



MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 23, 2015

TO: Members, Community Impact Fund Committee

FROM: Juan Salgado, Executive Director

SUBJECT: A for Arizona

SUMMARY

A for Arizona is a joint project of the Arizona Chamber Foundation and the Tucson Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of this project is to increase the number of “A” quality schools in low-income areas of Arizona. The goal is that every child will have access to a high-quality education.

The effort of *A for Arizona* focuses attention and resources on those leaders and schools that succeed with their students, and seek to understand what policies and practice the state and business leaders could engage in to directly support this expansion. *A for Arizona* works hand-in-hand with the leaders of the state’s ‘A’-rated public schools, specifically those that challenge the perception about poverty and achievement.

The outcome of the *A for Arizona* project will be a state where ‘A’-grade performance has grown from a possibility to an expectation, where state policies steadily support the expansion and replication of these schools, and where ‘D’ and ‘F’-grade schools are either actively involved in improvement, or are being closed.

A for Arizona is seeking \$50,000 from the Phoenix IDA to support specific programmatic areas of the project, the ‘A’ Leadership Team meetings, Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce’s DATOS group’s study of parents, and their public awareness efforts. (Please see attached proposal.)



**Phoenix IDA Concept Paper
June 8, 2015**

Mission/Vision:

***A for Arizona's* goal is to see a rapid expansion in the number of 'A'-grade schools serving low-income students in the state. Arizona has created a strong policy environment for school choices, but has not yet seen a commensurate gain in achievement, particularly in schools serving a significant population of low-income students.**

We believe that by creating a focus on the existence and needs of our target public schools (those rated 'A' by the Arizona Department of Education that serve over 60% free and reduced lunch qualified students), we can assist in designing and advancing the policies and programs that will support their expansion and replication.

Project Description:

In December of 2013, we created the *A for Arizona* project at the Arizona Chamber Foundation in partnership with the Tucson Hispanic Chamber, in order to best understand what would be needed to catalyze a rapid expansion of our best public schools. We began discussing this project in late 2013, knowing that the next governor of the state would be faced with a significant challenge to advance quality and equity in all of Arizona's public schools. We originally projected that this effort would require a decade worth of work.

Our first priority has been getting to know the leaders of Arizona's low-income 'A' schools. In June of 2014, we began meeting quarterly with our 'A' Leadership Team, consisting of the principals and superintendents of these 100 public district and charter 'A' schools. These meetings provide us with valuable information about the needs of these schools, and a deeper understanding of the kinds of policy and programmatic change that can best support their rapid expansion. For the school leaders, the meetings have been a source of support and networking previously unavailable to them.

Getting to know these leaders has left us in no doubt that Arizona can be the national leader in achievement gains for low-income students. Thankfully, we

have already been able to add our ‘A’ Leadership Team’s perspective to two major state initiatives now aimed directly at this possibility: Arizona’s Public Schools Achievement District and the design of a more efficient and student-centered funding formula via the Governor’s Classrooms First Council.

Need for the Project:

While Arizona is advantaged by strong public education policies in the arenas of personnel and school choice, we are painfully aware that permission to innovate alone has not resulted in sufficient statewide achievement gains. Any review of Arizona’s academic testing results, graduation rates, and completion rates for college or successful employment after high school reflects a persistent lack. These outcomes are based in large part on a very low quality of schools available to low-income students.

A for Arizona seeks to rapidly expand access to ‘A’-grade schools that serve primarily low-income students, and to confront our state’s low expectations by highlighting these schools that are proving the possible. Our effort focuses attention and resources on those leaders and schools who succeed with their students, and seeks to understand what policies and practices the state and business leaders could engage in to directly support this expansion.

Arizona’s ‘A’-grade public schools span the socio-economic scale. In Arizona today, 499 schools out of 2040 public schools received an ‘A’-grade. Of the schools that educate less than 20% low-income students, 44% attained an ‘A’-grade from the state. Of the one-third of Arizona schools that serve at least 60% low-income students, only 10% (or 86 schools) earned an ‘A’-grade. The ‘A’ schools serving low-income populations come from all three sectors of public education: district, magnet, and charter schools. These schools, their leaders, and their teachers constitute a sufficient base of excellence from which to expand and to use as exemplars.

