

U.S. Department of Education
2018 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [X] Title I [X] Charter [] Magnet [] Choice

Name of Principal Dr. Roxanne Zamora
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Vista College Preparatory
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 812 S. 6th Avenue
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

<u>Phoenix</u>	<u>AZ</u>	<u>85003-2528</u>
City	State	Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County__

Telephone (602) 625-7893 Fax

Web site/URL <http://www.vistacollegeprep.org> E-mail jmeyerson@vistacollegeprep.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* <u>Ms. Julia Meyerson</u>	E-mail
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)	<u>jmeyerson@vistacollegeprep.org</u>

District Name Vista College Preparatory, Inc. Tel. (602) 374-7159

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Mr Charles Mitchell
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

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):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 2 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	26	35	61
1	36	23	59
2	35	30	65
3	24	20	44
4	17	26	43
5	17	24	41
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	155	158	313

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 24 % Black or African American
 - 71 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 4 % White
 - 1 % 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: 15%

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	21
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	35
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	239
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.15
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	15

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 13 %
41 Total number ELL

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

Spanish, Amharic, Arabic

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 93 %
Total number students who qualify: 291

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %
37 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>1</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>1</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>5</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>17</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>12</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</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	4
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	15
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	2
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 21:1

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	93%	93%	93%	92%	0%
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 academic rigor and leadership development, Vista College Preparatory educates all K-5 students for success in middle school, achievement in high school, and graduation from college.

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

All students are given an equal opportunity to attend Vista College Prep. Charter schools are schools of choice and admissions policies reflect all state and federal requirements. In Arizona, a charter school shall enroll all eligible students who submit a timely application, unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level or building. In compliance with Arizona law, Vista College Prep gives enrollment preference to students returning to the charter school and to siblings of students already enrolled in the charter school. If the number of applications exceeds remaining capacity, students are selected through an equitable selection process such as a lottery. Vista College Prep does not limit admission based on ethnicity, national origin, gender, income level, disabling condition, proficiency in the English language or athletic ability.

PART III – SUMMARY

Vista College Prep (VCP) is a high-performing kindergarten through fifth grade tuition-free, public charter school educating a high minority and low-income student population – over 90% of students qualify for free and reduced price lunch and 95% are minority students. Vista College Prep opened in August 2013 with kindergarten and first grade. Five years later, we now operate a K-5 campus in downtown Phoenix, and have just opened our second campus in the Maryvale community. By the time Vista College Prep opened, our Executive Director had spent two years studying the highest performing charter schools across the country through a highly-selective fellowship with Building Excellent Schools, an organization that trains, mentors and supports individuals who seek to found, lead and sustain urban public schools of uncompromising excellence. These schools have demonstrated that demographics do not determine destiny and that students from low-income communities can be successful in school.

We opened in August 2013 with just kindergarten and first grade. Our first graders came to us almost three grade levels behind – some still struggling with their letters and numbers. Just two years later, this same group of students, now third graders, took the AZ Merit and outperformed the state average by 24% in math and 56% in reading. Looking at schools where over 90% of students qualified for free and reduced price lunch, VCP scholars had the highest literacy score in the state. We now have two years of testing data, and while we are incredibly proud of the fact that our students dramatically outperformed all low-income schools in Phoenix, we are very pleased to share that among all schools, district and charter, including high income schools, our students scored in the top 6% for literacy, and in the top 11% for math. In addition, Vista College Prep third graders - the first group of students to have been with us since kindergarten - scored in the top 3.5% in math and top 5% in literacy.

With a strong commitment to upholding the highest academic expectations for all students, Vista College Prep prepares all K-5 students with the foundation necessary for success at the middle school level, readiness for college preparatory work at the high school level and graduation from competitive and demanding colleges. We believe that future school success is dependent upon the strength of the elementary foundation. At Vista College Prep, that foundation is built upon seven central tenets.

1. Literacy is Everything: Literacy proficiency is vital to accessing an excellent education. In order to address the need for a focus on literacy, Vista College Prep devotes over 40% of the school day to different forms of literacy instruction. We are committed to research-based practices for literacy instruction with a focus on phonics, comprehension and critical thinking starting in the early elementary grades. We have designed our model to ensure that small group literacy instruction occurs in all classrooms, and we have an increased focus on vocabulary development during all aspects of the literacy block.

