

Part I – Eligibility Certification

The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2018 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2012 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, or 2017.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
9. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
10. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
11. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2017-2018) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 57 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 10 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 7 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 74 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban
 - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2017 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	36	43	79
5	43	47	90
6	48	43	91
7	45	47	92
8	38	43	81
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	210	223	433

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 9 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 11 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 76 % White
 - 2 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2016 – 2017 school year: 3%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain.

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	4
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	10
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	14
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	428
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.03
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0%
0 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 10%
Total number students who qualify: 44

8. Students receiving special education services: 2 %
9 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>4</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>5</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	20
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	0
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 22:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	98%	97%	97%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2017.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

Through rigor and challenge in the classroom, students will become critical thinkers and life-long learners who make a positive impact on our world and its people.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

Students submit an application and are selected based on standardized test scores, grades and teacher recommendation forms. A committee that includes the principal, IB Coordinator and another administrator select the students based on the criteria listed.

PART III – SUMMARY

Mesa Academy for Advanced Studies is part of the Mesa Public Schools Red Mountain Complex located in northeast Mesa, Arizona. This single-building structure hosts 437 students enrolled in grades four through eight. Mesa Academy is a public school, but it is considered a “choice school,” attracting families and students from across the city who are looking for an engaging and rigorous educational option.

The history of Mesa Academy begins with its opening in August, 2008. The objective was to keep students from leaving the public school districts by providing an environment in which students could be academically challenged in ways they might not be in larger, more traditional schools.

One community challenge is in creating a cohesive culture because students come from all over the district. Staff, stakeholders, and administrators have found several strategies to create a sense of community: after-school social clubs; classroom team-building; community service participation; high-caliber community interactions; rigorous, exciting academic programs; opportunities at local, state, and national competitions; and a focus on the IB character traits. These activities foster bonds of friendship that last throughout high school. Mesa Academy graduates come back year after year to visit the building, thank their teachers, and to reminisce about their days there.

Mesa Academy’s Mission Statement and educational policy are the same, ‘Through rigor and challenge in the classroom, students will become critical thinkers and lifelong learners who make a positive impact on our world and its people.’ Strategies used to fully develop students’ academic potential include tutoring and working with students one-on-one, sponsoring a wide variety of clubs, and providing truly challenging and unique learning experiences.

As an International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) school, there is a global approach to classroom content. This works to develop students’ thinking skills along with an understanding of others’ viewpoints. Through the challenging curriculum of IB and a deep understanding of gifted learners, teachers work to extend student thinking and provide them with opportunities to further develop their interests. Students are frequently seen working in pairs and groups to solve complex problems collaboratively as they develop problem-solving and interpersonal skills.

Instruction prepares students for advanced, college-level courses in high school, such as the IB Diploma Programme and Advanced Placement Courses and for college and career. Special courses are offered that allow students to experience unique content in powerful ways. All fourth and fifth grade students take Suzuki violin, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, Technology, Art, and Physical Education in a three-day rotation. Students in sixth through eighth grades have the opportunity to take Music Tech, which includes music history and appreciation and music composition in an Apple computer lab with electronic keyboards. All students also take Technology classes that include Web Design, Digital Technology and Animation Studio. Upper-grade students have an extended 7-hour school day to accommodate the World Language requirement of either Spanish or Mandarin. Mesa Academy students typically enter high school in level three of their chosen foreign language. P.E. courses offer a well-rounded curriculum including soccer, bowling, running, yoga, and cooperative games. Students also have structured and unstructured outdoor time twice a day.

One key strategy used to foster students socially and culturally is involvement in student clubs: There are over 16 clubs with focuses on academics, culture, service, the arts, and more. National Academic League, which is nationally ranked, allows students to demonstrate their knowledge while working as a team and honing their presentation skills. Multiple robotics teams have also competed beyond the state level, while math Club, Math Olympiad, Science Bowl, Novel Writing Club and more provide ample opportunities for social and cultural growth. This year the Culture Club worked with the Aloha Festival to learn about the Polynesian culture. Over six weeks of study, students learned ukulele, hula, and customs and performed for the community at the Mesa Academy International Festival. Many clubs focus on giving back to the community such as the FOR Club, Service Learning, National Junior Honor Society, and Student Council.

