A.3 Program of Instruction

A. Curriculum Overview and Alignment

The curriculum and instructional design of Vista College Prep is rooted in both successful practice and research. As Adam Meyerson notes in the introduction to Samuel Casey Carter's study of 21 high-performing, high-poverty schools:

> Their [high performing schools] achievement is not an accident. Their success is the intended result of hard work, common sense teaching philosophies, and successful leadership strategies that can be replicated. One of the nation's highest priorities should be to learn from the best practices of these high-performing schools and to insist that all schools serving low income children aspire to the No Excuses standard of excellence.[1]

Our curriculum is aligned with ADE 2010 Standards (CCSA), other rigorous state standards, and supplemented with the knowledge of our faculty to design internal standards to move our students toward high academic achievement and college preparation every year.

To provide the caliber of instruction that will prepare our students with the academic foundation necessary for success in middle school, achievement in high school and graduation from college, Vista College Prep's leadership team reviews and vets curricular materials for each subject and grade level to determine which will be most developmentally appropriate, academically rigorous, and engaging for our students. In reviewing textbook series and other curricular materials, we are considering the following factors: Alignment with ADE 2010 Standards (CCSA); Basis in scientific research of methods successful with our students, particularly English Language Learners (ELLs); Degree of use in high-performing urban schools; Organization and extensiveness of teacher and student materials; Level of vocabulary; and, Reinforcement of grade level-appropriate literacy skills.

Our firm understanding of the ADE 2010 Standards (CCSA) that need to be mastered by students in grades K-5 led us to the selection of the following curricular materials as outlined in **Figure A.3.1.** Each year we evaluate the success of our curricular models and materials and make any adjustments to meet the learning needs of our students.

Figure A.3.1: Proposed Core Academic Curriculum Materials K-5

Core Academic Curriculum Materials Grades K-5				
	Language Arts	**Mathematics**	**Social Studies**	**Science**
K	Phonics: SRA Reading Mastery, Writing: Lucy Calkins – Units of Study, Read Aloud: Text Talk	enVisionMATH	Scott Foresman	Full Options Science Systems (FOSS)
1	Phonics: SRA Reading Mastery, Writing: Lucy Calkins – Units of Study, Read Aloud: Text Talk	enVisionMATH	Scott Foresman	Full Options Science Systems (FOSS)
2	Phonics: SRA Reading Mastery, Writing: Lucy Calkins – Units of Study, Read Aloud: Text Talk	enVisionMATH	Scott Foresman	Full Options Science Systems (FOSS)
3	Phonics: SRA Reading Mastery (as needed, Literature: Junior Great Books, Writing: Lucy	enVisionMATH	Scott Foresman	Full Options Science Systems (FOSS)

[1] Carter, Samuel Casey. *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools.* The Heritage Foundation, 2000.

	Calkins – Units of Study			
4	Literature: Junior Great Books, Writing: Lucy Calkins – Units of Study, Literature: Great Books	enVisionMATH	Scott Foresman	Full Options Science Systems (FOSS)
5	Literature: Junior Great Books, Writing: Lucy Calkins – Units of Study, Literature: Great Books	enVisionMATH	Scott Foresman	Full Options Science Systems (FOSS)

Literacy in Grades K-2

In the primary grades, the goals of literacy instruction are to build fluency in decoding and speaking (through crafting habits of discussion), develop students' reading comprehension strategies, accelerate vocabulary development, and lay the foundation for articulate expression in writing. K-2 students receive approximately 215 minutes of daily literacy instruction (40,000 minutes of literacy instruction annually), which is especially valuable for ELLs who "respond well to a plan of instruction in which each aspect of the language builds on another, with plenty of opportunities for practice."[2] With only 18 students in each classroom, we have increased opportunities for differentiated instruction, especially during the critical literacy blocks. When students are not receiving individual instruction, students are grouped by ability for all literacy blocks.

