

U.S. Department of Education
2022 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Weinberg Gifted Academy
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 5245 S. Val Vista Drive
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Gilbert State AZ Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 85298-1010

County Maricopa

Telephone (480) 812-6600 Fax (480) 224-9254

Web site/URL https://www.cusd80.com/Domain/9702 E-mail nusbaum.jennifer@cusd80.com

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* Mr. Frank Narducci E-mail narducci.frank@cusd80.com
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Chandler Unified School District Tel. (480) 812-7000

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 Barb Mozdzen
(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, leave blank.*

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. 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, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 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.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2016 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 or 2021.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s nomination and/or rescind a school’s award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

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.

The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if one of these eligibility requirements is later discovered to have not been met or otherwise been violated.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the current school year (2021-2022) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools. For charter schools: If a charter school is part of the public school system, information should be provided for the public school district. If a charter school is considered its own district or part of a charter district, the information provided should reflect that.)

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

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. **Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not for the district.**)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
 Suburban
 Rural

3. Number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	18	20	38
1	23	24	47
2	41	27	68
3	49	43	92
4	61	44	105
5	51	36	87
6	36	16	52
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	279	210	489

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 19 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 7.2 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0.2 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 64.6 % White
 - 8 % 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 2020 - 2021 school year: 23%

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

Due to the pandemic, in the 2020-2021 school year families in our district could choose to move between online and in-person learning at each quarter. Each of those options is a separate elementary enrollment, meaning they unenrolled from one to go to the other.

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, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	53
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	10
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	63
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	278
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.23
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	23

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Spanish, Arabic, Cantonese, Filipino, German, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Thai, Tagalog, Urdu, Bengali, Hindi, Persian, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Turkish

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %
4 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 2 %

Total number students who qualify: 10

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 12 %
61 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. All students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504 should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>12</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>28</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>3</u> Developmental Delay | <u>11</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>11</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: 2
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	21
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	5
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	2
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

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 23:1

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

Required Information	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	96%	96%	95%
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 2021.

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.

At Weinberg Gifted Academy we empower our community to make an impact through our core values of kindness, bravery, and adaptability. We support our district's gifted academy approach by leveraging rigorous research-based resources, connecting with our diverse community, and engaging student interests. WGA students and staff are true partners in cultivating a climate of care, cause, and creativity.

16. Provide a URL link to or text of the school’s nondiscrimination policy.

Notice of Nondiscrimination: Chandler Unified School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex or gender, sexual orientation, disability, or age in its programs and activities.

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

Weinberg Gifted Academy is a 100% open enrollment public school for gifted learners. In the Chandler Unified School District (CUSD), education services are offered to all students who score at or above the 97th percentile on a verbal, quantitative, and/or nonverbal battery, or a composite score at or above the 95th percentile of a test included on any state-approved assessment. CUSD blanket screens every second-grade student with the Cognitive Abilities Testing (CogAT) and offers gifted testing throughout the year. Once students qualify to receive gifted services, they are enrolled through the CUSD open enrollment process.

PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Weinberg Gifted Academy (WGA) is one of two self-contained elementary schools for gifted learners in kindergarten through 6th grades in Chandler Unified School District (CUSD). Our governing board and superintendency have always been committed to identify, advocate for, and build programs for gifted learners. CUSD's approach to gifted services includes consultative services within a general education classroom, self-contained classrooms at neighborhood schools, and two self-contained gifted K-6 academies. Parents of students who qualify for gifted services from CUSD and surrounding school districts can choose WGA through the district's open enrollment process.

In the Fall of 2019, CUSD Administrators and Specialists envisioned growing a second self-contained gifted academy to meet the growing need for expanded gifted services. A new school building was being constructed for the students at Weinberg Elementary, and the Weinberg Elementary building would become Weinberg Gifted Academy. A Principal was brought on board to help bring to life the vision for WGA. We crafted thoughtful interview questions to build a core group of certified and classified staff that would collaborate to grow our community. We established a social media presence to introduce ourselves.

In the Spring of 2020, building renovations began, including removing walls between classrooms for three collaborative learning spaces, providing for a focus on design thinking and technology. Future students and families were invited to two information nights in March of 2020. The first information night was a packed house. The second information night didn't happen.

When schools in Arizona were closed for the fourth quarter of 2020 due to COVID-19, WGA staff adapted and moved to using Google Meet to interview and hire quality candidates. Online platforms provided opportunities for us to hold virtual staff meetings, start building a vision, and team-build using digital platforms. Over the summer, we participated in virtual professional development, engaged families by establishing the first WGA PTO using digital resources and drive-by voting and create a Site Council using digital meeting tools. We included students in the vision by asking them to contribute to a new mascot and logo. Social media, Google Meet, and email kept everyone excited about how we were growing as a community.