Although many students at Mesa Academy are academically inclined, there is still a need for student support. The Academy Success Center is provided for students in the fourth and fifth grades who may be falling behind or in need of extra time to master a skill. ASC takes place immediately after school, and students are provided transportation on a late bus. The counselor provides lunch study groups for upper-grade students who are in need of additional time or organization and study skills support.

Emotional health is essential. Lessons on topics such as bullying, peer pressure, gossip, respect, IB character traits, and more are presented monthly at various grade levels in order to support students' emotional growth. The contribution to student success is evident as seen in the low number of discipline referrals and the high level of student engagement and rapport. Mesa Academy is truly a unique part of the Mesa community.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

At Mesa Academy, core courses focus on instructing students with rigor, employing remediation immediately, offering numerous chances to prove mastery, and providing enrichment to those who have demonstrated mastery. The scope and sequence of learning objectives are constructed to cover all IB MYP framework concepts, chosen for its rigorous approach to teaching a world class curriculum.

Reading/English Language Arts:

The Academy's student body masters state and IB standards for reading and writing through experiences with real literature and informational texts spanning all subject areas. Exposure to an array of fiction and non-fiction works of worldly views deepens student understanding of global concepts. Excellent speaking and listening skills are developed through a multitude of presentation settings. They hone respectful communication skills, frequently presenting arguments and writing samples. From screenwriting to nonfiction research to debates, students collaborate on a variety of topics. Attendance of live programs, such as the local high school's production of "The Children of Willesden Lane," enhance student learning, and the study of language across subject areas. Writing skills are strengthened through daily writing and weekly sharing/publishing. Students produce clear and coherent writing for a variety of tasks and audiences, and Mesa Academy produces award-winning writers. They develop arguments with evidence from a diverse collection of print and digital sources, write creatively, and produce clear, formal, and coherent informational writing. This intensive reading and writing curriculum leads to higher achievement in English/Language Arts (ELA) and in other subject areas.

Math:

Math classes are taught using a variety of methods to help students develop essential mathematical skills. Students are encouraged to think deeply through carefully constructed questions and activities. Students develop communication skills, confidence, and curiosity while building skills and patience with their peers. Students work in pairs, small groups and whole-class settings and are given strategies to communicate effectively in all circumstances. Opportunities to communicate learning come in drawing, writing and speaking. Students use models, manipulatives, laptop computers, and other technology to increase interest and engagement with mathematics. Success is evident not only in high test scores, but students enjoy math and are able to move beyond grade-level math courses, successfully taking part in high school math courses, which Mesa Academy offers for its advanced mathematicians.

Science:

Because students attend a science course daily at Mesa Academy, teachers are able to offer a sophisticated, thorough curriculum, even at the elementary level. All state and IB standards are covered using a variety of resources, including science kits with hands-on learning materials, relevant scientific article subscriptions, and a modern science lab, equipped for engineering projects and scientific experimentation. By the end of a student's first year at Mesa Academy, one is able to develop sound scientific experiments, analyze experiment results, apply engineering principles, and create inventions. This solid foundation has allowed Academy teachers to dive deeper in grades 5-8, where students participate in science fair each year, regularly winning state-level awards. Supplementing this curriculum, teachers take students on an ocean exploration in San Diego, a Grand Canyon trip that includes an investigation of geology and the Earth's external processes, a Science camp geared specifically to for highly prepared students, a mission where kids work in teams in a mock NASA environment, and the STEM Sci-Tech Expo Community Partnership that helps prepare students for careers in the fields of science and technology.

Social Studies/History/Civics:

Standards for Social Studies cover five strands: Geography, American History, World History, Economics, and Civics. Since all of these content strands intersect often and easily, Academy learning standards focus on making deeper connections about people and events. The ultimate objective is for students to become active managers of information rather than simply passive recipients of facts. Engaging with primary sources in every major learning standard enriches classroom instruction. Student writing incorporates

impressions and evidence taken from a variety of reading sources to demonstrate a more complete understanding of the flow of history and how it incorporates other curriculum strands of geography, economics, and civics. Students employ what they learn by running Student Council, voting in federal elections, and participating in a mock Senate debate, researched and prepared for in class, then performed at the State Capitol.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

In partnership with the core classes, non-core subject areas play an integral role in shaping the Mesa Academy curriculum. One-third of each student's school day is focused on non-core subjects, offering students a well-rounded education through courses like health and wellness, technology, music performance, music technology, visual arts, and foreign languages.

