

**2003-2004 Arizona Educational Foundation A+ Schools Program
CERTIFICATION SHEET**

Level: X Elementary Previous A+ School
 Secondary Yes X No
If Yes, Year(s)

Name of Principal Natalie K. Wilcox
(As you wish it in the official records)

Official School Name Sonoran Sky Elementary School
(As you wish it in the official records)

School Mailing Address 12990 North 75th Street Telephone (480) 367-5820
Scottsdale, Arizona 85260 email address nwilcox@pvusd.k12.az.us

I have reviewed the information in this package, including the eligibility requirements, and certify that to the best of my knowledge it is accurate. If my school is recognized as and A+ school, the contest of this application may be made available to the public.

_____ Date _____
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent Dr. John Kriekard

District Name Paradise Valley Unified School District Telephone (602) 867-5100

District Mailing 15002 North 32nd Street Phoenix, Arizona 85032

I have reviewed the information in this package, including the eligibility requirements, and certify that to the best of my knowledge it is accurate.

_____ Date _____
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President Thomas Ohmart

I have reviewed the information in this package, including the eligibility requirements, and certify that to the best of my knowledge it is accurate.

_____ Date _____
(School Board President's Signature)

Submit application by 5:00 p.m., February 6, 2004 to:

Arizona Educational Foundation
6320 East. Thomas Road, Suite 307
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PART I DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

DISTRICT (To be completed by all schools)

1. Total number of students (pre k-12) enrolled in the district: 33,530
2. Number of schools in the district:
30 Elementary Schools
8 Middle Schools
6 High Schools
44 TOTAL
3. District Per Pupil Expenditure: \$ 5,300.00

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

4. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
 Urban or large central city
 Suburban school with characteristics typical of an urban area
 Suburban
 Small city or town in rural area
 Rural
5. 3 Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school.
6. Number of students enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school building:

Pre-K	<u>69</u>	5 th	<u>77</u>	10 th	<u>0</u>
1 st	<u>72</u>	6 th	<u>65</u>	11 th	<u>0</u>
2 nd	<u>65</u>	7 th	<u>0</u>	12 th	<u>0</u>
3 rd	<u>62</u>	8 th	<u>0</u>		
4 th	<u>92</u>	9 th	<u>0</u>		
				TOTAL:	<u>544</u>
7. Racial/ethnic composition of the students in the school:

<u>1</u>	% American Indian or Alaskan Native
<u>5</u>	% Asian
<u>3</u>	% Black of African American
<u>5</u>	% Hispanic or Latino
<u>0</u>	% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
<u>86</u>	% White
<u>100</u>	% TOTAL
8. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the past year: 18%.

(This rate should include the total number of students who transferred to or from different schools between October 1 and the end of the school year, divided by the total number of students in the school as of October 1, multiplied by 100)

9. Limited English proficient students in the school: 2%
8% Total Number

Number of languages represented: 9
 Specify languages: **Romanian, Spanish, French, Greek, Polish, Cantonese, Russian, Yugoslavian**

10. Students who participate in free/reduced-priced meals: 6%
33 Total Number

If this method is not a reasonably accurate estimate of the percentage of students from low-income families or the school does not participate in the federally-supported lunch program, specify a more accurate estimate, tell why the school chose it, and explain how it arrived at this estimate.

11. Students receiving special education services: 6%
31 Number Served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Acts.

<u>2</u>	Deaf	<u>6</u>	Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u>	Deaf-Blind	<u>1</u>	Seriously Emotionally Disturbed
<u>0</u>	Hard of Hearing	<u>14</u>	Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u>	Mentally Retarded	<u>35</u>	Speech Impaired
<u>3</u>	Multihandicapped	<u>0</u>	Visually handicapped
<u>2</u>	Orthopedically Impaired	<u>1</u>	Autistic

12. Indicate number of full-time and part-time staff members in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff	
	<u>Full-time</u>	<u>Part-time</u>
Administrator(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
Classroom teachers	<u>27</u>	<u>5</u>
Special resource teachers/specialists	<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>
Paraprofessionals	<u>6</u>	<u>0</u>
Support staff	<u>17</u>	<u>0</u>
Total Number	<u>55</u>	<u>5</u>

13. Describe any significant changes in the data reported in items 1-12 that have occurred during the past five years and explain why the changes occurred (use additional page if necessary)

Part II - Summary

Sonoran Sky Elementary School is located in Scottsdale, Arizona surrounded by the mountain preserve with a beautiful view of Arizona's sonoran sky. As you cross the threshold of Sonoran Sky Elementary School you experience a learning climate that is comparable to none other. Our school provides an atmosphere that exemplifies excellence in academics, social development, and hands on experiences to all who enter. You will see a community of principal, teachers, secretaries, students, parents, and community volunteers who are learning together. Some of these lessons are included in the Arizona Teaching Standards and other, possibly more important lessons, are expressed in the care and concern that we have for one another.

Sonoran Sky is a preschool through sixth grade elementary school. Students come from neighborhoods, which are primarily, middle-class suburban. Eighty-six percent of our school population is Caucasian and fourteen percent of our students are Asian, Black, or Hispanic. The majority of families live in new to older single-family homes. Seventeen percent are apartment dwellers. Eleven students meet the state's homeless criteria. Twenty-nine percent of the school population is comprised of students who live outside the Sonoran Sky boundaries. Approximately 110 students meet gifted criteria, and 60 students are eligible for services with special needs. This diversity, within our population, leads to a rich melting pot of experiences from which the Sonoran Sky students draw.

Sonoran Sky is a dynamic, forward-moving community of lifelong learners who work together to establish a safe, child-centered environment where each individual discovers his/her own area of giftedness while achieving maximum success. All learning has relevance to life and prepares students for productive citizenship by promoting problem solving, teamwork, responsibility and personal accountability, self-esteem, and mutual respect. This supportive and challenging atmosphere provides a place where imaginations are ignited and dreams take flight.

Our traditions include modeling high standards of excellence. While educating our children in strong academics we also provide lessons in the areas of personal integrity and responsibility. We infuse mutual respect and sensitivity toward others to become caring, contributing members of society. Through collective inquiry and reflection, we are able to foster a community of responsible decision-makers and lifelong learners. This occurs not only in our staff, but in our students, our parents, our families, and our community. Our stakeholders serve as role models through their demonstration of positive character traits. "Excellence: No Limits", our 2003-2004 school theme, exemplifies our commitment to our children, parents, families, staff, and community. We, as a caring community of learners, strive to soar to success.