2. Exceptional Teachers: The quality of our teachers drives the academic success of our students; therefore, high quality teaching is Vista College Prep's hallmark. Research shows that teacher quality is the most significant indicator of a student's academic performance. In the hiring process, we set clear expectations for the high level of professionalism and commitment that we expect of our teachers. Believing that all students can learn, our teachers are relentlessly and productively self-critical when students are not reaching mastery. Through exhaustive and highly selective recruitment efforts, extensive summer training, weekly professional development, and regular observations with feedback, Vista College Prep teachers are part of a professional learning environment that facilitates growth.

3. More Time = More Learning: To accomplish our mission, our extended school day and school year provide increased opportunities for teachers to individualize student instruction, ensure that all students meet rigorous learning standards, and overcome the chronic achievement gap that exists between our target population and their more affluent peers. Vista College Prep offers a longer school year (185 days) and extended school day (7:40 am to 4:00 pm). Teachers are able to use this extended time for individualized student instruction during the morning extra intervention block as well as during all literacy and math instructional periods.

4. Strategic Use of Data: With an uncompromising attention to data-driven instruction, Vista College Prep

collects a variety of data on a daily basis. Utilizing interim assessments, data is quickly analyzed for targeted intervention. Our data collection and analysis allow for individualized instruction and drives highly effective teaching. Quick input and analysis of data allows teachers to provide remediation to individual students in need of support and the ability to modify instruction when larger numbers of students evidence the lack of mastery.

5. Leadership Development: By building academic scholars and community leaders, we build a brighter future for them and for us. In order to fulfill our long-term goal of having students become leaders in their community, Vista College Prep dedicates time each week to leadership and character development. The skills and knowledge gained during this time are then reinforced throughout the day.

6. Structured and Supportive School Culture: At Vista College Prep, we work hard to ensure that we are creating a highly structured and joyful school environment through consistency, “sweating the small stuff,” and enthusiasm. Vista College Prep’s high standards for behavior are consistently enforced creating a structured environment that maximizes learning time. Coupled with high structure is an enthusiastic and supportive school culture. Our core values guide students and teachers in all aspects of school life.

7. Family Engagement: Vista College Prep works closely with families as their children begin the path to college in elementary school. Our partnership and constant communication with families is critical. While we do not believe that students without this support are unable to achieve, we do recognize the incredible value that a family has in the education of children. Beginning with home visits for each and every child and an annual family orientation, Vista College Prep offers extensive support to families as they, in turn, work to support the academic achievement of their children. As a result of this intentionality, we have averaged nearly 100% parent participation at every parent teacher conference since our first year.

Our students are beginning the path to college starting in kindergarten, and it is our job to deliver the highest quality instruction every single day. We are very grateful for the opportunity to be considered a National Blue Ribbon School.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The curriculum and instructional design of Vista College Prep is rooted in both successful practice and research. Our curriculum is aligned with Arizona Common Core standards, 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 K-2, we have a scripted curriculum of Reading Mastery and Investigations. We have used models from other high performing charter schools to guide the creation of our own lesson plans for the following content blocks: Read Aloud, Reading Comprehension, Guided Reading, Writing, Cognitively Guided Instruction, Science and Social Studies

In grades 3-5 we just use the scripted curriculum of Investigations, with our own modifications. Much like K-2, we have used models from other high performing charter schools to guide the creation of our own lesson plans for the following content blocks: Reading Comprehension – Informational and Narrative, Guided Reading, Writing, Cognitively Guided Instruction, Science and Social Studies. The one addition to our 5th grade Science program this year is the use of Amplify Science.

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. With only 21-22 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.

Literacy in Grades 3-5: The literacy instruction for grades 3-5 is comprised of two primary comprehension blocks: informational text and narrative. The third block focuses on writing through conventions practice and grammar (as discussed below). 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 includes 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. In grades 3-5, each Writing and Grammar class includes mini-lessons 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 effective authors, and supply frequent, specific feedback to improve student writing.

Math in Grades K-5: Our math block is split into two components: Investigations and Cognitively Guided Instruction. 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, Investigations is considered to be one of the only programs that combines all

necessary skills. In addition, our students are exposed to multiple problem types through our Cognitively Guided Instruction block. As a result of the combination of these two programs, students have a strong foundation in the basic skills, procedural computation, and conceptual understanding.

Science in Grades K-5: We implement a rigorous, standards-based science curriculum that maximizes student learning and engagement with the world in which they live. Aside from grade five, where we have used Amplify this year, we have created this curriculum internally. At a developmentally appropriate pace, students develop and master scientific knowledge and skills through the study of multiple scientific fields as emphasized in the Arizona State Standards, apply the scientific method, conduct experiments of their own design, and present their findings professionally.