- **Direct Instruction:** Phonemic awareness and phonics instruction incorporate visual, auditory and tactile cues. Using Reading Mastery, a curriculum producing demonstrable results for student from low-income families, teachers engage students in making verbal connections with visual representations of phonemes, and use call and response to teach students pronunciation and reinforce fluency with letter sound patterns. Differentiating instruction for a variety of learners, teachers give students tactile experiences, engaging multiple modalities.

- **Guided Reading:** All students are placed into three flexible ability groups for Guided Reading sessions during a daily literacy block based on the baseline data generated from testing during the student orientation period (with at most, six students per group allowing for highly differentiated instruction). All groups are accountable for the same concepts and skills and are required to take the same internal and external assessments regardless of their grouping. We believe that flexible ability grouping is the most effective way to differentiate instruction for students at different academic levels – specifically, because it allows the teacher to modify pacing of instruction and thus address students' academic needs. Small-group reading instruction presents the same content, but the degree of depth and in some cases the reading level varies according to the ability levels of the group. Teachers monitor students individually, conduct one-on-one assessments, and plan post-reading activities. The flexible grouping allows teachers to move students between groups as often as needed, so that students are getting instruction at the level they need. This movement typically occurs following the administration of six-week assessments, but can occur at any time if a significant change in reading level is noticed by the teacher. When students are not meeting one-on-one with a teacher, they engage in independent reading at their level or participate in a center.

- **Read Aloud**: During the 20-minute Read Aloud in K-2, "[t]he teacher reads aloud to students; but both the teacher and the students think about, talk about, and respond to the text."[3] Focusing on sight words, high frequency words and new vocabulary, teachers model habits of effective

[2] Haver, Johanna J. *Structured English Immersion: A Step-By-Step Guide for K – 6 Teachers and Administrators*. Corwin Press, CA. 2003.
[3] Fountas, Irene C. and Gay Su Pinnell. *Teaching for Comprehending and Fluency: Thinking, Talking, and Writing About Reading, K – 8*.Portsmouth, NH. Heinemann. 2006.

readers thinking aloud,[4] engaging students by asking thoughtful, multi-leveled questions. Achieving such standards as "with prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text" and "describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details, " the read aloud teaches the skills and knowledge outlined in the ADE 2010 Standards (CCSA), and then is further supported through practice during the reading comprehension block.[5] In addition, Vista College Prep will purchase a library of books from "Text Talk," which is a proven program that focuses on comprehension and vocabulary.

- **Reading Comprehension:** This is a thirty-minute block where students are practicing skills that were taught and modeled during the read aloud. Often the same text is used and this is also the period of time when a skill learned during the read aloud and later practiced in reading comprehension is assessed. The class is split by ability into two groups of nine. Further, this 30-minute block provides additional time to differentiate instruction, as the teacher (a second administrative teacher pushes in during this 30-minute block as noted on our sample weekly calendar) occasionally splits the group of nine students to have one group respond in writing to a story, while the other group gets to practice the skill with the teacher.[6]

Literacy in Grades 3-5

The literacy instruction for grades 3-5 is comprised of two primary blocks. The first is a focus on reading comprehension, literature study and vocabulary development. The second block focuses on writing through conventions practice and grammar (as discussed below). Independent reading occurs at the end of the day for 35 minutes during DEAR (Drop Everything and Read). Vista College Prep students are held accountable for their independent reading and are responsible for completing a nightly journal (assessing completion as well as comprehension) as well as presenting a final project on each completed book. Students have individualized reading plans based on frequent assessments to determine appropriate texts for independent and small group reading. There continues to be shared reading, focusing on non-fiction comprehension and fictional analysis. Additionally, some instructional time will include the reading and writing of non-fiction with a focus on science and social studies content.

Writing in Grades K-5

In grades K-2, students receive a 45-minute daily writing program. Beginning with a ten-minute lesson on handwriting mechanics, students transition into a full Writing Workshop where the teacher is beginning the year teaching students how to use pictures and words to communicate ideas, with the expectation of full sentences and paragraphs in later parts of K through grade 2. Students improve writing by focusing on ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, writing conventions and presentation. Teachers model techniques of effective authors, and supply frequent, specific feedback to improve student writing. Students write in various genres and learn the writing process of prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Vista College Prep will also ensure all students are responding to literature, as stressed in the ADE 2010 Standards (CCSA).