The unique culture of Sonoran Sky Elementary School is one that speaks to the heart of the needs of children. As a staff we realize with each and every student interaction, we have the opportunity to positively impact another human being's life. In fact, we know we can change students' lives for the better and help them realize their dreams. We teach them *how* to dream. We tell them their dreams are valuable and vital. We teach students to step into their dreams, one foot at a time. We believe in our students, and it shows in everything we do. In our actions, we literally hand children the tools for success. We believe in the sacred gift of education and take the responsibility of sharing this gift seriously. We are committed to excellence!

Part III – Vision/Mission Statement

Mission:

Sonoran Sky is a dynamic, forward-moving community of lifelong learners who work together to establish a safe, child-centered environment where each individual discovers his/her own area of giftedness while achieving maximum success. All learning has relevance to life and prepares students for productive citizenship by promoting problem solving, teamwork, responsibility and personal accountability, self-esteem and mutual respect. This supportive and challenging atmosphere provides a place where imaginations are ignited and dreams take flight.

Vision:

Establishing and encouraging a community of lifelong learners who are discovering and achieving their personal and group best.

Sonoran Sky Elementary School Platform:

The reason we get up every single day is for the students: the smiling, happy faces with open eyes anxious to learn and experience the world. Each day, with each and every student interaction we have the opportunity to positively impact another human being's life. In fact, we have the opportunity to change their lives for the better and help them realize their dreams. We teach them *how* to dream. We tell them their dreams are valuable and vital. We teach them to step into those dreams, one foot at a time. We give them a sense of self-worth, a feeling of empowerment, and the opportunity to grow. We believe in them, and it shows in everything we do. We relinquish freedoms in our own lives because we care that much. Each time we believe in their potential, each time we push them beyond their comfort, each time we are persistent in their mastery of a concept, every lunch hour we surrender, every evening we spend preparing, every class we take to better ourselves, we are unselfishly releasing their ability to succeed and are saying to each student, "I don't mind, you are worth it!" In our actions, we literally hand them the tools for success. We believe in the sacred gift of education and we take the gift seriously. Yes, we are impacting lives daily, and we truly do have a very unique opportunity to make a difference – a huge difference.

Sonoran Sky Elementary School Goals:

- to build on the success of each child
- to promote high levels of academic achievement
- to develop citizens of strong character
- to create a community
- to foster a love of learning
- to motivate students to have a positive impact on our society
- to empower our staff, students, and community to become change agents in our world

A: Describe your student population. Specify their academic and non-academic needs and how you identify and meet those needs. Indicate student participation rates in programs and services.

Sonoran Sky is a preschool through sixth grade elementary school located in Scottsdale, Arizona. Students come from neighborhoods, which are, primarily, middle-class suburban. Eighty-six percent of our school population is Caucasian, and fourteen percent of the students are of other ethnicities including Asian, Black, and Hispanic. The majority of families live in new to older single-family homes. Seventeen percent are apartment dwellers. Eleven students meet the state's homeless criteria. Twenty-nine percent of the school population is comprised of students who live outside the Sonoran Sky boundaries. Approximately *twenty-percent* of our students *meet gifted criteria*, and *eleven-percent* qualify for services for *special needs*. This diversity leads to a rich melting pot of experiences from which the Sonoran Sky students draw.

Our staff encourages mutual respect among students, parents, staff, and other community members. This leads to a healthy, nurturing atmosphere that enables children to maximize their school experiences. Students and families have many opportunities to build relationships within the school community. *Sonoran Sky welcomes community use* of the facilities to provide additional involvement for the students. Some after school activities include Boy/Girl Scouts, Athletes in Training, Keyboarding, Drama, and piano lessons through the Arizona Music Conservatory. Additionally, the staff and PTO provide after school enrichment classes.

Sonoran Sky students span the spectrum of academic, social, and emotional needs. It is in this diversity that we strive to articulate our common goals. The principal leads the staff in providing a strong, positive leadership model for the children to depend on and emulate. *The statement, "All students can learn, although all students learn differently," describes the philosophy the Sonoran Sky staff encompasses.* The strong academic reputation and curriculum is a magnet for families who choose to move into our area or enroll their children under open enrollment status. Due to their education, our students are prepared to meet future academic challenges. Students are fortunate to have strong family support in pursuit of educational excellence. For those students who face academic challenges, before and after school assistance is provided.

Students are our first priority, and *we strive to meet the needs of those who experience physical and mental challenges.* Additionally, some children experience a variety of obstacles within their families, which may impact achievement and learning. Students who have been diagnosed with learning, language, speech, or behavioral/emotional disabilities qualify for special educational services. Students, whose second language is English, qualify to receive assistance in academics and language acquisition. Sonoran Sky's staff is attentive and proactive to all facets of a child's education.

We use a variety of methods to assess the spectrum of individual student needs. All students are tested for our honor's classes at the end of second grade using the Cognitive Abilities Test. A score in the 97th percentile or above qualifies students for the program. The Honors Program is a replacement of services for reading, math, and non-verbal instruction for students in grades three through six. Two certified teachers with gifted endorsements provide instruction to approximately twenty-percent of our students on a daily basis. Within the regular classroom, teachers supplement the curriculum with enriching and challenging lessons. The Honors teachers also provide support and materials for all students and teachers. In addition, we have

two self-contained gifted programs for fourth and fifth grade. Thirty-five students are involved in this new program organized to meet the needs of highly gifted students. Two certified teachers with gifted endorsements collaborate to plan this challenging curriculum, which includes the Socratic method of teaching and learning and incorporates the methodology and practices from the College of William and Mary.

The Student Success Team (SST) is a true team approach to provide success for all students who may be struggling in some capacity. The SST is a resource to both parents and teachers to provide help with academic, social, and emotional growth and development. The team is comprised of a committed group of professionals including parents, teachers, principal, nurse, reading specialist, speech pathologist, school psychologist, and resource teacher. The meetings identify strengths of the child, in addition to recognized needs. The team may suggest a wide variety of strategies resulting in an alternative education plan to ensure the child's success. Additional screening and evaluation may be recommended which could initiate special education services. Speech and language therapy and occupational and physical therapy are available for students in kindergarten through sixth grade who have been identified and qualify for services. Approximately 35-40 students are serviced annually through this caring and supportive process.