One unique Academy feature that aids student acquisition of skills is the fourth and fifth grade wheel system. The younger Mesa Academy students have the same core classes every day and a rotating set of electives. This way, the students experience almost all of the Academy's electives—P.E./Health and Wellness, Visual Arts, Suzuki violin, Chinese, Spanish, and Technology on a three-day revolving schedule, allowing students to discover which areas of study motivate them.

When Mesa Academy knights enter the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, they are prepared to make choices about their electives. Non-core elective classes make up three class periods (approximately three hours) of each sixth, seventh, and eighth grade student's school day. In order to accommodate the three hours each student spends in the non-core set of classes, Mesa Academy has an extended school day for grades six through eight. This meets the IB requirement that all students take a foreign language class every semester, while ensuring time is not subtracted from the core areas of learning or other non-core classes.

Mesa Academy's band and orchestra staff are professional, performing musicians. This expertise in a small school of about 430 students is unprecedented, and results in the award winning, superior-rated music that is produced by the orchestra and the band each year.

For students who may not be interested in playing an instrument, Mesa Academy offers Music Technology. The music tech courses are taught by a professional composer, musician, and conductor who brings his experience, insight, and expertise into the classroom with course offerings that focus on arranging and composition, music history and literature, and music notation and theory. Visual arts accompany the music technology elective, and students are treated to an international look at art, with the hands-on creation of art and artistic projects as well as experience with artistic critique and reflection. Art club and weekly open studio hours allow current art students (or those without an art class) to continue to enhance learning and skills in the visual arts outside of regular class time.

All sixth through eighth grade students take one semester of P.E./Health and Wellness, and the Academy program is unique to most other schools. Students have access to the typical gym and sports equipment, but there is also a classroom set aside just for discussions and learning that relates to the physical education. Plus, because Mesa Academy is an International Baccalaureate school, emphasizing international-mindedness, students learn about sports and fitness outside of the United States, and get to participate in sports and activities from around the world in addition to those typically taught and played in the United States.

Foreign language is a required and important part of each student's schedule. Every student is enrolled a foreign language. Both Spanish and Chinese courses are offered, and because students get to experience both languages in the younger grade levels, they are prepared to make decisions about which language they would like to pursue further in grades 6-8. Students typically start high school at level three in a foreign language, where they are able to pursue advanced foreign language courses leading to true language fluency.

All students take one semester of Computer Technology per year. The technology programs is comprised of studies in computer literacy, business, college and career, personal skills and interests assessments, technology ethics, computer programming, website design, animation, and a capstone ePortfolio. The

students disassemble/reassemble desktop computers, studying the inner workings of personal computing systems. These technology skills prepare students to be successful in high school, college and beyond, thereby living up to Mesa Academy's vision of producing lifelong learners.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Mesa Academy's instructional approach is a tiered teaching process with problem-based learning, and explicit and differentiated instruction. Technology-based support allows for differentiation, ensuring a wide variety of interventions and enrichments are available for each student. Web-based programs prepare students to navigate in content-rich spheres utilizing technical skills and immersing them in real world problem-solving situations. Employment of programs that yield immediate and accurate information provide teachers with invaluable data which is used to administer interventions and enrichments in a timely and appropriate manner.

Overall, the instructional plan includes practices designed to ensure high levels of student learning and achievement: explicit instruction, small group work, individual work and intervention or enrichment activities. Students are given ample time and opportunities to deepen understanding of skills and concepts in each class and hone their collaboration abilities. The Socratic Seminar is one example of student-led edification. In these text-based formal discussions, a student asks open-ended questions; peers listen carefully to each others' comments. They think critically and articulate their own responses accordingly; these forums ensure every student actively participates.