In grades 3-5, each Writing and Grammar class begins with a "daily edit" exercise and a mini-lesson on rules of grammar and writing conventions. The class incorporates a Writer's Workshop structure for students' composition of fiction and nonfiction works in multiple genres. Teachers model techniques of

[4] "Think Aloud" allows students to understand what teacher is thinking and why, modeling what students should consider as they complete similar task independently. Keene & Zimmerman, *Mosaic of Thought*, Heinemann (1997).
[5] Common Core State Standards: http://www.maine.gov/education/lres/ela/documents/ELA_Break-Down/Common_Core_Standards-ELA_Reading_K-5.pdf.
[6] This practice of writing and responding to reading during the reading comprehension block was observed at North Start Elementary School in Newark, NJ—part of the Uncommon Network.

effective authors, and supply frequent, specific feedback to improve student writing. While based on the Lucy Calkins curriculum, starting in third grade, more of the lesson planning is internally created. Students write in various genres and use a process including prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing.

Math in Grades K-5

Using research-based curricula such as enVisionMATH, we provide an average of 68 minutes of daily math instruction in K-2 and an average of 88 minutes of daily math in grades 3-5. All instruction is aligned with the ADE 2010 Standards (CCSA). "Written specifically to address the Common Core State Standards, enVisionMATH Common Core is based on critical foundational research and proven classroom results."[7] With the recognition that students need basic fact knowledge and "automaticity" with procedural computation and understanding of conceptual ideas and the ability to solve complex mathematical problems, enVisionMATH is considered to be one of the only programs that combines all necessary skills in one program. As a result, students will have a strong foundation in the basic skills, procedural computation, and conceptual understanding. Our math block is divided between the scripted lesson from enVisionMATH and additional practice in problem-solving and fluency, with lessons created by the teacher. We are modeling our math block off of schools like Roxbury Prep in Boston and Capitol Collegiate in Sacramento. Both schools separate Math Problem Solving[8] and Math Procedures into two lessons.

Science in Grades K-5

We will implement a rigorous, standards-based science curriculum that maximizes student learning and engagement with the world in which they live. Because of its documented success we have selected Full Options Science Systems[9] (FOSS) as a foundational program in our science curriculum. At a developmentally appropriate pace, students develop and master scientific knowledge and skills through the study of multiple scientific fields as emphasized in the ADE 2010 Standards (CCSA), apply the scientific method, conduct experiments of their own design, and present their findings professionally. We will supplement as needed this research-proven model to ensure that our students are receiving a rigorous foundational science curriculum and are fully prepared to enter a more advanced course of study of the sciences at the middle school level.

Social Studies in Grades K-5

One reason for urban students scoring lower on reading tests is that they lack the background knowledge to deeply comprehend complex reading passages. When one reads a text, one must know how to decode the words and analyze text. To understand the text, one must also know the basic vocabulary and contextual information the author assumes the reader understands. Students must receive a rich and rigorous education in social studies. We believe this can be accomplished even with our alternating units[10] of Social Studies and Science during K-2, due to the intensity of our literacy program that underpins learning in the other key subjects. When schedules change in grade three with a full year of social studies every day, students' reading skills will be so strong that their ability to grasp content will also be strengthened and the impact of social studies instruction will be maximized. While not explicitly a Core Knowledge school, we will draw from the Core Knowledge Sequence. For texts, we expect to use

[7] Pearson enVisionMATH: http://www.pearsonschool.com/index.cfm?locator=PS1zHe.
[8] To ensure Vista College Prep's math curriculum samples are fully aligned, we have based our lessons off a 45-minute (K-2) and 50-minute (3-5) math procedures class. The remaining minutes in our math block are spent on teacher-created math problem solving lessons.
[9] FOSS is research-based science curriculum that provides meaningful science education for elementary school students and prepares them for life in the 21st century. The FOSS program also provides hands-on activities and readings in science.
[10] Starting in Grade 3 we switch to full 50 minute blocks of both Science and Social Studies.

the Scott Foresman[11] Social Studies curricula for all grades. We will develop supplemental curriculum in social studies that reinforces the ADE 2010 Standards (CCSA), so that our students are prepared for a rigorous middle school curriculum, continuing on the college preparatory trajectory.

