ARIZONA STATE BOARD FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS

NEW CHARTER APPLICATION RECOMMENDATION REPORT 2017

NOVEMBER 30, 2017

New Charter Application for the operation of

Think Through Academy

Submitted by

Think Through Academy

Report Summary

			Recommendation:	Approve	
Applicant Name:	Think Through Academy				
Proposed School Name:	Think Through Academy				
Grades Served Year 1:	9-12	Grades Served Year 2:	9-12	Grades Served Year 3:	9-12
Location:	West Central Phoenix, bounded by 55th Ave. on the west, 15th Ave. on the east, Glendale Ave. on the north, and Thomas Rd. on the south				
Mission Statement:	The mission of Think Through Academy is to equip learners with the 21st century skills necessary for success within and beyond school, through a highly effective and differentiated curriculum delivered by an effective instructional staff within a collaborative environment.				

Section Scores

A substantively complete application package meets the following scoring requirements:

- No evaluation criteria receive a score of falls below the expectations; and
- No more than one evaluation area in each section is scored as approaching; and
- 95 percent of the evaluation areas in each plan (educational, operational, business) score at the meets level.

	Preliminary TRP Scores		Revised TRP Scores	
Any falls below the expectations ratings?	Yes		No	
More than one evaluation area in each section scored approaches?	Yes		No	
		Section Score		Section Score
Educational Plan Score ≥ 95%?	No	53%	Yes	97%
Operational Plan Score ≥ 95%?	No	83%	Yes	100%
Business Plan Score ≥ 95%?	No	61%	Yes	100%

In-Person Interview Summary

The Applicant team at the interview included 2 of the 3 listed Charter Principals: Najat Benaoussar (also Authorized Representative) and Naureen Hasan. Kari Klein was not present. The two Principals present shared the responses evenly, and both demonstrated thorough understanding of the contents of the Application package, and allayed the few concerns felt by the TRP.

Prior to the interview, the TRP had concerns about the development of curriculum. The Program of Instruction (Educational Plan A.3) described a model that included block scheduling, a rotational model within a class block, an online component, double-dose scheduling of English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, and other uncommon features. Both Ms. Hasan and Ms. Benaoussar were able to describe in detail how the curriculum would be developed and implemented, including that they were in the process of developing a significant amount of curriculum for teachers to use (Capacity Interview 25:15). The Applicant team also described how the budgeted sums would be deployed to purchase adopted and resource material to support teachers in the development of instructional resources and units targeting the school population (Capacity Interview 31:30). The depth and details of the answer confirmed to the TRP that the Applicant team had the

capacity to implement their Program as described.

Another area of concern for the TRP prior to the interview was the business management capacity of the Applicant team. The written materials presented all three Charter Principals as having significant instructional and school leadership experience, but did not list the same degree of financial experience. Ms. Hasan noted that she had earned a Masters of Business Administration, and both members described how they intended to add board members with suitable experience to support them (Capacity Interview 1:13:49). These answers, combined with the evidence provided by 100% scores on both the revised Operational and Business Plans, and the fact that this Applicant had been awarded the substantial financial support of an AZCSP grant allayed the concerns of the TRP.

TRP Qualitative Analysis Summary

The TRP recommends that the application for Think Through Academy ("TTA") be approved because all three sections of the written Application package met the Board's criteria, the Education Plan provides a rigorous and innovative approach to meeting the needs of an underserved population, the Business Plan appears sound and is supported by the resources of a multi-year Arizona Charter Start Program ("AZCSP") grant, and the Applicant team demonstrated in the in-person interview strong capacity to effectively implement the planned program.

The Educational Plan includes a number of elements aimed at addressing the academic challenges inherent in the historically underserved target population, including a longer school day and year, block scheduling, a highly-engaging, hands-on approach including an inquiry-based rotational model with a project-based component and an online component, a Response to Intervention program for addressing individual instructional gaps. These elements were described both in writing and by the Applicant team in their interview to form a coherent whole supported by research and the experience of the team members.

Both the Business Plan and the Operational Plan were well thought out, described with good detail, and supported by the team in the interview. The Applicant understands the difficulty in attracting students and staff to a newly-opening school, and had contingency plans in place to address potential issues. The members of the Applicant team impressed the panel with their vision, passion, and evident capacity to serve the target population.

Educational Plan

	Preliminary TRP Scores				Revised TRP Scores			
Educational Plan Score ≥ 95%?	No	19	Of	36	Yes	35	of	36
Number of "Falls Below" ratings	0				0			
Number of "Approaches" ratings	17				1			

Plan Summary

Think Through Academy intends to serve grades 9-12 in the northwest area of Phoenix, targeting an area bounded by 19th Avenue on the east, 43rd Avenue on the west, Thomas Avenue on the south, and Glendale Avenue on the north. This area is served by the Alhambra Elementary District and Phoenix Union High School District, and has a racially and ethnically diverse population that has a low median income, high unemployment, and low educational attainment. The population in the area is predominantly Hispanic, with a median household income half that of Arizona as a whole, and 92% of students qualifying for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (Educational Plan A.2: Target Population, pages 1-3).

