A. Educational Plan

A.3 Program of Instruction

A.3 a) Curriculum for the Core Academic Content Areas and

Creating Curriculum

Curriculum is developed by grade level and subject area professional learning teams. Curriculum development is an iterative process that begins with the standards and results in a curriculum map. The map is then modified based on student progress and as new curricular materials become available. We have completely transitioned to the new standards despite the fact that the testing regimen still assesses the previous standards. This reflects a consensus desire of the staff to move forward with new classroom curriculum development. At bimonthly team meetings, Coordinators share the progress their teams are making with curriculum development. Every week, an optional after-school professional development session is held for classroom curriculum development. It consists of informal discussion and a brief presentation by the principal, followed by team time to write curriculum.

Assuring articulation of curriculum content is an ongoing process that begins with the yearly pre-inservice. Grade level teams have opportunities to meet with the grade level above and below them as they prepare their curriculum maps. A recent staff development session focused on vertical teaming and integrated learning resulted in two subsequent spin-offs: (a) a peer observation assignment (the peer was chosen from another grade), and (b) continuing bimonthly after-school sessions to continue the teaming. As we continue to study the new standards, there is a realization that articulation is embedded in them to a high degree. Work is still required to determine where one grade's work ends and another's begins in order to assure seamless learning. Although we are a one-school, K-8 district, we maintain contact with the high schools our students attend regarding curriculum preparation.

While designed to meet the Arizona College and Career Ready Standards (AZCCRS), our curriculum is created in a way that makes connections between what students are learning and the real world. To this end, lessons use real-world approaches as they incorporate information and materials that students interact with on a daily basis and put students on the path to meaningful learning each day. Lessons begin with an opportunity for students to explore new concepts with teacher guidance. The lessons typically follow the direct instruction model by setting a purpose for learning, providing an introduction to new material, containing guided practice and then independent practice, and finishing with closure.

To ensure students are focused on the standard being taught in each lesson, teachers use a Topic and Do format to express the instructional objective. The Topic and Do are written for the students. The topic states the topic being discussed and the Do tells the students

what they will be able to do at the end of the lesson. At any time, an administrator or other observer should be able to ask and receive an accurate answer from students to the questions, “What are you doing?” and “What are you learning?”

We differentiate content into three categories: Foundational, Essential, and Nice-to-Know. Foundational knowledge is what we expect our students to arrive with, but when students do not have it, we must bring them up to speed. Essential knowledge is the content specified by the Arizona College and Career Ready standards mastered at the target level of rigor. Bambrick-Santoyo has helped us realize that as good as the new standards are, they don’t usually specify the target rigor, so we must specify it. Our goal is for all regular education students to master the essential content at the target rigor level. We monitor this through data binders that contain pertinent assessment data for math and reading for each student in the class. We define Nice-to-Know knowledge as the content beyond the standards or the target rigor, and we reserve the teaching of that content for students who have already achieved target mastery or students in the gifted program.

For sequencing and organizing of essential content, we rely on the sequence in which the standards are presented, curricula developed by others such as Engage New York, and our own action research. Our bias is toward spending the time necessary with content for students to achieve mastery rather than merely covering content. Our teachers have access to Progression Documents produced in support of the standards. These documents detail content progressions that are most brain-compatible and desirable.

The main structure for monitoring implementation of essential curriculum is the professional learning team at each grade level led by a Coordinator. Curriculum monitoring and alignment is a responsibility of the Coordinator, and curriculum planning and implementation is a major function of the team. The teams also make decisions about student performance groupings that are fluid and subject-based, and they also decide how to vary instruction among the groups so that the curriculum calendar is adhered to. An additional check on the implementation of essential curriculum is the evaluation process. Through drop-ins and formal observations, the instructional leader monitors adherence to standards, and teachers must demonstrate that adherence in their summative conference.

Core Academic Area Content

The following outlines specific components of our curriculum for the core content areas and non-core content areas. The curriculum is aligned to the Common Core standards for reading, writing and math, and to the Arizona State Standards for social studies and science. Standards being taught are part of our guaranteed viable curriculum.

Reading

The Arizona College and Career Ready reading standards serve as the starting point for our reading curriculum. In kindergarten through third grade, we use a reading block of 90 minutes to deliver focused instruction in reading. One hour of the block is spent focusing on grade level standards and the other thirty minutes is spent in a Walk to Read format where students move into fluid groups to focus on mastering gaps in learning and receive enrichment, as needed. In the course of instruction, students spend approximately half of their time mastering standards focused on literature and approximately half of their time mastering standards focused on informational text. This is implemented through a grade-level appropriate focus on the reading skills that include key ideas and details, craft and structure, integration of knowledge and idea, print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, and fluency. We use the Daily Five and CAFÉ programs as a basis for driving our instructional format and to ensure consistency in classroom management and instruction from grade level to grade level. We use RAPS 360 and DRA assessments schoolwide to identify gaps in student learning. We address gaps immediately through our schoolwide Response to Intervention (RTI) program.