B. Methods of Instruction

All of the practices listed below are carefully taught to all founding teachers and future staff. Starting on day one, every teacher is versed in the practices and ready to execute. Additional support from the Executive Director is provided to teachers throughout the school year during weekly (and twice-weekly for new teachers) observations.

- **Strong Emphasis on and Differentiated Instruction in Literacy**: Our small class size allows for high differentiation throughout all literacy blocks ensuring we are reaching all learners through multiple modalities. With a focus on individualization, research indicates that early reading instruction is most effective within small homogeneous groups. Our model allows for two groups of nine during the direct instruction component of the phonics block—this allows for increased opportunities for differentiation as well as a constant focus on flexible grouping of students. During Literacy Block #2, while one group is receiving direct instruction from the teacher, the other groups are in structured literacy centers. During Literacy Block #1 in grades K-2, we have at least one additional teacher supporting this foundational period of instruction by teaching reading comprehension while the other nine students are receiving a Reading Mastery lesson.

- **Standards-based Curriculum and Instruction:** Vista College Prep's curriculum is based on and fully aligned with the ADE 2010 Standards (CCSA). All teachers analyze state content standards and internal school standards that correspond to their specific grade and content areas. They then frame their lessons to ensure that they align with the scope and sequence of study and develop lesson content based on daily standards-driven objectives in the manner best suited to achieving strong student outcomes. The frequent use of standards-driven assessment data assists teachers and administrators in ensuring that content mastery is occurring at the appropriate pace and in accordance with state standards.

- **Systematic Checks for Understanding:** Assessing student learning on a regular basis is critical for ensuring student mastery. Effective checks for understanding are deliberate and purposeful. Methods to ensure effective checks include: Direct questioning and paraphrasing, Written responses, Think-Pair-Share, White boards, Small group quick discussions, Use of signs or cues, and choral response.

- **Instructional Consistency**: Instructional consistency supports academic achievement and assists leadership in supporting teachers. It provides a common platform for instructional discussions and ensures that every staff member communicates to students from a common set of instructional expectations. Through 17 days of professional development over the summer, staff and leadership have multiple conversations and role-play instructional delivery to ensure consistency.

[11] Scott Foresman curriculum motivates students to become active and informed citizens in alignment with state standards. Curriculum provides a teacher with the flexibility needed to design engaging lesson and the infrastructure to provide the content and skill development elementary students need. The curriculum provides readable, accessible content that aligns with ADE 2010 Standards (CCSA)and easy to-use multiple resources meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. http://www.hmco.com/company/newsroom/newsroom.html.

- **Common Blackboard Configuration (BBC)**: The BBC consists of the Aim, Do Now, Agenda and HW; it sets academic expectations and serves as a visual cue to manage instructional pacing and is a school-wide practice.

- **Rap, Rhythm and Rhyme**: Chanting and rhyming create excitement about learning and help children remember key concepts. According to Michael Fienberg, "[T]he spectacular gains that KIPP students make in their first year is in part the result of [this] dynamic teaching method."[12]

- **Kinesthetic Learning**: Physical activity maintains student engagement and makes learning fun. Students learn a new concept using hand signals, finger snapping and other gestures and teachers reward individual/group academic performance while instruction is actively occurring.

- **Small Group/One-on-One Tutoring:** Targeted interventions throughout the day provide opportunities to deliver focused instruction in precise areas of concern for struggling students.