Every family and each staff member at WGA came from somewhere else, and that made creating a community and building relationships paramount. Teachers greeted all families throughout the summer in Google Meet, engaged our youngest students via a virtual Kindergarten camp, and created an opportunity for students to participate in a three-week virtual "Wild Summer of Reading" with the principal and teachers.

As the start of the school year approached and COVID numbers soared, our school Board elected to delay the first day of school by two weeks and to begin school virtually. WGA teachers committed to hours of training to prepare for virtual learning then set to the task of building virtual learning spaces. We worked together to build virtual, integrated, student-center, problem-based learning opportunities. We facilitated virtual curriculum presentations via Google Meet and recorded video to help families understand instructional plans. Teachers devised ways for students to share their backgrounds and passions with each other. We created a new social-emotional (SEL) special area class to connect students, led by Administration, the counselor, and media specialist. Special area teachers created virtual experiences in art, music and dance, and exercise.

During virtual instruction, students noticed problems, offered solutions and helped each other through challenging situations. They created "Tech Tip" help centers and dreamt up a way to have "recesses" together. Though they'd never seen their new campus, students were empowered to shape the school. They showed us the way through kindness, adaptability, and bravery. This would multiply exponentially when in-person learning resumed in September and once again when we returned to virtual learning in January, then back to in-person in February.

Throughout the year, families were able to choose virtual/in-person or online. Depending on local COVID

transmission rates, families chose “virtual/in-person,” or, “Online” through Chandler Online Academy. Attendance data reflected parents’ uncertainties as transmission numbers waxed and waned. Close-contact and illness kept students home. WGA teachers seamlessly included students who were not in the classroom with virtual learning tools and live instruction via Google Meet. Building community would continue to be our focus for the entire year, thus devoting our energy to building relationships before rigor.

The pandemic is an ongoing global challenge that introduced and exacerbated problems in education. At WGA, we applied a whole-campus, problem-based approach to each shift and collaborated with students and their families on solutions. Whether virtual or in-person, we turned problems into possibilities and created a learning environment where students felt safe, valued, and heard. We grew together by recognizing, cultivating, and celebrating kindness, bravery, and adaptability.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

1a. Overall approach, which may include overarching philosophy or approaches common across subject areas:

WGA prioritizes student ownership through a problem-based learning model that is interdisciplinary (connections between disciplines) and intradisciplinary (connections between people within a discipline). Student voice and choice are at the forefront of instructional planning and highly qualified teachers are able to meet students where they are academically and socially/emotionally, cultivating our core values of kindness, bravery, and adaptability. A central tenet to planning includes providing students with an authentic purpose and audience through connections with experts, analyzing current events, noticing problems, and communicating ideas and solutions.

Instructional planning at WGA begins with student inquiry in a true problem-based learning model. As students wonder about their world, we use a variety of resources and plan and create curricula that begin with an overarching essential question. We also leverage rigorous, research-based curricula to address Arizona state standards and high-yield instructional strategies including reciprocal teaching and cognitive task analysis.

Also at the forefront of planning is what we know about best practices for gifted learners. Our staff learns together and shares what we gain from varied professional development and conferences. We monitor progress and differentiate instruction using ongoing formal and informal assessments. ATI (Assessment Technology Incorporated)/Galileo and DIBELS assessments are used throughout the year to gain benchmark data, used to guide instruction and shape interventions.

Ongoing reflection is deliberate at WGA. Administrators, teachers, and students reflect on failures and successes and celebrate both. By embedding social-emotional learning into every lesson, we provide a safe environment for students to fail forward and to new challenges.

1b. Reading/English language arts curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

WGA enhances reading and English language arts (ELA) through our interdisciplinary instruction. Investigating how real-world problems have been solved allows for an increase in student engagement, curiosity, and understanding of the world around them. Through the use of various resources, students are exposed to new perspectives encouraging them to collaborate through meaningful discourse. Texts are gathered from curricula including Junior Great Books and Journeys as well as a variety of research-based resources that speak to student interests. Foundational skills are addressed through programs like Foundations and build up to shared inquiry discussions that dive deeper as students formulate unique stances based on evidence.

Due to our focus on design thinking, students are exposed to more technical text analysis and writing than is customary in a traditional environment. Students in all grade levels are assessed by their ability to analyze and apply what they have read to either solve a problem or share their interpretation for a potential solution. Formative ELA assessments include rubrics, real-time feedback, and reflection.