Writing

The Common Core writing standards serve as the starting point for our writing curriculum. Writing lessons may be integrated into the themed topic of study or take place as a stand alone activity as described in the Program of Instruction. During writing time, teachers will target daily instruction based on student needs as demonstrated by observation and data. Each lesson will have a relation to content the students are currently discussing or preparing to discuss. Writing instruction will follow the direct instruction model by setting a purpose for learning, providing an introduction to new material, containing guided practice and then independent practice, and finishing with closure. During independent practice, teachers will differentiate for individual students by providing assistance as needed. Students will learn to go through the 5-step writing process of pre-writing, writing, revising, editing and publishing for each piece of writing. When applicable, students will share their writing with classmates. Writing prompts and other standards based summative assessments are used to assess writing skills.

Math

The Arizona College and Career Ready math standards form the basis for our math curriculum. Math instruction is designed to progress students through their appropriate grade level math standards but also to provide the ability for students who are ready to move forward at a pace that exceeds their grade level standards to do so. Consistent with the grade level and ability of our students, math curriculum focuses on the AZCCRS strands of counting and cardinality, operations and algebraic thinking, number and operations in base 10, measurement and data, geometry, number and operations - fractions. Math instruction is designed to guide students in mastering math skills that build upon one another as they student moves forward in the math curriculum. In addition to teacher created assessments and checks for learning, benchmark assessments

are used quarterly to assess student progress in the math curriculum and to identify gaps in knowledge. Reteaching is provided as needed.

Science and Social Studies

Science and Social Studies are an important part of our school curriculum. Based on the Arizona State Standards in these areas, curriculum is created by teachers using a wide variety of resources and tools. We take a hands on approach to learning, especially in the science and social studies areas. Content from these areas is incorporated in to instruction in math, reading and writing whenever possible. Additionally, exploratory activities and lab activities are used to give students an interest in the subject and an excitement about learning more.

Foreign Language

We believe in the value of speaking a foreign language. To this end, Spanish instruction starts in kindergarten and continues through 8th grade. Research shows that children who study a foreign language in elementary school achieve higher scores on standardized tests in reading, language arts, and mathematics than those who do not study a foreign language, and that regardless of academic level, race or sex, students who take a foreign language class outperform those who do not take one. In keeping with our goal of achieving academic excellence, we offer Spanish classes once per week to kindergarten through fifth graders and two to three times per week for sixth through eighth graders. Spanish instruction focuses on real-world approaches by using Spanish words and action to identify things students see and interact with every day, thus keeping them on the path to meaningful learning each day.

Non-Core Areas: Art, General Music, Band, Orchestra, Physical Education, Technology

As noted earlier, we want to teach the whole child and assist each student in achieving excellence in both academic and non-academic courses. To develop well-round children who have the opportunity to explore their own special interests and develop their own talents, we offer art, music, band, orchestra, physical education and technology classes, to name a few. This robust specials program gives students the opportunity to apply what they are learning in the real world through diverse outlets that are specifically suited to their individual talents and interests. Specials classes often follow the theme being taught in the general education classroom and thus serve as a supplement to what the classroom teacher is teaching. Progress in these courses in monitored through practice sheets, projects, improvement in times and the number of exercises performed.

Methods of Instruction and Formative Assessments

Tucson Country Day School uses a number of methods of instruction, including direct instruction, to teach students the curriculum described in the preceding pages. Lessons follow the direct instruction model by setting a purpose for learning, providing an introduction to new material, containing guided practice followed by independent practice, and finishing with closure. The lessons use real-world approaches as they incorporate information and materials that students interact with on a daily basis and put

students on the path to meaningful learning each day. Standards taught are part of our guaranteed viable curriculum.

Visitors to Tucson Country Day School observe a dynamic teaching and learning environment. The school day begins with an outdoor flag ceremony where students are encouraged to make each day a day of learning. At the beginning of a lesson, teachers introduce the learning objective for the subject. There are several expectations regarding the learning objective. It is to be posted, large enough for students to read, easily found and visual during the lesson, and written in student friendly language. The learning objective is referenced by the teacher verbally and often by the students as well. Students are trained to be able to answer questions related to the learning objective, such as, "What are you doing?" and "What are you learning?"