The Learning Disability Resource Program (LD) serves kindergarten through sixth grade students in the areas of reading, math, and language. A certified special education teacher implements the program and is assisted by a full-time aide, who is also a certified teacher in special education. Currently, thirty-one students have been identified and are seen on a daily basis, with some mainstreamed into the regular classroom utilizing consultative support. *The goal of our LD program is to mainstream these students* by the time they reach the sixth grade to better prepare them for middle school. An individual educational plan is developed for each student, and goals are set and monitored continually. Annually, approximately ten to fifteen percent of these children exit the program.

Sonoran Sky teachers service eight to ten students who are on a 504 special accommodation plan. These children present varying *medical diagnoses that require adaptations* in the typical classroom setting. Teachers and support groups meet with parents of these children and together develop a plan that addresses the child's specific needs in the regular classroom. Accommodations may include extended time on tests, modified homework assignments, modification of classroom activities, preferential seating, and/or visual support with notes and outlines.

Our student body has several inclusion students who have a handicapping condition such as cerebral palsy or autism. *Our school has a reputation for success in meeting the academic and social needs of the inclusion child.* These students present unique challenges for teachers, administrators, and support staff. The parents, along with a team of educators including the classroom teacher, inclusion specialist, special education teachers, speech, occupational and physical therapists, and the adaptive physical education teacher meet regularly to address the needs and progress of these students.

Our special needs preschool, for three to five year olds, is a *reverse mainstream program* with four typical preschoolers and up to eleven special needs students. A certified teacher and three instructional aides facilitate the children's needs. Because these are formative stages, a special team of educators provide services both individually and as a whole class on a continual basis.

The parent community through our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) provides funds for *art grants*. These funds secure a different Artist in Residence program for each grade level. Effort is made to correlate the artist experience to a component of the ongoing curriculum at each level. These programs are an annual enhancement to our curriculum. Dance and movement at third grade, poetry at fifth grade, and stage presence and vocal delivery at fourth and sixth are examples of programs offered to students. These wonderful, experiential opportunities for students to develop their speaking and presentation skills are in alignment with the Arizona State Standards.

Our parent community was also instrumental in the development of our *Humanities Forum*. This is a special room located within our media center that provides students with a multifaceted arts experience. Art, music, and literature are examined through the curriculum. Students participate in the forum by experiencing the visual art and audible music that surround a theme, while having the opportunity to delve into various literature genre and media that address the same topic. Lessons are developed that encourage deeper exploration of a topic. Displays are brought together through the fine arts teachers as well as donations from the parent community.

We have a strong *music program* that also encompasses choral music as an extracurricular activity. Our chorus participates in the holiday performances at our State Capitol and at a local resort. We offer band and strings during the academic day. Advanced band students have the additional opportunity to participate in the Young Jazz Band of the Paradise Valley School District. Student musicians perform regularly at community and school events.

One particular program developed through the fifth grade social studies curriculum is “*Sing, America, Sing*”. This is a musical pageant that reviews American history through song, dance, and vignettes as well as choral and solo performances. Students throughout the grades look forward to this traditional celebration at the culmination of the year. Backdrops, costumes, and accessories are collected and combined for a complete theatrical approach.

Junior Achievement is a school wide program that brings the community into the school. Community volunteers come into every classroom to teach Social Studies Standards. These people come from a variety of businesses with a variety of backgrounds, and they model many careers for students. Interest and motivation in topics like government and economics are enhanced from kindergarten through sixth grade as students participate in this hands on program taught by the community.

Exchange City is a specific *Junior Achievement* program that our fifth grade students participate in yearly. Through this program our students learn about economics and what it is truly like to have a job. Students decide what job best fits them. Then, they fill out job applications, resumes, participate in interviews, keep a checking account, create logos, design web pages, write radio and newspaper ads, and assist in running their business. The students are motivated to do their best in their business with the desire to pay off their loan at Exchange City. Those students who manage to pay off their loan have a great sense of pride, and those who do not, learn what they could have done differently.

We believe in the value of identifying and supporting the *whole child*, and it is through these varied programs and services that our goals are accomplished.

B: Tell how the culture of your school exemplifies a learning community. Provide specific examples of sustained and caring relationships among all individuals. Describe the campus safety and security programs and strategies that are in place.

As you cross the threshold of Sonoran Sky Elementary School you experience a learning climate that is comparable to none. Our school provides a welcoming atmosphere that shouts of *excellence in academics, social development, and hands-on learning experiences*. You will see a community of principal, teachers, secretaries, students, parents, and community volunteers who are learning together and from one another. Some of these lessons are included in the Arizona Teaching Standards and others are expressed in the care and concern we have for one another.

Sonoran Sky Elementary School continues to model high standards of excellence in its pursuit of academic achievement. While educating our children in the areas of personal integrity and responsibility, we infuse mutual respect and sensitivity toward others to become caring, contributing members of society. Through collective inquiry and reflection, we are able to foster a community of responsible decision-makers and lifelong learners. We cultivate this not only in our staff, but also in our students, our parents, our families, and our community. Our stakeholders serve as role models through their demonstration of positive character traits. “Excellence: No Limits”, our 2003-2004 school theme, exemplifies our commitment to our children, parents, families, staff, and community. *We, as a caring community of learners, strive to soar to success as we articulate our mission to reach and exceed the expectations established by the State Department of Education and the Federal Government.* Extensive programming enables us to meet our student achievement goals. These various programs include:

- **Artists in Residence** are invited for short-term residencies which provide enrichment for the entire school, such as dance, drama, percussion, poetry, and ceramics. This is made possible through our PTO funding and grants.
- **Arizona Health Standards Day** is an annual school-wide event where students move from one station to another for instructional models that demonstrate the Arizona Health Standards. Many community agencies and parent resources collaborate to make this a novel and successful learning experience for each student, covering a broad scope of health topics and “healthful” life choices. Following this full day event, the PTO organizes a Family Fun Run to encourage fitness and activity as a family health goal with a “fun” twist. Over 150 people participated in 2003.
- **Athletes in Training** is provided in response to the teachers and families’ recognition of the need for additional physical education and sports opportunities. Programming is available through community education and is offered at Sonoran Sky after school. Attendance varies with each sport offered.
- **Battle of the Books** is a program sponsored by the Scottsdale Public Libraries. Fifteen teams of three students each read selected books and answer questions about their readings. In 2003 Sonoran Sky’s students placed second in the regional competition.
- **Catch Me Reading** involves first grade teachers and various staff members calling all of the first grade students at home, in the evening, to “catch them reading.” When students are “caught” their name is announced the next day. The objective of this program is to promote student literacy.
- **Character Education** focuses on a word of the week, introduced by our principal and reinforced in each classroom through various activities.