Through shared inquiry, students work to understand multiple perspectives. Students are exposed to multiple sources of media, developing an understanding of the role of context. For example, in a second-grade exploration, students interacted with a variety of texts as they researched natural disasters. They engaged in group discussions about the background information to formulate plans for how to prepare and prevent natural disasters. To help communicate their findings and inform an audience, students used their research and writing to plan a school-wide experience that included demonstrations, student-created video games, interactive models, and informational pieces.

When the school year started out with virtual learning, our teachers used tools, like Pear Deck, Google Classroom, Padlet, and Flipgrid to help even our youngest students engage with text and create original pieces of writing. Kindergarten students started researching and learning about the sea and, when we returned to in-person learning, they transferred their learning to create individual aquarium projects. Upholding mitigation strategies and still incorporating student choice and rigor, they crafted research papers and constructed models of a sea organism and its habitat. To include the entire school, students pre-recorded their research onto a push-button recorder and placed them next to each exhibit, allowing for small groups of students from all over campus to enjoy their work while maintaining mitigation protocol. They were also able to share their work with their families via videos produced at school.

Another example of integrating reading and English language arts into an interdisciplinary project was in a fifth-grade project called You-topia. After studying the foundational ideas which formed America, students created their own utopian society. Students conducted an extensive amount of research and writing for their societies and even created a language for their new civilization. They made connections with the past and stayed within the overarching essential question: "How do you impact the world around you?" The project culminated with the construction of a three-dimensional zoetrope to showcase a scene that symbolized their utopia, which was shared with the whole campus.

1c. Mathematics curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

Our Weinberg teachers have worked hard as a professional learning community (PLC) to create a true thinking environment in all subjects, particularly when learning mathematics as it relates to our five-year plan for student achievement. We believe K-6th grade students should be excited to work through math problems with peers while maintaining a growth mindset and rethinking beliefs that math is a series of steps or algorithms. Instead, students in our math classrooms are engaged in constructing meaning and are conducting real-world mathematics investigations. Students are involved in lively mathematical discussions where they are justifying their thinking and listening to peers' alternative ways of reasoning while persevering in problem solving.

Teachers foster an environment where students take ownership of meaningful mathematics. It is not enough to know an algorithm or process without understanding why it works. This learner-centered, student-owned math model empowers students to collaborate with peers, ask questions, and think deeply about what it all means. Teachers are trained to facilitate productive struggles while students work toward a conceptual understanding. To illustrate, second-grade students engaged in an area problem to determine how much paint they would need to cover a surface and arrived at the conclusion that they needed to multiply 17×13 . They were given the time and space needed to wrestle with this multi-digit multiplication problem. In their productive struggle, they realized that they could deconstruct the numbers into products they were familiar with, paving the way for grand understandings of the distributive property.

Like other subject areas, we use research-based resources to create rich mathematical experiences for our students including Eureka and Glencoe Math. Our staff also actively pursues and creates professional development for themselves and to benefit all classrooms. We use a number of successful research-based approaches such as Dan Meyer's 3 ACT Math Tasks, Robert Kaplinsky's Open Middle Math and Cathy Fosnot's Context for Learning Mathematics to build numeracy skills as well as digital resources like Desmos and Moby Max for computation practice and assessment.

Our model allows us to consistently use formal and informal assessments to understand and meet students' individual mathematics needs. For example, in a primary classroom, when students became excited about wondering whether a square can always be considered a rectangle and if the opposite could also be true, they were encouraged to explore their thinking and construct arguments. Dwelling in this excitement gave them a reason to employ mathematical reasoning and vocabulary, revealed misconceptions and generalities, and provided pathways for next steps from an instructional standpoint.

1d. Science curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

At WGA, we empower students to be explorers, creators, tinkerers, engineers, and scientists. Students question, explore, and investigate topics of interest while teachers integrate state standards. Our design thinking model encourages students to begin with empathy, recognize a problem, formulate ideas, build and design ideas, fail, reflect, and redesign. We help students with each step by explicitly teaching communication, collaboration, multiple perspectives, observation, and the value of a sense of wonder.

Providing for an authentic purpose in science also helps develop SEL skills. For example, while researching insects, our kindergarten students became interested in the speed at which an insect can travel. This resulted in the first-annual “Great Bug Race.” Students across campus were enthralled to participate after Kindergarteners shared scientific knowledge to persuade the community to vote on an insect to win the race. The whole community participated through virtual voting and live streaming. SEL was incorporated throughout, helping students grow from the potential disappointment or hubris of choosing/promoting the losing or winning bug.