	Row Labels	Schools	Students	Percent of Students
All Arizona Schools not including Alternative schools A = 380,870	A	540	380,870	35%
	B	574	371,571	35%
	C	426	242,153	22%
	D	163	62,371	6%
	Not Yet Rated	106	20,050	2%
	Grand Total	1809	1,077,015	100%

	Row Labels	Schools	Students	Percent of Students
All Arizona Schools with 60% or more FRL not including Alternative schools A= 41,575	A	80	41,475	8%
	B	297	192,719	39%
	C	335	197,796	40%
	D	130	56,195	11%
	Not Yet Rated	17	2,782	1%
	Grand Total	859	490,967	100%

Arizona's grading system is by no means perfect, but it is at least a rough estimate of school quality, and relies on individual student gains from year to year as a significant factor in the calculation of grades. This means that a school's 'A'-grade does not reflect only demographics; it reflects the quality of the teaching and culture at the school itself. Students cannot attain at high levels in schools that themselves do not earn excellent grades.

We have learned that excellence is a decision; and those leaders, teachers, and schools that have decided to seek excellence in the most challenging settings are achieving it through a high degree of skill, very hard work, and the existence of a permissive policy environment.

In Arizona's fast paced growth environment, we possess an urgent need for policies and programs that incentivize expansion, replication, or creation of only excellent schools and that prohibit the growth of poor quality schools. The leaders of our low-income 'A'-grade schools tell us their biggest need is for highly qualified teachers, and secondarily they need ready access to facilities when seeking to serve more students by growing larger or replicating. As a matter of policy, the state should not only offer easy access to facilities for highly performing schools, but should deny expansion authority to schools and systems that have no record of success with students. *A for Arizona* is working to understand the barriers to each of these goals.

Population to Be Served:

***A for Arizona* works hand in hand with the leaders of the state's 'A'-rated public schools, specifically those that defy conventional wisdom about poverty and achievement. Most instructional reform efforts in Arizona and across the U.S. focus earnestly on reducing failures and we certainly support those efforts. But in contrast, we seek to focus our efforts on success.**

***A for Arizona* Beneficiaries:**

- **Low-Income Students. Expanding the number of 'A'-grade schools in Arizona means genuine opportunity for the students who will attend those schools. We calculate that roughly 40,000 students are currently being educated in low-income 'A' schools, and we believe it will be possible to see a 10% increase in the number of students served in low-income 'A' schools every year, beginning in the 2016-2017 school year.**

The majority of students in Arizona's public schools are currently Hispanic, and in our target low-income schools this majority is larger still. The primary beneficiaries of expanding access to 'A'-grade schools serving low-income students will be Hispanic students enrolled in Arizona's public schools.

- **Arizona and its local communities.** Students who graduate from ‘A’-grade schools are prepared to move on – without remediation – to attend college or career preparation and to contribute to their communities.
- **Educators who lead or teach in ‘A’-grade schools.** ‘A’-grade schools serving low-income students who choose to be part of the *A for Arizona* project should be able to expect significant increases in support – both professionally and financially.

The outcome of the *A for Arizona* project will be a state where ‘A’-grade performance has progressed from a possibility to an expectation, where state policies systematically support the expansion and replication of ‘A’-grade public schools, and where ‘D’- and ‘F’-grade schools are either actively engaged in improvement or are being shut down.

As a result, our students will have their choice of excellent public school options that will prepare them to move on to further education, career training, or military service without need of remediation. We believe all Arizona public schools can and should offer this excellent level of preparation.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies:

While *A for Arizona* focuses on both program and policy, we are requesting support from the Phoenix IDA for specific programmatic areas of the project: the ‘A’ Leadership Team meetings, Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce’s DATOS group’s study of parents, and our public awareness efforts.

A for Arizona provides a unique opportunity and positive pressure for education advocates to form more workable relationships. We are bringing together business CEOs, education advocates, school leaders, and policymakers to the table around a targeted conversation of how to support a system of choice among high-quality public schools serving low-income communities, as the necessary starting point for developing a statewide culture of excellence.

- From April 2015 through through December 2015, *A for Arizona* will meet at least twice each with key education partners who are not immediately involved in the *A for Arizona* project, including but not limited to leadership of the Arizona Education Association, the Arizona School Boards Association, and the Arizona School Administrators, in order to discuss general education issues and seek to discover shared policy interests, as recorded in program management files.