- **Chess Club** is a before school program, teaching the strategies of chess and sportsmanship. Tournaments are available, including district-wide chess tournaments which challenge participants' skills. Currently, there are twenty-five first through sixth grade students enrolled in the program.
- **Chorus** is a before school activity offered to fourth through sixth graders training them for a holiday performance at Gainey Ranch, a choral event at the Capitol, and a spring District Choral Recital. Seventy-five students participate in the chorus.
- **Counseling Services** are a collaborative partnership with Touchstone Behavioral Health offering support to students and families via short-term screening/counseling sessions and appropriate referrals. In addition, small student support groups are offered to kindergarten through sixth grade students. At any given time, twelve to twenty-four students are receiving services.
- **Dance Class** is offered to help students develop basic motor skills of dance and rhythm. This is a weekly class provided through community education. Twelve to fifteen students generally participate.
- **Dial Corporation "Clean Hands" Initiative** was created in collaboration with the Dial Corporation. All students use the hand sanitizer stations that were installed for the purpose of ensuring healthy habits before eating lunch, thereby decreasing absenteeism due to illness and increasing academic achievement.
- **Drama Club** gives children the opportunity to develop their drama skills. This after school class offered by community education culminates in a final show/event. Twelve to fifteen students generally participate.
- **Exchange City** is a collaborative Junior Achievement program involving our fifth grade students, parents, and community members. (see question A)
- **Field Trips** and various educational enrichment opportunities occur across all grade levels. These often include overnight experiences such as Astrocamp in Idyllwild, California, Outdoor Education Camp in Prescott, Lake Pleasant Arizona Education experience, and the Phoenix Zoo Overnight Animal Education experience.
- **Fifth Dimension** is an extended day kindergarten enrichment program that enhances the regular classroom experience. This program nurtures social development and encourages readiness skills. Approximately 80% of the kindergarten students participate.
- **First-Third Grade Buddies** meet weekly to support each student's literacy goals. Activities are planned which focus on the academic standards and socialization skills. 100% of the first and third grade students are involved.
- **Friendly Friday** is a monthly-shared reading experience where visitors from the community are invited to school to read with all first and second grade students.
- **Health Services** include a full time, nationally certified, masters prepared RN who provides individualized care to students. She provides mandated screenings and identifies health problems that may impact the learning process. These services are provided to all students and staff.
- **Health World** offers health education classes and opportunities at each grade level. All students are exposed to this learning experience.
- **Junior Achievement** involves community members and parents presenting lessons at all elementary grade levels that focus on topics such as families, community, city, region, country, and the world. (see question A)
- **Keyboarding** is offered after-school to teach basic piano keyboarding skills in a group setting and results in a culminating final recital. Twelve to eighteen students participate.

- **Kids Night Out** is a quarterly evening event sponsored by the PTO where kids come together for fun, games, and socialization.
- **Literacy Nights** are evenings where parents become aware of the Arizona Academic Writing Standards through publishing a book with their child in our Secret Garden Publishing Center. Typically, over thirty books are published.
- **Make Your Day** is a school-wide citizenship program that emphasizes student responsibility, development of conflict resolution skills, and character development.
- **Parent Inservices** such as parent book study groups and guest speakers, who discuss topics of parent awareness and mental health issues, are offered throughout the year. Parent participation varies based on the program offered.
- **Parent Volunteer Tutors** exist throughout the grade levels. Parents tutor students to strengthen their academic skills. Teachers rely on these parents as a valuable resource to help improve student achievement.
- **Peer Tutors** are sixth grade students who are matched with younger students and then provide assistance in academic areas. Each year one-third of our sixth graders receive training and have the opportunity to participate, impacting 90% of our classrooms.
- **P.I.L.O.T.S.** (Preparing Individuals For Leadership Opportunities To Succeed) is a program unique to Sonoran Sky. Our sixth grade students go to Prescott, Arizona, for three days of leadership training, team building, goal setting, and planning. Students become certified in CPR and first aid and return to school ready to lead the student body in activities and service projects throughout the school year. In the spring students attend a leadership culmination ceremony. This is a celebration of the sixth grade students who successfully complete the specified criteria focusing on the Six Pillars of Character.
- **Principal's Challenge** is an opportunity for students to embark upon a long-term learning experience that culminates in a final product. Each project is read and evaluated personally by the principal. Students are given generous latitude in the topic choice and format allowing for their creativity to flourish. The students present their projects at Border's Bookstore. Each year approximately sixty students participate in the challenge.
- **Project Read** is a district-wide kindergarten through third grade assessment and prescriptive reading assistance program to ensure all children are reading at grade level by the end of third grade. (see question C)
- **PTO Enrichment Classes** have been created in collaboration with the staff. Children are offered opportunities to take classes such as German, study skills, poetry writing, and classes in health and fitness. Enrollment varies based on the class offerings.
- **Reading Support** involves a certified reading specialist who works with small groups of children to provide reading instruction. She works with students both above and below grade level to maximize their reading potential. Our reading specialist predominately interfaces with first through third grade students. She evaluates kindergarten students for their reading level and provides services as needed to all students.
- **Safety Committee** is comprised of staff, student body representatives, and a parent representative, whose goal is maintaining a safe environment on our campus. Special focus is given to continuous revision of our safety plan.
- **Sing, America, Sing** is an annual patriotic musical which provides every fifth grader the opportunity to share what they have learned about America's democratic roots through drama, song, and dance. (see question A)
- **Staff Retreat** is an annual overnight event whose focus is to set personal and professional goals for the school year while reinforcing staff relationships. This year's

retreat focused on the *21 Keys of High Performance Teaching and Learning*. In any given year, twenty-five to thirty-five staff members attend.