To address the needs of this population, TTA proposes an instructional program that includes a block schedule and, within each block, a rotational model involving an inquiry-based model, a computer station with online materials for practice, support and enrichment, a collaboration station, a project station, and a catch-all station for additional intervention and enrichment (Educational Plan A.3: Program of Instruction, page 4; Capacity Interview 38:34). To address the historic deficiencies found in a Title I population, the school provides a double dose model for ELA and Math (Educational Plan A.3: Program of Instruction, page 6). The application describes how the Applicant is currently reviewing Pearson curriculum for core classes, as well as IXL and Khan Academy online material, though in the interview the Applicant elaborated that these materials were intended primarily as resources to support the teachers in developing differentiated instructional resources targeting the individual students (Capacity Interview 30:56).

To measure the impact of the program, the Applicant describes an assessment plan including diagnostic and benchmark assessments using Galileo, and formative and summative assessments aligned to State standards. Many of the assessments will be performance assessments tied to the inquiry questions and project-based learning units. Data from all sources, including State standardized and college readiness assessments will be used to monitor and improve instruction and curriculum (Educational Plan A.3: Program of Instruction, page 7). A Response to Intervention multi-tiered support structure will be in place to identify and address gaps during small group instruction, before and after school, during vacation breaks, and through tutoring sessions including Saturday (Educational Plan A.3: Program of Instruction, page 4).

The school calendar will include 185 days, and the school day will extend from 7:30 to 3:00, with breakfast provided every day. Fridays will either be Early Release (ending at 1:25) or half day, ending at 12:20. A total of 1118 instructional hours will be offered, well exceeding the statutory requirement of 720 instructional hours for grades 9-12 (Educational Plan A.4: School Calendar and Weekly Schedule, page 1).

Analysis

The Educational Plan meets the criteria for approval because the selected instructional program and curriculum are clearly linked to the anticipated needs of the target population, the model is both rigorous and engaging. The Instructional Analysis indicates the Applicant has a good capacity for creating curriculum aligned to the rigor of the State standards. The Academic Systems Plan provides a well-developed structure for sustaining the school after opening.

TTA provides a great deal of data showing the demographic challenges faced by the population in the target area, and the current low performance of the high school options in the area. Only one, Metro Tech High School, has AzMERIT passage rates above 20% or a graduation rate above 90%. The Educational Plan presented by TTA addresses these issues with a number of research-based, cohesive strategies including an extended school day and year, double-dose ELA and Math, block scheduling, a rotational model featuring inquiry and project-based learning, computer support, and intervention (Capacity Interview 14:20).

Operational Plan

	Preliminary TRP Scores				Revised TRP Scores			
Operational Plan Score ≥ 95%?	No	19	of	23	Yes	23	of	23
Number of "Falls Below" ratings	0				0			
Number of "Approaches" ratings	4				0			

Plan Summary

The corporate board of TTA will be the governing body for the school. The board currently consists of three members, but it is the intention of the Applicant to add two members by February with expertise in law and finance (Capacity Interview 51:30). The three current members all have extensive instructional and leadership experience in high schools serving a population with a similar demographic (Operational Plan B.2: School Governing Body, page 2). Ms. Benaoussar and Ms. Hasan both intend to leave the board once the two new members are approved, so they can focus on their school leadership roles (Capacity Interview 51:58).

The board will hire and oversee the Principal, who will act as a liaison between the board and school staff, and will be responsible for overseeing all areas of school operation. The Principal will be assisted by the Academic Coach, who will oversee facilities management, curriculum and instruction, special education contracted services, and student data. The Academic Coach will also oversee the ELL Coordinator, teachers, and Instructional Assistants. The Principal will also be supported by an Operations Manager, who will oversee daily operations, operational contracted services, and finance. The Operations Manager will also oversee the Registrar, Security Guard, and Office Assistant (Operational Plan B.3: Management & Operations, page 3). Lead Teachers to oversee academic departments will be added in Year 3 as the school population grows. The school will maintain a teacher: student ratio of 1:20.

TTA will contract with service providers in the following areas: financial management, payroll & human resources, insurance, special education, legal, auditing, information technology, janitorial, and food service (Operational Plan B.3.2: Contracted Services, pages 2-4).

Analysis

The operational plan meets the criteria for approval because the planned governance and management structure is detailed and appropriate for an operation the size of the one described in the Application. The founding board members who will be operating the school plan on leaving the board, and replacing themselves with experts in areas where they identify the need for support (Capacity Interview 52:57). The management structure provides sufficient oversight for the areas needed to manage a school, without placing too many responsibilities on one person (Operational Plan B.3: Management & Operation, page 4).