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 of Social Studies and Science during K-3 due to the intensity of our literacy program that underpins learning in the other key subjects. We create our own curriculum for social studies that reinforces the Arizona state standards, so that our students are prepared for a rigorous middle school curriculum, continuing on the college preparatory trajectory.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Vista College Prep students have access to a variety of enrichment opportunities. All students have twice weekly physical education for 45-50 minutes, on top of daily recess. In addition, we structure additional enrichment opportunities by grade. Kindergarten and first grade students have access to a performing arts program, including African drumming. Second grade students have a dance class. Student in grades three through five have a theater class and skateboarding program.

Our biggest investment is in a coding program for grades three through five. As we plan out our middle school (to be opened next year), we want to ensure our students have daily computer science. Therefore, we want to make sure our students are prepared with a weekly coding class.

This year, we have piloted a new social emotional learning program in grades three through five, that is discussed more in Part V. We are fortunate to partner with a high-performing school in Tennessee as we look to build out this program in our middle school this upcoming year. However, as a pilot this past year, we have built in a weekly community circle, separated by gender, in each grade. This has been an incredible opportunity for our students to build strong connections and meaningful relationships.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Instructional Methods and Interventions: All of the practices listed below are carefully taught to all teachers. Starting on day one, every teacher is versed in the practices and ready to execute. Additional support from the Executive Director, Senior Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and Principals 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.

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 three weeks of professional development over the summer and ongoing instructional support from coaches throughout the year, staff and leadership have multiple conversations and role-play instructional delivery to ensure consistency.

Kinesthetic Learning: Physical activity maintains student engagement and makes learning fun. Students learn a new concept or definition using hand signals, finger snapping and other gestures.

Small Group/One-on-One Tutoring: Targeted interventions throughout the day provide opportunities to deliver focused instruction in areas of concern for struggling students. We have also created Friday review blocks where students can receive additional individualized instruction.

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. We select 2–3 techniques as part of our professional development focus each year, giving our team a common language.

Assessments - 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. The “do now” is included in teacher lesson plans and reviewed by the Principals.

Six-week, Interim Assessments: Throughout the academic year, as outlined on our 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. 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. These assessments are already written into the staff calendar, so teachers know in advance when they will be administered, and receive clear instructions on the school’s test-taking practices.

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.” The comprehensive test measuring both comprehension and fluency is administered six times per year. The STEP Assessment comes with extensive in-person professional development to ensure that the program is implemented with fidelity. All directions are clearly marked on the test administration forms. The results of this assessment drive the individualization of our literacy program.

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. All of these tests are indicated on our school calendar, so that our assessments are formalized and written into our program.

Nationally Normed Assessment: At the start of each academic year, we assess each student’s reading level and math skills proficiency level using the NWEA MAP Assessment 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.

State-Mandated Assessments: We administer annual state mandated assessments, currently the AZ Merit beginning in grade three to measure students' mastery of grade-level standards and to assess annual progress, as well as the AIMS Science test in grade four.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Vista College Prep is committed to building a safe, supportive and joyful staff and student culture. Our core values of Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Courage, Hard work, and Self-Determination guide students in all aspects of school life. Each week our principal and assistant principal leads a morning motivation assembly with our K-2 and 3-5 students, celebrating students' academic achievement and demonstration of our core values. Each class starts with their college cheer, reflects on a monthly core value focus and the Principal reviews some key learnings that have occurred in each grade. The tone of the celebration is energetic, joyful, and urgent from start to finish. On Fridays, scholars cap off the week with a celebration of academic achievement and demonstration of core values from the week. Our teachers provide student shout-outs for scholars who have exhibited one of our core values, and the week ends with a celebratory dance party to recognize students who have contributed to a positive and respectful school culture throughout the week. We believe that our leaders and teachers set the tone for this environment and that when supported and motivated, all students will achieve to the highest academic standards.

As an organization, we also believe that our students will not ultimately be successful without an intensive focus on their social and emotional development. As students grow, it is clear that part of the journey to successful adulthood must be developing their self-awareness and their ability to self-manage their emotions and actions in order to allow them to engage with high-quality instruction. During the past year, Vista College Prep prioritized the development of a targeted social-emotional learning program based on a high performing network of schools in Tennessee. As part of the program's development, teachers received ongoing training and support on facilitating self-awareness and relationship work between students. Teachers also led weekly student circles to support student relationship work, students' development of self-identity, and community interaction.