Both science interests and standards drive instruction at WGA. In a second-grade natural disaster project, one group was excited about plate tectonics. They created an interactive model that allowed the user to move the tectonic plates and experience simulated seismic waves. Students in other groups incorporated circuitry, hydraulics, robotics, 3D (three dimensional) printing, and art into prototypes of solutions and interactive displays.

Providing students with an authentic audience and purpose also serves as a formative assessment in science standards. When first-grade students investigated simple machines, teachers started with an Engineering is Elementary (EIE) kit. As teachers listened to conversations and connections, they facilitated an experience that showcased student learning. Students constructed games using simple machine concepts and built an interactive carnival of games in our outdoor learning space, enjoyed by all grade levels.

1e. Social studies/history/civic learning curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

Social studies standards integrated with science standards provide big ideas to frame student inquiry in a PBL (problem-based learning) model. To support teachers who are new to creating curriculum using a variety of sources, teachers have dozens of EIE kits and district-created integrated units for social studies and science.

For instance, in a third-grade integrated lesson students were posed the essential question, "How did people come to Arizona?" After learning about Native Americans and explorers through literature, students determined that people who came to Arizona had to adapt and overcome obstacles. Students were asked to showcase how people came to Arizona, or how they adapted and survived in the climate. They poured over readings and took virtual field trips to get a comprehensive understanding of those who came before us. Students chose to build explorers' galleons, creating scaled cross-sections of the vessels complete with barrels and cargo. They crafted missions and pueblos so an audience of their peers could see inside these historical structures that have lasted generations. This entire process incorporated all content areas, applying understandings of fractions and scaled measurements, interpreting and summarizing technical text, experimenting with structural integrity in engineering, and persevering through a complex task – all through the lens of social studies.

The fifth-grade You-topia project was also driven by social studies. The standards inspired the essential question for the project, “How do you impact the world around you?”. Students chose aspects they wanted to explore further to include in their own civilizations inspired by ideas and concepts they learned from history and current events. Extended interdisciplinary projects derived from social studies and science standards created myriad opportunities for assessment with each step. In this case, summative assessments included a writing piece, a 3-dimensional zoetrope, and an oral presentation for an authentic audience of our community.

1f. For secondary schools:

1g. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

When planning WGA, CUSD maintained its commitment to provide gifted learners special area classes that challenge them intellectually, artistically, and physically. WGA is unique in the district because we offer band and orchestra beginning at fourth grade and Performing Arts and Visual Arts special areas in addition to physical education (P.E.) and Technology.

Our PBL environment focuses on student ownership where students are encouraged to make mistakes and develop flexible solutions and adaptability. Specials support classroom learning by embedding social emotional learning and giving students experiences they'll use to demonstrate mastery and communicate their thinking through access to another variety of tools, techniques, and materials. For example, in Visual Arts and Performing Arts students use inquiry skills to analyze masterpieces and exemplars while creating original pieces. This can be seen at the WGA monthly lunchtime showcases that invite students to audition and perform in front of their peers. These opportunities allow students to apply improvisational and composition skills while developing audience literacy.

In specialized learning spaces, students have access to 3D printers, Glowforge laser cutter, coding and robotics, video production studio, microprocessors, sewing machines, pottery wheels, kiln, Styrofoam cutters, and more. These tools help students learn to use and create works of art, prototypes, inquiry tools, and solutions to problems. To illustrate, for our science fair, a group of fifth-grade students sought to understand the tensile strength of materials. They had access to the Technology Hub CAD software and 3D printers, Art Hub textiles and sewing machine, and digital microscopes in the media center.

WGA special area teachers incorporate a unique addition with "Extra Special Mondays." In these workshop-style extra Specials, 4th-6th grade students choose their focus. Options include Backstage, Dance, Photography, Advanced Ceramics, News Crew, CAD design, Advanced Coding, Olympic Sports, Team Building, and others determined by the students. Extra Special Mondays help learners explore a discipline more deeply and apply knowledge. For instance, students in the Backstage workshop learned sound and lighting and stage set-up and tear-down. These students now run the stage for all school performances.

At WGA, we believe before- and after-school experiences are a vital part of building community and meeting students' innate desires to explore ideas and interests. Through teacher-led and student-created clubs, WGA learners enjoy clubs like VEX Robotics, Cheer, Math, Composting, Gardening, Spanish, Yoga, Running, 3D Printing, Dungeons and Dragons, Origami, and Glowforge Design. When a student has an idea for a club, we make it happen.