Business Plan

	Preliminary TRP Scores				Revised TRP Scores			
Business Plan Score ≥ 95%?	No	20	of	33	Yes	33	of	33
Number of "Falls Below" ratings	1				0			
Number of "Approaches" ratings	12				0			

Plan Summary

Proposed Location: *Option 1: 1726 W. Camelback Road, Phoenix 85015*
Option 2: 3345 N. 19th Avenue, Phoenix, 85015
Option 3: 3232 W. Thomas Rd., Phoenix 85017
No facility has been secured.

Facilities Requirements: *The facility will need 9,000-11,400 sq. ft. in Year 1, 13,500-17,100 sq. ft., in Year 2, and 18,000-22,800 sq. ft. in Year 3. The layout would need general classrooms (10 in Y1, 15 in Y2, 20 in Y3), a conference room, a multipurpose space, a teacher work room, offices, an Art room, a Science room, a copy room, and a Library. Additional office space will be needed as the school grows.*

Budget Summary

	Startup Period	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Projected Enrollment:	n/a	180	270	360
Total Revenue:	300,000	1,616,205	2,080,518	2,663,531
Total Expenditures:	299,543	1,549,656	2,055,160	2,542,080
Ending Balance:	457	66,549	25,358	121,451

The business plan includes three facility options all in the target area. A timeline for securing the facility, and projected facility costs, are also included. All options include a plan for growth during the first three years of the charter contract (Business Plan C.1: Facilities Acquisition). The marketing and enrollment plan (Business Plan C. 2: Marketing and Student Enrollment), includes a table including all outreach actions and media placements, including the timeline, details, and responsible party. A second table includes costs for the various strategies, as well as the source of the costs for each of the first three years of operation. The narrative also describes the enrollment process, compliant with the requirements of the AZCSP grant and ARS §15-184.

The Personnel plan (Business Plan C.3: Personnel) describes a process for recruiting, hiring, and training 10 teachers for Year 1, 15 for Year 2, and 20 for Year 3, as well as additional staff. The narrative also describes an evaluation and retention process, and a compensation package competitive with other districts in the area (Business Plan C.3: Personnel, page 15). The plan calls for a teacher: student ratio of 1:20, and describes a recruiting strategy.

The Start-Up Budget (Business Plan C.4: Start-Up Budget) includes funds for salaries and benefits, curriculum and resource material, furniture and equipment, supplies, marketing, operations and maintenance contracted services, and membership dues. Revenues exceed expenditures by $456, but the Applicant has been awarded an AZCSP grant which will provide $250,000 in Year 1, so carryover is not required to cover contingencies. Revenue calculations for the three year operational budget (Business Plan C.5: Three Year Operational Budget) are based on 90% of anticipated full enrollment.

Analysis

The business plan meets the criteria for approval because all parts of the plan are detailed and show a solid understanding of the needs of the target population. The facilities plan includes three options within the target area that meet the space and budget requirements. The marketing and enrollment plan is detailed and comprehensive, and the personnel plan provides for a competitive recruiting package and detailed training schedule.

During the capacity interview, the Applicant team addressed TRP questions about the demand for the school by describing their extensive experience working with in the target area, and their outreach to organizations serving middle and high school-age students, including the local refugee center where Ms. Benaoussar has been active in a mentoring program, and local middle schools including Pensar Academy and Imagine Middle School (Capacity Interview 1:00:15). The team was also able to provide support for their plan to recruit teachers to address a fairly demanding program of instruction and schedule (Capacity Interview 1:03:15)

Evidence of Capacity

Applicant Summary

Name	Role	Attended Interview?
Najat Benaoussar	Authorized Representative, Charter Principal	Yes
Naureen Hasan	Charter Principal	Yes
Kari Klein	Charter Principal	No

Analysis

The TRP finds that the Applicant has the range of knowledge, skills, and experience needed to open and operate a high quality school because the application is detailed and well written, and both of the Applicant team members present have extensive experience teaching at and leading high schools serving the target population. They also demonstrated deep understanding of and commitment to their plan, as well as effective collaborative leadership skills during the interview.

All sections of the application package are clear, well-written, detailed, and cohesive. The Applicant's name, Think Through Academy, provides an example of how they have thought through the process. The academic plan includes innovative elements that the team members have implemented themselves in the past. Ms. Benaoussar has been a high school math teacher and charter school administrator. Ms. Hasan also has experience teaching high school math in charter and private schools, and has an M.B.A. and experience as a tax specialist to support the operational side of the plan. While the TRP did not get a chance to interview Ms. Klein, her 15 years as the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction of a Valley high school district suggest expertise in education and governance.

The members of the Applicant team were engaged and knowledgeable during the capacity interview and were comfortable elaborating on all parts of the application. The TRP entered the interview with few concerns, due to the quality of the written application, and came away assured that the team has the capacity to effectively implement a program that could benefit the target population.