Learning objectives at TCDS have three parts: a topic, an assessment and a thinking level. Topic, the first component, is specific to one lesson and is aligned to the standards for the grade level. Assessment, the second component, which we call the "Do," is specific to the single lesson. It is performed by all of the students prior to the end of the lesson. It is a measurable and overt behavior, and all the students are checked by the teacher to inform their teaching. Assessments can be embedded in the lesson's activities – what Robert Marzano calls non-obtrusive assessment, or given after the lesson activities have concluded – this is obtrusive assessment. A ticket to leave is an example of obtrusive assessment.

Thinking level is the third component of the learning objective; thinking level can be of a located on Bloom's taxonomy or Webb's depth of knowledge; it identifies the level of rigor required in the lesson. We seek a mixture of higher and lower thinking level objectives. What is important is that the thinking level must match the rigor we have specified in connection to the Arizona College and Career Ready standards.

Teachers at Tucson Country Day School challenge students' thinking through a number of means: questioning strategies, asking students to take a position and make an argument, requiring students to provide evidence for their answers, and requiring students to explain their thinking. These strategies are all aligned with the new standards. Specific instructional strategies observed at TCDS include direct instruction, whole-brain teaching, inquiry learning - especially in science, student-created task analyses - especially in mathematics, and inherently engaging tasks that relate to students' lives.

Active student engagement is a topic of ongoing discussion and professional development at TCDS, and our own action research indicates that what makes an activity or task inherently engaging is student choice and ownership in the task. Long-term projects that students have designed themselves are utilized in the upper elementary and middle school, and technology-based assignments engage students; for example, interactive white boards in all of our classrooms provide learning opportunities for students to work through important questions and materials while their classmates observe and respond.

Formative assessments are given in all subject matter areas to see where students are at and what they have learned. Formative assessments are used to check for understanding and to make decisions about a student or group of students' readiness to move on.

Summative Assessment Plan that Allows Determination of Student Mastery

Tucson Country Day School makes use of data to drive instruction. We use daily checks for understanding, more in-depth formative assessments and summative assessments to see what students *really* know. This information is then used to modify and adjust the delivery of curriculum to meet the needs of our individual students. Academic needs are assessed through consistent benchmarking, the use of RAPS 360, DRA and DIIBELS testing for reading, and formative and summative assessments created at a classroom level by teachers or teams. We also use Success Masters for K-8 math remediation, and Measured Progress, an online program that gives our teachers access to a large data bank of Common Core related questions that can be used for formative and summative assessments, remedial and enrichment activities, and benchmarking in math. Our system for determining mastery of the Arizona College and Career Ready Standards and adjusting instruction to fit the needs of our students follows.

Check for Understanding
In the course of daily lessons, teachers check for understanding to ensure students are mastering the key concepts being taught. Teachers have been trained on how to incorporate checks for understanding into their daily instruction. Check for understanding can be performed in a number of ways including the use of white boards, a "thumbs up, thumbs down" system, the use of colored pieces of paper signifying yes or no for understanding, and other creative approaches. As each lesson contains a "Do" – telling the student what they will be able to do at the end of the lesson – teachers will conduct an end of the lesson check for understanding that demonstrates whether or not the student can perform the expected action. Based on analysis of the data obtained, instruction will then be tailored to the needs of small groups of children or individuals, as needed.

Pre-Tests
Teachers will use pre-tests at the beginning of a new unit and at the beginning of each quarter to asses student level of knowledge. Instruction will be modified accordingly based on the data obtained.

Benchmark Assessments
Students are assessed at the beginning and end of each quarter in math and reading. These assessments contain questions relating to the topics being covered during the quarter. The pre-test lets teachers see where students are at so they can modify their instruction, if needed, and the post-test lets them see how well a student has mastered the material taught during the quarter. Data is reviewed by each grade level team and the administration during monthly team data meetings.

Summative Standardized Assessments
The data obtained from the AIMS assessments and Stanford 10 assessments (or the new state end of the year assessments) required by the State of Arizona is used to assess student performance and to provide a look back at the effectiveness of what was taught and how it was taught in the tested content areas. Data follows students from year to year so the receiving teacher knows how the student performed the prior year. Year to year data can be used to identify gaps in teaching when data from a specific teacher consistently shows unusual trends.

Tucson Country Day School has a systematic approach to reading instruction that identifies specific dates for benchmarking and progress monitoring. The plan includes actions that will be taken when students score significantly below or above the expected targets. Students identified as needing remedial instruction are placed in the RTI (Response to Intervention) program for assistance in filling the gaps in their learning.

Alignment of Program of Instruction to the Performance Management Plan

Tucson Country Day School's Peformance Management Plan discusses detailed strategies relating to the action steps, resources and accountability necessary to ensure the Program of Instruction is successful.