Our Media Center is another hub that students have daily access. K-3 students enjoy a 30-minute library time each week and all students can visit the library for research or reading throughout the day. Students also enjoy the quarterly challenges from our Media Assistant that include an estimation jar and geography mysteries. Students are currently working with the Media Assistant to create a new space they call the "Innovation Station." These students are designing a place for all to tinker, build, and be inspired.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

At WGA, our whole-student and whole-campus approach supports students as they make brave choices to take ownership of and accountability for their learning. Staff analyzes data from a variety of sources ,including district benchmark testing (ATI/Galileo), progress monitoring (CORE Literacy Library Diagnostic) and screening tools (DIBELS), state testing (AzM2), and teacher-created formative and summative assessments. Additionally, teachers use ongoing student surveys, reflections, observations, and conferences with students and their parents to identify areas of need, progress, and personalized learning

opportunities. On the 2021 state assessment, the percent passing rate for students receiving special education services was 76%, compared to 94% of the general population. These needs are addressed with research-based curricula, including Foundations, Touch Math, and Wilson through differentiated, 1:1 and small group instruction, and paraprofessional support in classrooms. Additionally, we accessed ESSER III (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funds to create before-school tutoring and intervention groups. Students struggling behaviorally, academically, or emotionally are provided support through our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, a coherent, collaborative, data-driven, problem-solving approach to intervention.

We intentionally teach social-emotional support using the Caring School Community curriculum; and, students are also purposefully taught about giftedness and the unique challenges that can come with it. Our counselor, psychologist, and special education teacher host groups and teach classes that employ a psychoeducational approach that addresses dysregulation, asynchronous development, perfectionism, over excitabilities, and peer relationships. Professional development equips teachers with an understanding of neuroscience and giftedness and tools, such as Dr. Bruce Perry's Neuro-Sequential model which complements the Zones of Regulation Social Thinking curriculum used in our special education classroom. We offer social emotional tools including calm-down corners, flexible seating, a school garden, and sensory tools to help students regulate their bodies and emotions. All WGA classified and certified personnel are encouraged to connect and build relationships with all students.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

At WGA, language arts and mathematics are accelerated by at least one academic year and all classroom and special area teachers are in possession or pursuit of a Gifted Education PreK-12 endorsement, building an understanding of the unique characteristics of gifted learners and best instructional practices. Our instructional model focuses on design thinking, depth and complexity, interrelationship of disciplines, inquiry, constructing knowledge, decision-making, collaboration skills, and learning with an authentic purpose and audience in mind. We reflect on and gather input from our students about pacing, quality innovative resources and tools, personalized demonstrations of mastery, and effective ways to add depth, rigor, and vigor to learning. For students who need to move farther or faster than their gifted peers, we use the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework to collaborate on strategies and opportunities, similar to students who need remediation. Frequent formative and performance assessments provide data to teachers about student achievement and engagement.

Learning opportunities at WGA are specifically designed for students who are ready for more depth, acceleration, or a faster pace because we provide for student choice and open-ended applied learning. With asynchronous development in mind, our teachers embed Costa's Habits of Mind, de Bono's Thinking Hats, and Gould and Kaplan's Icons of Depth and Complexity to help students develop metacognitive skills, including perseverance, insight, situational awareness, and goal setting. We also have Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) devoted to Peter Liljedahl's Building Thinking Classrooms framework, which is ideal for gifted learners and transfers across disciplines. For example, an advanced mathematical thinker might quickly arrive at an answer for an engaging math task, but not yet have the skills to communicate their thinking, analyze processes, or recover from misconceptions. Using Liljedahl's framework, teachers use questioning rather than answering to help students collaborate and mobilize knowledge.

3c. Special education:

WGA is unique because we are a self-contained gifted school with a focus on relationships, student ownership, and social emotional learning across campus. We value and take pride in addressing the needs of all our learners. Students who qualify for gifted services often come with other exceptionalities. Identified twice-exceptional students make up 12.5 % of the total population and include students with autism, learning disabilities (dyslexia or dysgraphia), speech and language disorders, and social or behavior challenges. For students with dyslexia or dysgraphia, the goal is to remediate skills using research-based curricula, including Wilson Reading System, Verbalizing and Visualizing, and Touch Math that are designed to address students' learning styles and needs. These resources use a multisensory approach to learning.