Assessment data used to analyze and improve student and school performance include: Benchmark tests in reading, writing and math; Proficiency exams in Spanish and Chinese; AIMS Science; AZMerit; and IB rubrics (both formative and summative). District benchmarks in reading, writing and math are administered three times a year and scored immediately. Pre and post-growth data provide critical data points for teachers to use in creating customized learning plans for the class individuals. Access to item bank information allows teachers to identify areas of curriculum that require more instruction and the program also provides multiple summative assessments in specific standards that prove to be areas of weakness.

Benchmark data is used to identify underperforming students for intervention. Course assessment data helps teachers find students in need of remediation, which is offered in a variety of settings: Catch Up (teacher intervention through individual tutoring), Success Center (individualized assistance with executive functioning skills) and a targeted web-based remediation program. If, after regular classroom interventions, a student continues to have an apparent deficiency, the teacher has a variety of resources to help the student master the standard: one-on-one or small group Catch Up tutoring; additional support from the Success Center; and targeted reteaching and formative assessments through technology directly tied to Arizona state standards. In this way, Academy teachers individualize the instructional and interventional approaches to meet all student needs.

Staff meets once a week to identify overall student progress per grade level. Students performing below grade level is a rarity. However, in cases where students are demonstrating lack of effort or performance, a meeting of each student's teachers is held to determine the cause and proper interventions. Parents are notified and the student is invited to Success Center or tutoring help with the counselor. Students in need of tutoring receive help before school, during lunch and/or after school.

More common are the occurrences of students performing above grade level. When students exceed standards, they are given enrichment assignments/problem sets which require more robust critical thinking skills. When data, students, and parents agree, many students advance to the next grade level of a course. This focus on individual student ability has helped to prevent achievement gaps, and no subgroup shows an achievement gap nearing or exceeding 10%.

Students play an integral role in their own learning progress through self-assessment and self-reflection. Online assessments, presentations, oral examinations, and writing samples provide consistent data for such self-analysis. Students regularly help to create rubrics used for assessments, and they are familiar with the principles of creating rubrics that exceed standards and goals while also meeting rigorous IB expectations.

International Baccalaureate standards are reflected in grade reports, but do not impact grade point average. Rather, the IB rubric is reported to provide a deeper narrative of each student's progress as a global scholar.

To maintain high levels of achievement, instructional approaches extend past normal school hours. Through a multitude of clubs and programs, pupils enrich their science, math, English and technology understanding. Working with a teacher sponsor or a community expert, extracurricular enterprises provide opportunities for students to form communities where they advance their academic goals and share a zeal for learning.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

The Academy creates a welcoming and positive environment right from the start by providing introductory tours through the school and into classrooms so prospective students and their parents can feel comfortable. Building on this positivity, new Academy students attend an orientation designed to encourage them to build relationships, and they each take part in a year-long mentoring program that provides an eighth grade mentor to each of the new students. Later, Academy alumni come back to talk to current students about the transition to high school, providing a familial link to all the high school campuses. These relationships instill a sense of security in a new school and help to create a positive environment and social growth opportunities beginning with the school's youngest students.

There are also a variety of opportunities that help students grow socially and emotionally, while enhancing academic development. Students are encouraged to join clubs or student government, which are student-led. These clubs provide students the chance to socialize and meet new people, learn about specific subjects and cultures that interest them, compete, and make a difference in the school and community. The Academy Broadcast System, a live video announcement broadcast, is led by students and provides vital information while promoting messages given by our principal and counselor about character-building. The counselor is available to students who need to talk about emotional issues, as well as academic struggles. Academy grade levels attend whole-class field trips that simultaneously focus on socialization and education.

One means of motivating and engaging students is the school-wide grading system: it allows students extra time to meet mastery, alternative means to demonstrate understanding, extended deadlines, test retakes, and resubmissions of work. Students are recognized frequently for service work (in and outside the school), academic achievements, and character traits. This is communicated through the daily video announcements, in classrooms, via social media, and at assemblies. Academic engagement is amplified in the classrooms, where the IB curriculum helps to relate student learning to real-world experiences.