- **Student Council** is a first through sixth grade student government program providing leadership opportunities through subcommittees (charity, citizenship, community outreach) that focus on school and community service. Over fifty students are elected as members of student council.
- **Thunderbird Club** meets the needs of families by providing a safe and fun place for children before and after school and on early release days. Children participate in a variety of activities.

In addition to these programs, numerous procedures are in place to ensure the safety and security of our children and staff. Procedures include *a site crisis plan that has been developed* in collaboration with the Scottsdale Police Department and the Rural Metro Fire Department. Protocols are in place and practiced for campus *lock-down, evacuation, and off-site containment* in the event of a crisis. Our telephone tree includes the parent community to facilitate communication in such events. We have a highly secure closed campus whereby all visitors must enter through the front office upon arriving. All volunteers are expected to comply with a regulated volunteer process. Additionally, our teachers are trained annually on safety issues such as CPS reporting and O.S.H.A. regulations.

The Sonoran Sky community is proud of the *legacy of diverse and quality programs and services* that are offered to our students. We strive to positively influence the present and future health and well being of our students to promote a learning community. Therefore, we have developed programming built upon the foundation of comprehensive teaching concepts and standards.

C: Describe core curriculum and include a brief description of each subject area.

In alignment with our Superintendent of Public Instruction's vision we seek to provide a variety of learning experiences for students. *We desire to teach to all aspects of the curriculum, not only the tested areas. We provide a comprehensive, integrated curriculum of relevant learning which promotes higher-level thinking.* Our school mottos have consistently reflected our philosophy of challenging students to achieve high levels of success in all curriculum areas. Test scores on state assessments and nationally normed tests show our students perform substantially higher than district, state, and national averages. Academic success for *each* student is a focus for all staff members, certified and classified. Parents, students, and staff work together to ensure every student's success.

Language Arts: Sonoran Sky has been a leader in developing and implementing research based language and literacy programs and has served as a model for other schools in our district. We strive to achieve literacy goals by formulating life-long reading strategies that build upon well-balanced literacy programs throughout the school. The curriculum encompasses a variety of methods and programs that embrace the enjoyment of reading and language arts. These include:

- *Project Read* - Project Read is a district-developed assessment to meet the goal that each student is a successful reader by the end of third grade. It encompasses 180 minutes of daily reading and writing. The staff has met this goal effectively with continued flexibility in responding to the students' needs. Our school fully implemented the district's reading initiative within the first year.

- *Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)* - First through third graders are assessed with the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The results of these tests are used to determine the individual students appropriate literacy level.
- *Guided Reading* – This program has been established within each primary classroom. It enables the student to acquire the necessary skills to become a successful reader. Small groups for instruction are formulated based on similar reading levels. Guided Reading enables the teacher to monitor each child who is having difficulty progressing with his or her reading skills. These students are referred to the Reading Specialist.
- *Soar to Success* – This is another program the Reading Specialist and third grade teachers use to help struggling readers become successful. This is a prescriptive reading program that focuses on a variety of reading strategies and comprehension skills.
- *Accelerated Reader (AR)* – The AR program individually challenges students in reading comprehension and vocabulary. Students in fourth through sixth grade are assigned reading levels based on individual results of a Standardized Testing for Assessment in Reading instrument. Students are required to read a total of sixty minutes each day. Students in third grade, begin transitioning into this program. Research has shown that students who participate in the AR program are able to understand and comprehend textbook material more quickly and easily. In addition, they appear to be making larger gains in test scores and writing capabilities.
- *Literacy Library* – This is a collection of leveled books appropriate for all students at Sonoran Sky and is open to the staff for checkout. Teachers use this resource daily.
- *Six-Traits Model for Writing Instruction* - This research-based toolbox provides students with guidelines for successful writing.
- *Writer's Workshop* - At each grade level teachers guide students through the entire writing process beginning with brainstorming and ending with a published piece. The continuity of this strategy throughout the school eases transition for students as they write at each grade level. The staff has designed a graphic organizer template that is used not only in the classroom, but in nonacademic areas as well, such as in the health office.
- *Sixth Grade Creative Writing and Poetry Program* – This program is taught by a published author. Students have opportunities to share their writing through poetry readings at a local bookstore. Writing and poetry is presented and published throughout the year.
- *Secret Garden* – This publishing lab is a visual delight as well as a complete resource for publishing student writing in a variety of formats. The PTO has generously funded this center, and we are able to offer the latest in binding choices because of their continued support. We have a dedicated core of parent volunteers who oversee the publishing process and allow the students to participate in book publication. Every student in the school has the opportunity to publish at least one book a year, and many students publish several pieces in different genres.
- *Family Literacy Nights* - Parents and students are invited to learn about the writing process and author their own books that are published in Sonoran Sky's Secret Garden.
- *Literacy Centers* - While teachers meet with reading groups, first and second graders make reading and writing choices at literacy centers. All children choose books, writing tasks, and other literacy related activities to complete independently.
- *Word Walls* – This tool is used to incorporate math and other content area vocabulary in student writing and is another method used to enhance student success in writing.
- *Writing Rubrics* - Teachers meet in small groups to evaluate student writing and refine their skills in applying the rubric to student writing.

- *Collaborative Writing Workshops* – This joint effort with other schools provides staff development to ensure our students write effectively and are challenged in their writing.
- *Jane Schaffer © Multi-Paragraph Writing Method* – This process provides a guideline for students to make sure their writing consistently incorporates all elements of effective writing. A foundation is set for middle school where the same method is employed.

