intervention program where they work with small groups of students to close the identified gaps. Student growth in this program has exceeded our expectations and resulted in many students being exited from the Intervention program because they have mastered grade level skills.

Our instructional strategies and whole child approach work with our target population.