Because we believe that adult culture drives student culture, we have also placed a strong emphasis on our staff culture. For the past two years we have incorporated six core observable behaviors into our culture. We talk consistently about how VCP team members: 1) Fully Engage and Contribute to the Team with a Positive Sense of Urgency, 2) Have a Personal Commitment to Excellence and the End Result, 3) Present and Pursue Sustainable Solutions as Opposed to Dwelling on Problems, 4) Are Respectful, Honest and Straight Forward, 5) Do What They Say They Will and 6) Continuously Improve Self and Organization. Staff members explicitly name and celebrate examples of these behaviors exhibited by their colleagues during Friday huddles, emails, and in team meetings. Additionally, coaches and principals privately celebrate examples of these behaviors with staff that they support and set explicit goals based on areas of growth. The opportunity to reflect on each of these behaviors leads to stronger collaboration and communication, a firm sense of urgency in our mission, and clear expectations for what it looks like to be an exemplary Vista College Prep teacher.

Our teachers are dedicated to their students and to closing the achievement gap. They work long hours, go above and beyond, and consistently are thinking about how they can improve so that they can achieve better outcomes for their students. To drive this, our leadership team is focused on ensuring the act of teacher appreciation happens throughout the year. Teachers are provided all of the resources that they need during the school year, including materials prep and operational support. Additionally, we provide meals during all conferences or any extended time we ask our team to stay in the building, provide gifts of VCP swag, bring surprise coffee and snacks to celebrate milestones, and have team outings during summer training, before winter break and at the end of the year.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Our team consistently prioritizes family and community engagement as a critical element of our school model. Despite the primary source of new students coming from referrals or siblings of current students, we attend all community events in our neighborhood. In addition, prior to a student's first day on campus, our operations team completes a home visit to share more information about VCP. We use these home

visits as an opportunity to explain the commitment we are making to not only the student enrolling, but also to the family of that student. Additionally, we provide transportation to after school programming options for our families. The programming partnerships include the Boys and Girls club, the YMCA, and other local community centers. We have even had the opportunity to be a pilot school for an after school music program founded by the lead clarinetist from the Phoenix Symphony. These programs ensure our students have a safe and structured after school program.

Of great importance is the relationship we seek to build between teachers and parents. Our Principal and teachers give out their cell phone numbers to ensure that parents have easy access throughout the day. VCP teachers meet with parents formally for conferences three times each year, make two additional parent contacts each month, and are often texting a quick celebratory picture of a scholar who had a great day, achieved an academic benchmark, or just keeping them plugged into the school day. We view our parents as partners in this work and deeply value the relationship that our team builds with each family.

We anticipate our student population will come from families who only speak Spanish or speak little English. While we have 13% of our student population who are considered as English Language Learners according to the state, nearly 40% of our students come from homes where the primary language is not English. Therefore, it is critical that we are able to communicate with our parents in both Spanish and English. To ensure we are able to fully communicate with parents we make certain that all information that is sent home to parents is in both Spanish and English, all front office staff are bilingual, and every teacher has a translator in their classroom for parent-teacher conferences. As a result of this investment, we have had nearly 100% parent participation at every parent-teacher conference to date. We firmly believe that this has a direct impact on the strong culture at our campus and the academic achievement of our students. Further, throughout the year, we hold events designed specifically to increase parent engagement. Some of these events include: Back to School Night, monthly “cafecitos” with our Principals, performances by our Bucket Band, Family Fun Day, and others.

Additionally, when calculating Vista College Prep’s FRPL percentage at 93%, that number is based on a calculation by the state as Vista College Prep is part of the Community Eligibility Provision, which allows all VCP students the opportunity to take advantage of receiving a free meal. We were eligible for this program due to the high number of students who initially qualified for FRPL in FY 2016, which is 97%.

3. Professional Development:

We are focused on providing ongoing coaching and support to our teachers. We firmly believe that having mission-driven teachers, combined with this coaching and support drives student achievement. We break down this support in two categories: during the summer and throughout the school year.

Summer Professional Development: To ensure our key instructional leaders are prepared and ready to deliver rigorous standards-based instruction on a daily basis, we have three weeks of staff development during the summer. Key topics covered during summer professional development include: Curriculum planning & Development, Instructional Practices, Assessments, School Culture Building and Norming, and School Routines and Structures. ^[1]_[SEP] Throughout the summer staff will participate in role-plays, evaluate scenarios, create and adapt curriculum, learn systems that include everything from how students enter the building to how they sharpen pencils. This will serve as a model for the entire staff and orient our own discussions around excellence. ^[1]_[SEP]