Because integrated problem-based learning is championed at WGA, special education students are given options on how they would like to show their learning focusing on their strength while supporting challenging areas. Additionally, students' needs are met during assessments with appropriate accommodations. Having 1:1 technology gives access to assistive technology for students who need text-to-speech or speech-to-text to increase independent reading and writing output. Students receiving specialized instruction for speech/language practice social pragmatic language while working on speech deficits. For our students with autism, social and/or behavioral challenges, the Social Thinking curriculum is used to teach Zones of Regulation. Students learn to consider the size of the problem, use whole-body listening, and how to be a social detective. These curricula are intentionally integrated and used across campus. Our team has also developed daily check-in/check-out opportunities, sensory-integration breaks, differentiated strategies for classrooms, safe places, safety plans and quiet workspaces to address individual students' needs.

3d. English Language Learners, if a special program or intervention is offered:

Upon enrollment Chandler Unified School District screens every student using a Home Language Survey. When parents indicate that a language other than English is the primary language spoken by the child or their family, students are administered the state-adopted Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA) to determine their level of English language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The families of students who qualify for English Language Development (ELD) services have the option of enrolling them or withdrawing them from these services, and all students identified as ELD are re-evaluated annually until they score "Proficient" on the AZELLA. The diverse population of Weinberg Gifted Academy includes many students who speak multiple languages. In October 2021, four students, or 0.8% of the population, qualified for ELD services. Three withdrew from services, and currently one Kindergarten student is receiving ELD services in a two-hour daily Structured English Immersion/Integrated Model in the general education classroom. Interventions include 1:1 checking for understanding, word walls to visually model new language, and using multiple modalities to teach language skills across the curriculum.

3e. Other populations (e.g., migrant, homeless), if a special program or intervention is offered:

In Chandler Unified School District, meals for breakfast and lunch are 100% free to all students through the 2021-2022 school year through the USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture). The Arizona Department of Education and the Department of Economic Security also offer additional assistance to students who qualify with reduced school fees and scholarships. Currently, 2% of Weinberg Gifted Academy students are eligible to receive free/reduced meals and 1% of students have an immigrant status. As a site, WGA supports these learners with inclusive practices that honor and respect their backgrounds. Though no students at WGA have a homeless or migrant status. Should the need arise, our district has a robust Federal Programs department that includes Migrant Education, Families in Transition (Homeless), and Indigenous Education. In addition, our district provides medical and dental services, counseling services, meal services, and other family resources at no cost for qualifying students and their families through the Chandler Care Center.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Building and opening a new school concept during a pandemic presented us with interesting challenges in building a school climate and culture for our incoming students and their families. We seized the opportunities afforded by virtual learning including district-wide technology distribution and the growing familiarity of the community with online learning platforms and tools. WGA teachers leveraged digital tools to build a sense of community in classrooms, beginning the summer before the 2020-2021 school year with virtual opportunities including “Meet the Teaching Team” for all students and a voluntary “Wild Summer of Reading”.

We also connected to students during this time by inviting them to submit ideas for a new mascot, school colors, and logo. Students used a digital survey to tell us about their ideas for a mascot along with the “why.” The staff then narrowed it down to six choices before the community voted for the “WildCATS,” a combination of gifted learners’ “wild imaginations” and the acronym of our district’s gifted program, “Chandler Academically Talented Students” (CATS). It was students who submitted the new mascot idea via video to the Superintendent, and it was our students who dreamt up ideas for our new logo, made official by a parent.

When our Technology teacher was reassigned to an online classroom, we created a special area opportunity in its place that we called, “WGA 101.” The goal of this special was connecting students and staff, creating a community, and incorporating SEL through virtual projects like “Empathy Emporium”, in which 3rd-5th grade students submitted products using the tool of their choice to help K-2 grade students understand, recognize, and show empathy.

Building community was our main focus last year. With students moving in and out of in-person learning, our communities were in a constant state of flux. We chose to focus on relationships over rigor and intentionally looked for ways to connect. We designed safe opportunities like outdoor yoga and virtual running clubs. We live streamed school-wide and grade level events like the first-annual Kindergarten Great Bug Race and the sliming of Administration after meeting a fundraising goal.

With building community in mind, every twist and turn resulting from the pandemic became an opportunity for us to engage and grow students' minds, hearts, and interests. It is because of this that we established our defining hashtag on social media: #growwga.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

WGA students come from across the district and neighboring districts, making the art of building community fundamental to success. When schools were closed to in-person instruction in the Spring of 2020, we took deliberate measures to include our entire community to help form the foundational tenets of WGA. Through virtual meetings and surveys of parents, students, and staff, we began crucial conversations about a shared vision before school even started. We celebrated our school’s history by investigating 39 years of primary sources, pictures, and artifacts as we planned for becoming the next chapter.