- Each year, *A for Arizona's* quarterly 'A' Leadership Team meetings, where our highest performing low-income school leaders gather, will include total annual participation from at least 8 legislators, 5 state board of education members, 2 staff members from the governor's office, 5 media representatives, and 10 community influencers, as recorded in program management files.
- Each year, *A for Arizona* will organize and execute at least 2 Schools of Excellence tour days to introduce highly performing low-income public schools to state legislators, state education board or staff members, governor's staff members, and/or community influencers in at least 3 separate state regions, as recorded in program management files.
- Each year, *A for Arizona* will organize and execute at least 7 social gatherings ("Race to the Tap") twice monthly, where at least 15 legislators, policymakers and education advocates can connect informally, as recorded in program management files.
- Between April 2015 and March 2016, at least 8 short video clips will be produced and distributed to highlight *A for Arizona's* goals, leadership schools, and school leaders. Video clips will be shared via social media through *A for Arizona*, the Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Tucson Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and at least five partner organizations.
- Between April 2015 and March 2016, at least 12 articles or op-ed pieces regarding the goals and leaders of *A for Arizona* will be published among popular Arizona media outlets and beyond by summer 2016, as identified and collected by program staff.
- Between April 2015 and March 2016, at least 2 blogs will be published on the *A for Arizona* website highlighting progress of initiative, as recorded in program management files.

Projected Outcomes and Related Indicators:

A for Arizona staff will evaluate our goal attainment using qualitative and quantitative data including:

- (a) the number of schools and students actively affected by or participating in newly created opportunities, as reflected in public records;
- (b) the number of new, expanded, and improved 'A' schools across Arizona and by region, as reflected by data released by the Arizona Department of Education;
- (c) the number and type of public awareness activities completed each month, as reflected in program records and calendars;

(f) the number of education advocates we have met with, as reflected in program records;

(g) the number of convenings and total number of participants in those meetings as reflected in program records; and

(h) the number of initiated or supportive published pieces, as noted and collected by staff.

This data will be gathered throughout the program year at various intervals, i.e. monthly, quarterly, or annually depending on the activity. Project staff will collect advocacy and relevant program data monthly. School counts, student enrollment, and accountability data will be reviewed annually from the Arizona Department of Education.

Our results will be analyzed and reported via formal reports, newsletters, blogs, and other relevant communications to the governor, Chamber boards, donors, foundations, business and community partners, and 'A' leaders, as data becomes available. The results will be used to modify metrics as needed on an ongoing basis to ensure all goals and activities across the state are meeting expectations.

The staff who will be involved in the evaluation process are Lisa Graham Keegan, Emily Anne Gullickson, and Katie Fischer.

Collaborative Partners:

In discussions at the end of 2013, the CEOs and Boards from the Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Tucson Hispanic Chamber of Commerce accepted the proposal created by former state school superintendent Lisa Graham Keegan to leverage the success of the Arizona Chamber Foundation model by moving beyond research only and into active partnership with Arizona's best low-income school models.

Approving this project reflected the Arizona business community's profound desire to identify and replicate excellent schools across the state. Many of the members at both Chambers have expressed an urgent need for a more qualified and prepared workforce and have openly discussed the negative economic impact on our state if we do not begin to better educate all of Arizona's children. Directing the project from within the Foundation exerts a constant pressure on metrics of success, and also keeps the leaders of Arizona's largest companies aware of current and emerging excellence in education across the state. These business members of the Arizona Chamber of Commerce and the Tucson Hispanic Chamber of Commerce are primary partners to the *A for Arizona* project.

The nearly one hundred schools who serve low-income students at the 'A'-grade level are partners to the *A for Arizona* project on a day-to-day basis. In

addition, we welcome to our meetings any schools whose data show a significant increase in achievement over time if they would like to join. We call these our “On-the-Way to A” schools, and since excellence is a decision before it is anything else, we look forward to welcoming many more of these schools.

The *A for Arizona* project collaborates directly with numerous organizations, including primary partners that we consult and work with on the entire project, and those partners with whom we have more specific collaborations. Our current primary partners are: the Arizona Charter Schools Association, including New Schools for Phoenix and the Center for Student Achievement; Teach for America-Phoenix; and the Raza Development Fund.

Our collaborative partners include: Beyond Textbooks, a project of the Vail Unified School District; the Rodel Foundation and their Exemplary Teacher and Exemplary Principal programs; Reason Foundation; Chicanos por la Causa; Arizona School Choice Trust; Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce DATOS Institute; Expect More Arizona; and the Center for the Future of Arizona. We constantly seek to expand our network of partners, and are in conversations with potential collaborative partners including American Dream Academy, Democrats for Education Reform Arizona, Arizona K-12 Center, Arizona Teachers of the Year, the Teacher Retention Project, and GreatSchools.org.