Professional Development during the School Year: Teachers participate in approximately four hours of weekly professional development. During this time, teachers and the leadership team plan and discuss curriculum, analyze student data to modify or adjust lesson planning and continuously seek ways to improve the quality of instruction we deliver to students. The weekly professional development sessions are differentiated by grade level, content area, and adapted to address trends identified by school and network leadership. Additionally, through the weekly observation/debrief cycle, teachers receive individualized feedback targeting their highest lever practices. We provide dedicated professional development days during the year, allowing us to contract external professional development as needed, and offer teachers opportunities to visit high-performing schools to observe best practices. Five of these

dedicated days are devoted to data evaluation following our six-week assessment cycles where teachers and instructional leaders evaluate students' small group levels, determine lesson modifications and evaluate whether any skills or concepts need to be retaught. Data-driven instruction allows teachers to recognize what information is not being accessed by some or all students and helps them to understand why. As a staff, we analyze the results of data on a weekly basis and analyze the results of internal assessments through extended professional development blocks. The goal of each data analysis session is to make program improvements to ensure all students are achieving mastery on all objectives. The action plans required from this information may include re-teaching, spiraling material more extensively, individual tutoring, small group sessions, or increased homework on a specific objective. Teachers will be expected to use the information gathered to modify their planning. Teachers will work with the instructional coaches on those modifications, as needed. We will monitor student mastery of standards as well as reading levels and fluency.

4. School Leadership:

The VCP leadership team is committed to excellence, driving high expectations, and the belief that all students can achieve as long as they have access to a high quality education. The leadership team is comprised of the Network Support Team and the School-Based Administrators. The Network Support Team includes the Founder and Executive Director, Senior Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Director of Operations, Director of Strategy and Growth, and Director of Finance. The school based leadership team is comprised of the Principal, Assistant Principal (who is also the Middle School Principal in Residence), Director of Curriculum and Instruction and Operations Associate.

Each leadership team member shares core beliefs about education. First, the team believes that there is an urgent need for high performing schools in Phoenix. Second, the team believes in setting high expectations with the structures and supports for every teacher, and creating a building that is designed for ongoing learning and reflection. Third, building the foundational knowledge and skills for students to engage in a rigorous college preparatory curriculum. Fourth, the team believes in teaching and developing the leadership and character values that each student will need to succeed in middle school, achieve in high school and graduate from college. Fifth, every staff member believes that parents are key partners in this work. This shared vision brings us together and serves as the foundation for any conversation about growth and impact.

The Network Support Team believes that it has a sole responsibility of ensuring that nothing gets in the way of instructional excellence. This team provides coaching and support of the school leadership team, ensures a high level of operational efficacy, and manages the delivery of curriculum and instructional best practice.

The Principal, Assistant Principal and Director of Curriculum and Instruction are the instructional leaders of the school. They are providing the weekly coaching and support of teachers, monitoring student progress and goals, modeling strong parent communication, and delivering exceptional professional development. They are the leaders that foster joyful urgency, build the staff and student culture of ongoing reflection and refinement, and push the team to reach higher.

Additionally, as we head into our sixth year of operation, we will have 89% of the founding team still teaching and leading. We firmly believe that this consistency, deep passion, and relentless commitment to excellence are defining elements of our leadership team that contribute to strong student achievement.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

We firmly believe that leaders and teachers matter. Most importantly, we believe that you can learn to be a great teacher. As a result, we focus our hiring on attributes rather than skills. Because we recognize that teacher quality is the single greatest factor in determining student achievement we are dedicated to recruiting and retaining the best and brightest talent available. However, in order to recruit these game-changing individuals, we know that we need to hire exceptional leaders.

Our professional development model is rooted in coaching and practice. Therefore, a new teacher is hired not necessarily because of their current skills in the classroom, but instead because we believe that they are interested in growing, eager to receive feedback, and in alignment with our mission and vision. This alignment is demonstrated by a belief in the following: 1) All children can and will learn, 2) All staff receives targeted, mission-driven, and individualized professional development, 3) Joy and rigor create a culture of achievement, 4) Interim assessments allow for targeted intervention, 5) A longer school day/year and strategic daily schedule maximize student achievement, and 6) A strong, pro-active partnership between home and school fosters strong learning for every child.

Through exhaustive and highly selective recruitment efforts, extensive summer training, weekly professional development, and regular observations with feedback, Vista College Prep teachers are part of a professional learning environment that facilitates growth and prepares teachers to implement an instructional program at the highest level.

While there are so many aspects to our model and beliefs that drive excellence, ultimately, as long as we continue to hire teachers and leaders who are driven by redefining what is possible in urban education, we believe that we will close the achievement gap for our students.