At the Academy, teachers and all staff are also valued and supported, united in a common purpose. The school culture is one of mutual respect and support. Employees treat the school as a family and support one another as such. The administrator treats teachers as experts in their fields, asking for opinions, encouraging communication, and regularly relaying positive messages, while also supporting and encouraging teachers to seek advancement opportunities and professional development. Mesa Academy is known for engaging and motivating in a positive environment.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Engaging families and the Mesa community at the Academy is vital to its success as a school and in growing global learners. The most meaningful activities Mesa Academy students engage in are service-oriented. Students participate in Feed our Starving Children by serving food to grateful Mesa citizens. National Junior Honor Society members spend hundreds of hours serving the community in a variety of ways, from collecting hygiene items for a local group home to setting up a crew to clean up after the Phoenix Marathon. Choir Club presents a holiday program for a retirement home and students donated over 1,600 lbs of food for the Mesa Food Bank this year. Engaging in activities that directly impact people outside of the school supports students' social and emotional growth and helps them to see their roles in the community.

Parents feel welcome and are an omnipresent volunteer group, assisting with administrative tasks, carrying out daily lunch duties as a service to the staff, and serving on SIAC (School Improvement Advisory Committee) to discuss and approve use of tax credit funds for field trips and projects. Communication is essential for successfully launching such endeavors. The principal holds an "open door" policy: staff, students, and parents are welcome to speak with her, setting a tone of openness and transparency throughout the building.

Technology use is maximized for effective community communication: Parents and the community are informed of students' academic achievements and/or challenges in numerous ways. Teachers create an open line of communication with parents and students while providing positive and frequent feedback through emails, newsletters, and up-to-date web-based calendars. Grade portals are updated frequently and are easily accessed online for parents and students to monitor grades and missing work. Communication with parents occurs on multiple platforms: through the principal's school-wide direct text/email communication platform that includes regular calendar and announcement information and through social networking media, including Facebook and Twitter pages designed to keep parents and stakeholders in the loop. Informing students, parents and stakeholders in a clear and consistent manner of students' academic achievements serves several purposes: inspire the entire student body to keep diligent and appreciate the rigor of Mesa Academy; hold families, staff and students accountable to strive to be better each day; and motivate the Mesa Academy community to take pride in the campus and seek further improvement.

3. Professional Development:

Professional Development at Mesa Academy is multifaceted. As an IB school, the objective is to keep the practices and philosophy of IB in the forefront of teacher practice, while ensuring the staff are gaining new skills to meet district and state requirements. To that end, professional development is planned on three levels: articulation with sister IB schools, IB coursework as a single-site staff, and district/state professional development.

At regular articulation meetings with two sister IB schools in the Mesa area, there is a focus on continuity of instruction. Teachers engage in vertical and horizontal articulation of curriculum in groups representing the entire spectrum of a subject area. Therefore, these professional development opportunities have included trainings relating to unit-planning; developing high-quality assessments; implementing IB rubrics; and studying IB standards across grade levels. A Mesa Academy eighth grade teacher, for example, is able to learn about sixth through twelfth grade IB goals and expectations to ensure students have the best opportunity to meet all goals, while experiencing a deep and complete IB World education.

As a single-site IB staff, teachers and the administrator together engage in many hours of professional development. Every teacher within his or her second year at the school is fully trained to teach the IB curriculum. Staff members have traveled to a variety of in and out-of-state workshops to complete IB Level-1 Training and IB Advanced-Level Training in areas like cross-curricular IB instruction and IB school leadership. Teachers then become a professional development resource, working to ensure best practices across the entire staff. For example, in professional development sessions this year, the staff learned more about ATL (Approaches to Learning) skills. The staff learned new ways to teach these learning and organizational skills and developed a plan for reinforcement across grade levels. This supports student learning and school improvement because when the staff is aware of how skills are taught across grade levels and subjects, students experience a consistency of vocabulary and expectations. The curriculum delivery and instruction become part of an integrated framework rather than an isolated practice, leading to higher student understanding and achievement.