Implementation Plan:

The heart and soul of *A for Arizona's* work is to recognize, support, and accelerate the work of the leaders who direct our state's low-income 'A'-grade public schools. In late Spring 2014, we sent letters to these highly performing schools, congratulating them on their work and inviting them to participate with us in the *A for Arizona* project to expand their impact. Since that time, we have convened the 'A' Leadership Team at least quarterly, and have hosted two different Schools of Excellence tour days, where we introduce community leaders and members of the press to these outstanding schools.

We created a partnership with the Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's DATOS group in order to conduct market research on the decision-making of low-income parents. We believe that the excellent market research done by DATOS can add greatly to our understanding of how to reach out to these parents. The DATOS leadership has already presented to our leaders.

We host a series of informal get-togethers where our partners can gather informally with lawmakers and education representatives from the state board of education, the state board for charter schools, and local school boards and school leaders. These “Race to the Tap” meetings have no particular agenda, but offer a way for education leaders to share information informally, which we had felt was lacking in our state.

In the year ahead, we will:

- continue our regular meetings with school leaders,
- continue our education of policy makers about what our 'A' Leadership Team needs in order to be able to expand their work,
- study the school choice decisions of low-income parents,
- contribute our knowledge to policy makers and the business community, including through a summer tour of eight cities around the state, and
- seek to educate the public at large about the existence and importance of very highly performing public schools throughout the state and for every kind of student.

The *A for Arizona* project is housed within the Arizona Chamber Foundation, and led by former state school superintendent Lisa Graham Keegan. Mrs. Keegan is a well-known education leader in Arizona and nationally, and has been very successful in the formative year of the project in convening schools and advocates, and encouraging their participation in the *A for Arizona* project.

Glenn Hamer, President and CEO of the Arizona Chamber, has been a huge supporter of education, as a member of the Arizona Council on Economic Education, Vice Chair of the Arizona Charter Schools Association, and a member of the Arizona Ready Education Council.

Lea Márquez Peterson has served as the President/CEO of the Tucson Hispanic Chamber of Commerce since August of 2009. She serves as the only Arizonan and only Latina on the Obama Administration to the National Women's Business Council and has been recognized as the 2012 University of Arizona's Alumni Association's Distinguished Citizen Award, 2007 Woman of Influence by Inside Tucson Business and was a 40 under 40 award recipient. She is very committed to seeing more excellent majority Hispanic schools.

Sustainability:

A for Arizona is seeking \$50,000 from the Phoenix IDA to support a number of distinct efforts within the project: our 'A' Leadership Team meetings, parent surveys, and public awareness efforts. These portions of our project are highlighted on the attached budget and explained in the budget narrative.

A for Arizona is a high priority project for the Arizona Chamber Foundation and the staff dedicated to this project. Formally launched in December of 2013, all work was supported internally by the Arizona Chamber Foundation, with time and materials outside of one staff person contributed by the foundation and leadership team until the Spring of 2015. *A for Arizona* is a designated project within the Arizona Chamber Foundation, and benefits from the staff and infrastructure support of the foundation. The Arizona

Chamber Foundation was founded in 2008 as a non-partisan, objective education and research foundation.

Our project has been funded to date by three grants totaling \$260,000. We received a small \$5,000 grant to support summer Public Policy Fellowships in July of 2014 and in October of 2014 received a \$55,000 grant from the Helmsley Foundation via our presentation at the first annual America Succeeds “Shark Tank”. We invested that original grant to support our Program Director Emily Anne Gullickson’s time, to support our ‘A’ Leadership Team meetings, and to create our logo, website and collateral that launched in May 2015.

In May 2015, the Chamber Foundation received a \$200,000 grant from the Walton Family Foundation, with an additional 1:2 matching component of \$174,000 for gifts up to \$348,000 committed in writing by the end of June 2015.

***A for Arizona’s* overall budget is just over 1 million dollars for April 2015-April 2016, and we have active requests in place currently totaling \$730,000. We are committed to ongoing fund-raising efforts in order to sustain this project over the next decade. We seek to ensure that a significant portion of the *A for Arizona* project budget is always supported by Arizona organizations, as that is the best way to spread the news in our state about the opportunities at hand in our highly performing low-income schools.**

Budget and Budget Narrative attached.