- **Taxonomy of Teaching**: We use a variety of academic, behavioral and advanced instructional techniques that reinforce student expectations and build high levels of student engagement.[13] We will select 2–3 techniques as part of PD focus each year.

- **Gradual Release "I do/we do/you do:"** When appropriate, the lesson begins with the teacher demonstrating the concept/skill – "I do," and then providing opportunities to learn and practice the concept together – "we do." Students practice the concept independently –"you do" – for individual mastery.[14] This gradual release is particularly important as students move from grade two toward grade five.

C. Formative and Summative Assessment Plan

One of the five characteristics common to all 90/90/90 schools - schools where more than 90 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, 90 percent of the students are from ethnic minorities, and 90 percent of the students meet or achieve high academic standards - is "frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement."[15] At Vista College Prep, we believe that our students' academic progress relies on the successful implementation and use of data generated from standards-based assessments. Prior to the start of the school year, we conduct a diagnostic assessment of each student using the STEP (Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress)[16] Assessment System to measure instructional and independent reading levels and the nationally-normed TerraNova and Stanford 10 assessment to measure initial literacy and math proficiency. The results of these diagnostic assessments are used by Vista College Prep staff to establish a benchmark against which to measure student progress and to inform instructional planning. This information is sent home to parents (in a clear and concise manner) as well as presented to the Governing Board. Below is a more detailed list of the type and frequency of assessment we will offer at Vista College Prep.

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[12] Carter, Samuel Casey. *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High Poverty Schools.* The Heritage Foundation. 2000. Chanting throughout the day was also observed by the Lead Founder at multiple high-performing schools including Excellence Girls and North Star Elementary.

[13] Instructional Techniques taken from the *Taxonomy of Effective Teaching Practices* by Doug Lemov. Mr. Lemov is a Managing Director for Uncommon Schools and the founder of Rochester Preparatory Charter Middle School in Rochester, NY. Building Excellent Schools provided training for Fellows on the Taxonomy.

[14] Pearson, P.D., and Gallaher, M. (1983) "The Instruction of Reading Comprehension," *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, p.8.

[15] This quote is from research conducted at the Center for Performance Assessment on the "90/90/90 Schools." The term "90/90/90" was coined by Douglas Reeves in 1995 based on observations in Milwaukee, WI, where schools had been identified with: 90%+ eligible for free and reduced lunch, 90%+ ethnic minorities, 90%+ met the district/state academic standards.

[16] The STEP assessment is used in many of the high performing schools we studied. They are (http://uchicagoimpact.org/step/) a "developmental literacy assessment…and data management system that defines the pathway and tracks the progress of pre-kindergarten through third grade students as they learn to read using research-based milestones."

Formative - Frequent assessments are given throughout the year to measure student progress so that teachers can modify student groups, adjust their instruction and increase academic rigor based on the needs of their students.

- **Daily "Do Now"/Checks for Understanding:** Teachers use a "do now" at the beginning of class as a formative assessment to measure which students mastered the lesson from the day before. The "do now" informs lesson planning and individualization of teaching.

- **Six-week, Interim Assessments**: Throughout the academic year, as outlined on the proposed calendar, we conduct standards-based interim assessments every six weeks to gauge students' progress in reading, writing, math, Science, and Social Studies and conduct the STEP Assessment to measure reading level growth. We will use internal assessments normed against those created by other high-performing charter schools to assess mastery of Science and Social Studies content. The week following each round of interim assessments, we conduct a teacher professional development day during which leaders and teachers analyze assessment results, identify trends in student progress and gaps in skills and proficiency levels, and create instructional action plans for individual students, sub-groups, classes, and grade levels. We discuss students' progress and goals with them individually and share assessment results with parents through progress reports and report cards.

- **STEP:** The STEP Assessment, one of Vista College Prep's interim assessments, has gained a significant following from high performing schools because it "provides accessible formative assessment data, identifies struggling readers early, offers clear intervention strategies, and includes a data management system that can inform teachers about the strengths and weaknesses of their students' reading performance."[17] The comprehensive test measuring both comprehension and fluency is administered six times per year.