In addition to IB training, in order to best meet state and district standards and foster continuous school improvement, the principal and teachers have chosen professional development to best suit Mesa Academy's population. Trainings have covered differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching, and implementing new school-wide grading practices. The principal seeks out professional development opportunities that interest the teachers, so the staff is eager and engaged. Teachers also meet weekly with their Professional Learning Communities to ensure instructional consistency. The staff can be found gathered together multiple times per month engaging in new learning, always striving to provide the best possible education for Mesa Academy students.

4. School Leadership:

Mesa Academy is a small school and its only administrator is the principal. The principal's leadership philosophy is grounded in making students the center of all decision-making. All practices and programs

are based upon what is best for students. Every student and staff member knows the Academy's motto of "Rigor and Challenge in the Classroom" and understands the importance of academic and behavioral excellence.

Shared leadership is an important aspect of the school's culture. For example, department chairs coordinate and problem solve among all grade levels within their content areas and encourage the flow of communication. The MYP coordinators help to support the implementation of the program, support instruction and ensure fidelity of the IB curriculum. Because the staff is small, the principal is able to have whole-staff conversations about issues or concerns ensuring that everyone is part of the solutions and is aligned in their desire to support student success.

With input from the entire staff, the school was designed to be a place where students would be challenged and encouraged to develop their potentials. In combination with the capable assistance of parents and extended family members, the school has continued to grow and develop while maintaining a strong focus on every student achieving their best.

The principal knows the students by name and, in many cases, by their interests both in and out of school. Staff see students as complete persons, not just as people to whom subjects are taught but, rather, as developing, growing people who have a huge variety of interests and activities which take place outside of the school day. Through classroom walk-throughs, observations, video announcements, lunch-time supervision, and more, the principal's visibility helps set the tone for the students, staff, and parents and plays an important role in ensuring student and teacher success.

As an IB MYP school, the expectation is that all are "lifelong learners" and this concept is practiced, daily, by all involved in the life of the school. Rigorous thought that is reasoned and ethical is a way of life for students, staff, and the extended families. This focus has been the philosophy of the staff since the school was opened. Every summer the staff meets to reflect on the past year and looks to the coming in terms of what was done well, what could be better, and what can be added to or disposed of to become a more challenging, creative, caring school.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The most instrumental practice in Mesa Academy's success is the school-wide language arts focus. One way teachers and staff have implemented this language-centric approach is by assigning each fourth grader a language arts buddy from the seventh or eighth grade. Teachers prepare these older mentors to aid in reading comprehension and provide one-on-one writing feedback, while promoting positive attitudes about reading and writing. Teachers assign buddies based on skills and personalities to create purposeful pairings that excite and engage young readers.

Perhaps the most important way a culture of literacy is perpetuated at Mesa Academy is through the promotion of literacy in every subject area. For example, mathematics teachers instruct the students about argumentative techniques and evidentiary reasoning, while the technology teachers have students create their own web-pages, requiring research, reading, and writing skills in addition to the technical components. PE students read health-related articles and write written reflections about their experiences learning about and participating in sports from around the world. In music, students prepare and publish an argumentative essay about two composers and a fictional story inspired by a song. History and science at Mesa Academy are rich in language opportunities as well; history teachers guide students in analyzing primary source documents, while science teachers provide instruction in scientific writing, technical language related to engineering, and reflective responses to investigations. Whether in elective courses or core subject areas, Academy students are immersed in reading and writing pursuits.

A literacy enriched environment is furthered through clubs that focus on various types of reading and writing. For example, for students that enjoy fictional reading, Battle of the Books gives them a chance to read for fun and show off their skills in a group setting, competing against other teams from the state in challenges that test the students on a diverse collection of books. Similarly, the Novel Writing Club teaches strategies for planning original stories and following through on daily writing goals, culminating with completed student books during NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month). For future journalists, the school's video news program and Yearbook Club both provide opportunities to demonstrate informational writing abilities.

The outcomes of the school-wide focus on reading are demonstrated in the latest benchmark data in which 100% of 8th graders at the end of third quarter were proficient or highly proficient on the language arts benchmark test as well as evidenced by the excellent AzMerit test results in all five grade levels. The pursuit of producing and inspiring highly proficient readers and writers has been pivotal in Mesa Academy's success.