WGA teachers also connect to parents and the wider community to bring mentors and masters into the classrooms either live or virtually. Our students have talked with members of the U.S. Space Force, authors, master gardeners, SpaceX engineers, and artists. We also look for local and national grant opportunities to enrich our resources and raise awareness of who we are and what we do for students. Signature annual events, like student-led patriotic commemorations in which we invite key community members including servicepeople, first responders, and the Mayor, also help build community as we live-streamed these events to families to maximize access. We also committed to attracting and retaining quality teachers for our students by collaborating with local colleges and universities to bring in student teachers and interns.

WGA is dedicated to consistent and clear communication. We have a robust social media presence as well

as a weekly “Paw Prints” newsletter that tells our story to a broad audience. Conversations with parents throughout the year including conferences are made as accessible as possible by offering in-person and virtual options, and parents are updated using the Bloomz messaging app.

Site Council and PTO at WGA are diverse microcosms of our demographics and include classified and certified staff. PTO supports WGA with well-attended meetings and family fun that supports our core values. Also active is our Site Council, which helped review and communicate specific mitigation strategies and helped create our annual Strategic Planning parent surveys that give every parent a voice to help shape our decision-making. Our K-6 grades student leadership group, with a focus on community outreach and service learning, connects with and supports the broader community with household and hygiene drives for care centers, fundraisers for local and global charities, and environmental initiatives like a student garden and a TerraCycling project.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

At WGA we empower our staff to make an impact through our core values of kindness, bravery, and adaptability. We support our district’s gifted academy approach by leveraging rigorous research-based resources, connecting with our diverse community, and engaging student interests. WGA students and staff are true partners in cultivating a climate of care, cause, and creativity. Our outstanding staff are committed to growing professionally and personally and dedicated to developing each student’s academic, social, emotional, physical, and creative potential through a problem-based, interdisciplinary approach that focuses on authentic purposes and audiences.

When in-person options weren’t available during school closures, professional development for WGA teachers was delivered through asynchronous and virtual options. We continued learning together through district- and site-based coursework and extended our professional learning networks using social media and professional organizations. As a staff, we recognized how important it was to turn obstacles of virtual learning into possibilities. At WGA, professional development builds upon research-based practices, innovative approaches, and engagement strategies directly in line with student achievement. The district differentiates professional development to meet the needs of student achievement goals, including gifted education using the National Association for Gifted Children PreK-12 Gifted Programming Standards.

Another practice at WGA that has contributed to our success is instructional rounds. In collaboration with the district Gifted Specialist and other campuses, WGA administration and teachers observed classrooms using a staff-created list of “look-fors” derived from the Marzano evaluation tool and aligned to our vision. The reflection and conversations that result from instructional rounds have a profound impact on the professional development of administrators and teachers.

WGA teachers are mentors to one another and incoming educators. We host student teachers and interns at multiple grade levels and participate in mentorship and standards-based coursework toward gifted endorsement and continuing education. We engage in ongoing dialogue with teachers of gifted learners across the district. Beyond that, teachers share their strengths by creating and offering planned and ad hoc professional development opportunities for the staff. Many teachers on staff have given presentations on topics including math curriculum and instruction and best practices for gifted students at conferences at a statewide and national level. As a staff we are very supportive of this in providing an audience and feedback for staff before they present to a larger audience. In addition, all staff are involved in PLC book studies centered on student achievement and best practices.

4. School Leadership:

Weinberg Gifted Academy employs a shared leadership model that focuses on providing students conditions in which they will thrive. The WGA leadership team includes the Principal, Gifted Specialist, Dean, Counselor, a classified staff member, and representatives from each teaching team. They meet monthly to ensure alignment of decisions to core values, review updates to mitigation strategies, and communicate upcoming opportunities. Additionally, because we have a small staff (thirteen sections in 2021), we are able to regularly meet as a whole staff to analyze data, share instructional strategies, and make key decisions.

Shared leadership at WGA provides faculty with a voice in the instructional model and facilitates staff collaboration and reflection. In the principal survey in May of 2021, 100% of staff reported that the administrator guides staff in on-going evaluation of practices and decisions. Administration at WGA is highly visible, making frequent classroom visits and engaging in conversations with students and staff. Shared leadership can also be seen in our PLC book studies, led by teachers. WGA staff regularly share articles and research and create ad hoc training on a piece of technology, a data dive, or a teaching strategy.