Science: There are several unique features that place Sonoran Sky as a frontrunner in the field of science instruction taking us beyond the Arizona Standards. *Sonoran Sky was opened with a curriculum focus on space and technology.* The following innovative programming enriches these standards:

- *Science Laboratory* – Part of the construction of our facility revolves around a science laboratory. This aspect of our building provides a fully equipped laboratory and kitchen including a variety of science materials for use in the laboratory or individual classrooms.
- *Flight Room* – This classroom contains astronaut seats, simulators, posters, and resources. A program was developed to allow students the opportunity to communicate with the NASA astronauts in space. Students in all grades will correspond with the space station via our school’s amateur radio.
- *Departmentalization* – Grades three through six departmentalize the delivery of instruction in science in order to encourage expertise in a specific field. This has been valuable in providing a deep knowledge base in specific areas of science and research.
- *Arivaca Pond* - Our pond, which houses endangered fish in the State of Arizona, was funded through a grant written by staff members and is a partnership with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. The area surrounding the pond has been developed into a multi-sensory educational experience for our students. Through the academic uses of the pond, our students are learning about endangered species and becoming stewards of the earth’s resources. All grade levels enjoy the pond in a variety of different academic activities. Lessons have been developed that correlate with data analysis of math instruction, and the setting allows for creative writing. These lessons have been developed by grade levels to provide age appropriate learning. For example, some students tag and record fish species. Art students developed mosaic benches and stepping- stones. Through this project students were able to learn how to blend art into the environment. The pond is a perfect example of our integrated curriculum. The setting also allows us to connect our curriculum to our citizenship program as students develop a sense of pride as they care for the pond and maintain the area.
- *Science Based Field Trips* – Many grade levels incorporate science field trips to expand their science curriculum. For example, the sixth grade student three-day trip to Astrocamp in Idyllwild, California provides the opportunity to explore various hands-on science activities that cannot be replicated in the classroom. Fifth grade students travel to Prescott to participate in a comprehensive Outdoor Education experience, while the fourth grade students experience an overnight visit to Lake Pleasant.

Mathematics: All members of our staff have collaborated to articulate and align our mathematics curriculum to the State Standards. Techniques for solving problems that are applicable to real life are evidenced. Emphasis has been placed on the students’ need to understand, use, and integrate math vocabulary into their everyday problem solving. As a result, writing is a component of all math instruction. We have several unique math experiences for our students:

- *Math Lab* – This lab houses manipulatives and instructional aids utilized to enrich students’ math experiences. Class sets of clocks, geometric shapes, measurement tools, and counting aids are among the items available to teachers.
- *Discrete Mathematics* - The Rutgers University Discrete Mathematics Institute has trained teachers in first through sixth grade. Critical thinking skills have been emphasized in this rich mathematical content which teaches the science of math. The participating staff has continued their involvement by providing national workshops and in-services to other teachers. In addition, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics has identified staff members as exemplary teachers.
- *Math Olympiads* – The intermediate students in the gifted math program participate in this national math competition that emphasizes problem-solving skills.
- *Math Fair* – This is an event where third graders demonstrate their knowledge of the Arizona Academic Math Standards through the use of various math games in a competitive venue. In a special evening program they challenge parents and other students to learn along with them.

The Arts: The Sonoran Sky Arts program is a collaborative effort. Parents and staff work together to provide a varied and meaningful approach to arts in the classroom.

- *Art* - Sonoran Sky’s certified art teacher provides unique instruction to all grade levels in accordance with the Arizona Academic Standards. The lessons are integrated with the regular classroom curriculum.
- *Music* – We have a strong music program that follows the district outlined scope and sequence for music instruction. All students in grades one through six are exposed to a variety of musical experiences. In addition, intermediate students have the opportunity to participate in the school’s chorus (see question A).
- *Band and Strings* - Instrumental music is offered to students during their academic day. Student musicians perform regularly at community and school events. Additionally, we have been privileged to bring the *Arizona Music Conservatory* to our school. We are the first school in the state to house such a program and have embraced the opportunity to provide instruction of this caliber to our students.
- *Artists in Residence* (see question A)
- *Field Trips* – Our students experience several field trips which enrich their fine arts education. Students visit the art museum, the symphony, and the theater.
- *Humanities Forum* (see question A)

Workplace Skills: At the elementary level, workplace skill curriculum includes a wide range of lessons and experiences such as:

- *Exchange City* (see question A)
- *Junior Achievement* (see question A)
- *Organizational Skills* – These habits are taught and reinforced at each grade level. The staff has developed a continuum of skills in organization, responsibility, and work ethic. For example, each student is required to maintain an assignment calendar. The students’ responsibility for its maintenance increases as they advance through the grades.

- *Cooperative Learning* – Many teachers are trained in the Kagan Cooperative Learning methods. This enables them to guide students in this critical workplace, life skill of collaborating with others. Students are expected to assume responsibility for their own actions. This complements our schools' Make Your Day program. (see question B)

Social Studies: Social Studies continues to be an area of the curriculum that not only examines the past, but also makes direct correlation to the present and future. Citizenship and civic responsibility are infused in the philosophy of our building.

- *Content Focus* – Each grade level focuses on a particular civic entity. For example, third grade students are learning about cities while sixth grade students study world history.
- *Assessment* - Various assessment techniques are used to allow for individual expression:
 - wax museums
 - multi media presentations
 - musical pageants
 - poetry and writing research projects
 - first person biographical sketches
- *Field Trips* – As with the science curriculum, there are various field trips that tie in with our social studies programs. For example, our second graders visit the Pioneer Museum while our fourth grade students visit the state capitol.
- *Classroom of Difference* – This is a district program which heightens awareness of cultural and ethnic diversity. Our school embraces and models this philosophy throughout our interactions with peers and adults.
- *Community Service* - Most grade levels incorporate an element of community service into their school year with the emphasis being placed on our sixth grade student leaders. Throughout the year, the entire student body participates in various humanitarian efforts, such as, collecting materials for the homeless, used books for underprivileged schools, and canned food for the Paradise Valley Emergency Food Bank.

Technology: Sonoran Sky Elementary is taking great strides toward integrating technology into the school and curriculum. Students have access to computers in their classrooms as well as a forty-minute computer instruction time one to two times a week. Sonoran Sky is a fully *networked school on a wireless system*. The computer lab has thirty-one iMac computers and the media center has fifteen computers; both are staffed with a full-time media specialist. There is a publishing lab with three computers operated by teachers and parent volunteers. Each classroom has an iMac computer, and every teacher has a wireless iBook. The District Technology Scope and Sequence is the basis for the following teaching and learning:

- *Curriculum Integration* - Integrating technology into the classroom curriculum is evident throughout the school. Autobiographies written in all grade levels using Appleworks Drawing, book reporting in first through third grades, poetry writing in third through fourth grade using digital cameras and word processing and PowerPoint in fifth grade for state reports, are a few examples of teachers and the media specialist working together to merge both the classroom and technology standards. Additionally, Sonoran Sky teachers are computer literate, and they use technology every day in their teaching. They have many opportunities, through the technology department, to receive instruction on a

weekly basis for new technology the district has adopted. Teachers use multimedia carts to teach and share new ideas and concepts with students.