Summative – We use our end-of-year data to compare how a cohort of students has performed over the course of the year and use our internal assessments and nationally-normed assessments to compare our performance nationally.

- **Internal End-of-Year Exams:** These tests are summative assessments of all standards covered throughout the year in both math and literacy. The exams are created before school begins and helps guide lesson planning.

- **Nationally-Normed Assessments:** At the start of each academic year, we assess each student's reading level and math skills proficiency level using the nationally-normed TerraNova in order to: (1) Obtain a baseline level for each child against which we can measure growth throughout the academic year; and (2) Target and pace instruction and academic support programs strategically to ensure that we close grade-level skills gaps and ensure all students progress at the rate necessary to reach grade-level proficiency and content mastery by the conclusion of the academic year. This test is administered again in May (at the end of the year), to track, evaluate, and compare student progress. We administer this test for all grades as a national comparison to other high performing charter schools that use the same exam. We will still administer the TerraNova in grade two and administer the Stanford 10 as mandated, to ensure our data is consistent year to year.

[17] Information provided by Deirdre Ring-Marrinson, an employee of STEP on October 24, 2011. However, school leaders at the Uncommon Schools, Memphis College Prep (founded by BES Fellow, Michael Whaley), Capitol Collegiate (founded by BES Fellow Penny Schwinn) and others have reinforced these benefits as demonstrated by the success of their students in both reading proficiency and development of critical thinking skills.

- **State-Mandated Assessments:** We administer annual state mandated assessments, the Stanford 10 in grade two and Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS)[18] beginning in grade three to measure students' mastery of grade-level standards and to assess annual progress.

English Language Learners

We anticipate 25% of our students to be English Language Learners (ELL).[19] We recognize our responsibility to accurately identify ELL students and effectively serve them in attaining high levels of academic achievement. To do so, we will use the enrollment form and Home Language Survey to determine if a student needs to take the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA).[20] If a student scores Pre-Emergent, Emergent, Basic or Intermediate, s/he is an ELL, and eligible for English Language services with parent consent. We either offer Structured English Immersion (SEI) or provide services through the use of an Individualized Language Learner Plan (ILLP), depending on the number of students who qualify. We administer regular English proficiency assessments throughout the school year. We expect that the results of this data will expedite the rate of students gaining proficiency throughout the year (as we can adjust curriculum accordingly). Our goal is for K-1 students to be proficient within seven months.[21]

Special Education

Vista College Prep maintains high expectations for all students, including those with identified special needs, and will ensure all receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. All elements of Vista College Prep's education program are designed to meet the academic and behavioral needs of all students, including those with learning differences and disabilities. In serving students identified as having disabilities under the law or whom we suspect may have such disabilities, we will provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and comply with all applicable state and federal statutes, including Title II of the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Section 50465 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1974. We will educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and with their non-disabled peers to the extent appropriate and allowed by each student's IEP. We will not discriminate against students having or suspected to have disabilities in admission and enrollment practices. All staff will receive annual special education compliance training and we will hire at least one fully certified special education teacher during year one, two fully certified special education teachers during year two, and a Special Education Coordinator in year three (with an additional special education teacher still on staff).

D. Alignment of Program of Instruction and Performance Management Plan

Our Performance Management Plan for reading and math outlines appropriate staffing, curriculum and strategic decisions by the Governing Board and the Executive Director to fully support our program of instruction and allow for successful oversight and accountability from staff to the Executive Director and from the Executive Director to the Governing Board.

[18] As Arizona moves to fully adopt the Common Core assessments, we will, of course, modify this schedule to account for any state testing required by the Common Core.
[19] For more detail see National Center for Educational Statistics: http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?start=0&ID2=0407080.
[20] We look forward to implementing the new AZELLA Kindergarten Placement Test and will follow its roll-out during the 2012-2013 year.
[21] Based on the expectation and results demonstrated at Capitol Collegiate in Sacramento, a high performing elementary school.