The principal also shares leadership not just with staff but with students and parents. One example of this is in the hiring process. Forming an all-new and growing staff required a thoughtful interview process aligned to our vision. When the first five teachers were selected, they helped craft interview questions tied to our vision and became part of the interview team. The same is true for our classified staff. When hiring custodians, our lead custodian was a part of the interview team. Interview questions are reviewed periodically, as does the rubric tied to our core values of kindness, bravery, and adaptability. In 2021, students and parents were consulted for questions for teacher candidates. Students provided insightful, thoughtful questions for candidates that became part of our interview process.

The principal also meets with student advisory groups. These groups of diverse students reviewed data from our K-3 and 4th-6th grades student climate survey and proposed solutions and plans for areas of need. For example, they noticed fewer students reported knowing how to report bullying than expected. The student advisory group proposed using student announcements to raise awareness of what bullying is and how to report it.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

WGA teachers and staff cultivate instruction and enrichment opportunities that are culturally responsive for our diverse community. We apply the district's Equity Department strategies, action steps, and pathways to planning and school-wide events to maintain inclusive practices. Administration ensures hiring is equitable and representative and the process for identifying students to be eligible for gifted services strives to be culturally and socioeconomically equitable as possible. CUSD blanket tests all second graders in the district each year using the CogAT and all Title I Kindergarten students using the Naglieri Nonverbal Abilities Test resulting in a more equitable distribution of gifted identification. In addition, bussing is provided from students' home schools to WGA to provide for equal access. At WGA, school supplies are discretely provided for socioeconomically disadvantaged students and funds and scholarships are provided so field trips and special activities are available to all students.

To support equity in our school, the WGA Equity Team speaks at staff meetings and produces newsletters with information to help inform teachers of current events that affect our students. As a PBL (problem-based Learning) school teachers incorporate current events into curriculum planning. Our counselor is accessible for all students who need to deconstruct and process current events.

Teachers make efforts to understand and include students' culture. Languages and cultures are celebrated across the WGA campus. For example, rather than a Read Across America event in the Spring, WGA hosts a "Read Around the World" event and invites community members and families to contribute traditional songs, stories, and poems representing their culture. Parents are also invited throughout the year to share their culture and traditions, and the family builds are purposefully inclusive, allowing all families an opportunity to participate and represent their backgrounds.

Our special area classes also support responsive teaching. In Art, students in all grade levels study artists from all over the world and in performing arts and P.E. they learn about traditional songs, dances, and sports from other cultures. The WGA media center is rich with diverse titles. Students can also choose to share their cultures and traditions by participating in morning announcements or our monthly lunchtime showcases. With the help of parents and students, our campus has enjoyed learning about traditional Eritrean clothing, watching a classical Indian dance, learning to sing Happy Birthday in Polish, crafting Chinese lanterns, and learning about Diwali.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Founding a new program for gifted learners in a pandemic provided a perfect circumstance for genuine, collaborative problem solving. There were very real problems for us to solve together as we grew. We intentionally employed an integrated, PBL instructional model with student ownership and authentic purpose in mind because it empowers students. We recognized that our work was to provide students with the skills, resources, and attitudes to analyze and solve real problems around them. We modeled this for them by consistently turning things we could not do because of mitigation strategies into possibilities of doing things in new ways and doing new things altogether and they showed us the way through kindness, bravery, and adaptability.

The Weinberg Gifted Academy core values of kindness, bravery, and adaptability evolved organically during the 2020-2021 school year. Parents, students, and staff made brave choices to leave a campus and start something new at the Weinberg campus. Bringing together a group of educators devoted to teaching to the whole child and committed to reflective practices in the interest of true student achievement was certainly our “what”. We also understood that our systems of support for the WGA entire community needed to be both dependable and dynamic, ardent and adaptable for us to react and respond appropriately to the uncertainties that accompanied COVID-19, we understood that building relationships was paramount to building a school experience in which students flourished. We knew that reciprocal compassion, kindness, empathy, and grace would be the “how” we built the WGA community.

With each challenge, planned or unplanned, we solicited input from students and families, developed plans and collaborated on solutions, and reflected on the impact of those plans and solutions. As we grew and set about the task of establishing a firm mission, we gathered input from all of our stakeholders about what they wanted from their time at WGA. Trends emerged. Parents and teachers considered big ideas like grit, grace, persistence, perseverance, wonder, care, leadership, perspective-taking, collaboration, resilience, and creativity. Students shared desires to build strong friendships, have fun learning, be ready for any situation, feel a sense of belonging, and to be heard. It became clear that our mission was to empower our community to be brave, kind, and adaptable. That is our “why.” These values guide, affirm, and uplift the WGA community as we continue to #growwga.