- *Computer Instruction* – This includes creating multimedia presentations, researching classroom projects using netTrekker, working with graphics, understanding computer terminology, and basic computer keyboarding and usage. Additionally, students in grades three through six will use a Tungsten Palm Pilot in various academic areas.
- *Software* - In order to integrate these standards into the curriculum, a wide variety of software that includes KidPix, Appleworks, Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point, and the Internet are used. Reading programs such as Accelerated Reader and Wiggleworks are part of the daily reading curriculum in the school. Math Keys and Harcourt Brace software are used to reinforce math skills taught in the classrooms.

Comprehensive Health and Physical Education (PE): We currently have a full time certified PE teacher who infuses the Arizona Health Standards into the daily physical education curriculum. As a staff we value the development of healthy lifestyles. The following activities exemplify this philosophy:

- *Arizona Health Standards Day* - This is an annual, all day, school-wide event where students rotate through stations representing each of the seven health standards. Health professionals from the parent community and health organizations give dynamic instruction at each station.
- *Jump Rope for the Heart* – Students learn the value of physical activity and cardiac health while raising funds for the Arizona Heart Association.
- *Field Day* – This all day intramural sport event focuses on healthy competition and sportsmanship.
- *Human Growth and Development* – This comprehensive curriculum is taught to our sixth grade students by our school nurse and PE teacher over the course of six days. This district mandated program is reviewed by parents prior to student instruction.

Character/Leadership Skills: In an effort to support our philosophy of character development, we have implemented many programs and created curriculum to meet our student needs. Examples of these programs include:

- *Project Wisdom*© – This comprehensive, licensed program uses messages that were carefully piloted and screened by educators, students and parents of diverse racial, religious, economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Daily messages are read during morning announcements whose objective are to encourage students to think ethically, to foster an internal motivation to make wise choices, and to teach tolerance and understanding of different races, cultures, and religions.
- *Character Counts* © - This philosophy focusing on the six pillars of character is mainstreamed into our daily curriculum. In addition, we schedule school-wide Character Counts © assemblies and a leadership synergy workshop for our sixth grade students.
- *Get Real About Tobacco* © - This state approved program provides factual information that impacts positive decision-making concerning tobacco use. Parent volunteers and student leaders teach lessons at specific grade levels.
- *P.I.L.O.T.S.* (Preparing Individuals for Leadership Opportunities to Succeed) – This is a teacher-generated trilogy of curriculum, activities, and outreach that focuses on character,

responsibility, and leadership. The foundation of this program is established at a three-day P.I.L.O.T.S. leadership training in Prescott. Sixth grade students are placed on one of three committees. Students meet to develop goals for their committees, set personal goals, and acquire practical skills such as CPR, first aid, and collaboration. Several sixth grade students participate in Peer Tutoring, which places them into classrooms where they provide one-on-one instruction to students who are in need of extra assistance. Likewise, students participating in our School Wide Assistance Team (S.W.A.T.) find themselves helping students with safety issues. In addition, the S.W.A.T. members are placed in classrooms to assist teachers and staff with their daily routine and organization. Members of the third committee, Community Outreach, are afforded the opportunity to help others outside of our school community. Students are challenged to organize and carry out plans that would provide services to various parts of the greater metropolitan area. In addition, students are given the challenge of teaching character education lessons to students in preschool through fifth grade. The sixth graders carry out lesson planning and facilitation of these lessons.

Many times, as students see the value in what they are doing outside of their class environment, they are better able to capitalize on what they are learning within the classroom. Students continue to work in their committees throughout the year providing service to the entire community. The sixth grade teaching team developed the third piece of the P.I.L.O.T.S. program. The curriculum employs the six pillars of character development with pragmatic methodology. Sixth grade students are taught several lessons focusing on each of the six pillars. They are accountable for several assignments and a project focusing on the lesson of each pillar in conjunction with the committee on which they serve. Students who meet the criteria are invited to a culmination ceremony celebrating their leadership and character.

As an Arizona school, our curriculum is guided by the *Arizona State Standards*. The Paradise Valley Unified School District receives guidance from the Citizens Curriculum Advisory Council. This standing committee, made up of administrators, teachers, and parents, provides leadership and direction in the creation and revision of the district's scope and sequence as well as the adoption of curriculum texts. The Sonoran Sky community is an active participant in this process. Teachers are members of the textbook adoption committee, and parents are asked for their input. Each grade level evaluates textbooks to be adopted, and as a school, a final recommendation is submitted to the committee.

Ensuring the Standards are taught, Sonoran Sky's administration has provided each teacher with an Arizona Academic Standards and Scope and Sequence notebook. Teachers use this information, in collaboration with their grade level, to create lessons and activities aligned with the state standards. *Teachers understand the need for accountability in teaching the standards and document standard implementation in planning and on assignments*. Teachers attend workshops and collaborative sessions to continually evaluate, create, and improve instruction.

In addition, teachers use in-service days to review and evaluate current curriculum instruction and participate in staff development opportunities to improve their instructional skills. They collaborate with other grade levels to ensure consistency as a child moves from one grade to the next. *In-service days are also used to analyze AIMS and SAT test results to evaluate students'*

achievement. This helps to guide teachers in the implementation of the Arizona State Standards and the district scope and sequence.

As of this year, Sonoran Sky teachers are piloting a new *standards based report card*, which will serve as a new source of data when evaluating curriculum. The report card data, along with our other current practices, will be part of the continuing curriculum analysis and refinement for student excellence.

Sonoran Sky Elementary School is proud of its curriculum which addresses the diverse needs of all students. Teachers find students in their classroom who have traveled the world, while at the same time there are students who have just arrived from other parts of the globe. *The differing backgrounds the children bring to Sonoran Sky on a daily basis are as unique as their individual learning styles.* Through special programs and curriculum enrichment opportunities, we create a balance across all grade levels and special area departments. Staff and administrators are committed to the academic progress of our community of diverse learners. Our theme this year, “Excellence: No Limits,” exemplifies our commitment to each and every student including gifted and talented students, children with limited English, at-risk students and students with disabilities.

D. Describe your teaching practices and show how they support student learning.

Our curriculum is driven by the Arizona State Standards, while our teaching practices are based on current research on cognition, teaching, and learning. The teachers use multiple intelligences, learning styles, cooperative learning, as well as many other methods of instruction to meet the individual needs of all students in their classrooms. As students progress through the grade levels, they are introduced to various teaching styles and learning opportunities including:

- **Departmentalization** - Third through fifth grade teachers are semi-departmentalized allowing for students to receive instruction from teachers who have a passion for a particular subject area or curriculum. Preparing for middle school, sixth grade students are departmentalized for science, social studies, and language and receive intensive instruction in those subject areas.
- **Student Directed Learning** – Teachers often use student-generated rubrics accepting student input in the assessment process. In addition, KWL charts are used throughout the school, allowing students to show what they **know**, what they **would like** to know, and what they have **learned** about a particular topic. Teachers assign projects that can be completed in a variety of ways allowing for student choice.
- **Hands-on, Investigative Experiences** – Teachers frequently design lessons that require student use of investigative techniques. This methodology is implemented across the curriculum in classroom activities with independent assignments. Visiting any classroom on our campus would afford the opportunity to observe students using manipulatives in the problem-solving process.
- **Higher Level Thinking** – Teachers often provide opportunities for students to use and develop higher level thinking skills. Students are expected to not only answer questions, but to explain the process. Lessons are often developed referencing Bloom’s Taxonomy of Higher Level Learning.

- **Real Life Problem Solving** – Students are exposed to problem solving that involves real life scenarios. As adults often do, students participate in book clubs discussing literary elements to cultivate the joy of reading. Another example of application of real life skills is the gifted math students’ participation in a Stock Market competition. Additionally the Arizona Game and Fish Department relies on our students to report the actual count of the endangered fish maintained in our pond.
- **Other Pedagogy** - Teachers create a toolbox of methods to help students develop critical-thinking skills. Several examples of this include the writing process, scientific process, and various problem-solving skills.

Sonoran Sky demonstrates a continuing role with *active leadership at district and state levels*, representing best practices in curriculum facilitation. Teachers and staff are constantly on the search for new methods of teaching that will facilitate student learning. As previously stated, a variety of teaching approaches are used in all academic areas to support and ensure student learning. This is evidenced by our *high student achievement*.

E: Tell how your staff builds professional community to support student learning. Develop an overall picture of professional development in your school.

Professional development is an essential element to the growth and vitality of our school. Our staff members are given opportunities to develop their professional growth portfolios. School-wide and small group professional development opportunities are developed on an ongoing basis at our school, based on needs identified within the community. Teachers identify staff development needs based on a plan for continuous improvement in teacher efficacy and student achievement. *Sonoran Sky teachers and support staff are part of a network in our school community where communication and collaboration are the norms*. This collaborative network is focused on the idea that to remain effective, we need to assess student achievement data, monitor school climate, and identify research-based best practice for continuous progress in meeting the needs of students and families.

Three core committees, Grade Level Chair, Faculty Advisory Council (FAC), and School Council, are avenues for discussion, collaboration, and decision-making. *Grade Level Chair* is a leadership committee that includes a representative from each grade level and department of the school. Our principal and teachers set the agenda and review topics relating to student achievement, curriculum, professional development, and coordination of programs. *FAC* is a management committee which includes a representative from each grade level and department whose agenda is also set by our principal and teachers. *FAC* focuses on issues of general logistics, coordination, communication, and teamwork. *School Council* functions as a principal’s advisory committee, consisting of teachers, classified staff members, parents, and community members. The School Council handles topics centered on all aspects of our school community. These three committees may address topics independently, or may network the same topic through all three groups.

In addition to the three core committees, each staff member also serves on one of four areas to help enhance student learning and promote school achievement. The areas of focus are Literacy, School Climate, Community Awareness, and Philosophy. The *Literacy Committee* collaborates on projects and strategies to enhance student achievement in the areas of reading and writing. The projects include Catch Me Reading, Battle of the Books, researching information on reading

strategies, and ideas for promoting literacy. The reading strategies include assisting and supporting teachers in using reading logs, Accelerated Reader, and literacy records. This committee also organizes and supports author visits. Each of these projects and strategies is designed to improve student literacy and promote a love of reading. The *School Climate Committee* plans and implements a school staff retreat to set goals and focus on the year ahead. They also organize activities to enhance staff rapport and improve school climate. They plan the Volunteer Tea, which is a way for Sonoran Sky to thank our community for helping in our school. As a result, Sonoran Sky consists of a cohesive staff that continually collaborates to support one another as well as student learning. The *Community Awareness Committee* works with the PTO to organize visits and tours for prospective families and promote our school's strengths to surrounding communities. This committee is also responsible for marketing school-wide events. They are the public relations arm of our school. The task of the *Philosophy Committee* is to look at programs within our school to make sure they align with our goals, mission, and standards. The committee is developing instructional manuals defining the procedures for each of our programs. This will help to develop consistency among each staff member in the building. The committee serves as a sounding board for new ideas, which creates checks and balances with the school philosophy. Each of these committees work together to build a professional climate that enhances our collective capacity to work together, support student learning, and maintain a sense of community.

Informal communication and collaboration norms are a pervasive part of our school culture and also play a key role in developing our professional community. Teachers and support staff take advantage of many opportunities outside of formal committees and meetings to collaborate toward our school goals. Staff members interact in varying degrees of formality before and after school, during lunch breaks, and during their preparation periods. This also integrates new staff members into our school. Teachers may meet on weekends and vacations to plan together as teams. It is not uncommon for grade levels to spontaneously meet to take on a commonly identified issue.

An important goal of our school community is to find and retain staff members who support this collaborative process. As a result, team members are an integral part of the hiring process. Candidates are selected based on their alignment with the mission, goals, and objectives we have established. The assignment of new and existing staff members is determined based on the educational needs and welfare of the school. Additionally, new staff members are provided with professional support through our district-mentoring program and grade levels also provide guidance to new staff members.

Sonoran Sky teachers continuously evaluate and change the content and delivery of instruction to ensure our students meet both the standards and the district scope and sequence. Student *achievement data from AIMS and the SAT-9 are analyzed thoroughly each year* for individual and group trends. This is used to drive ongoing revisions and change of focus. Teachers work together to find better ways to pace instruction and track students' exposure and mastery of content. Our staff continues to review methods to engage and involve parents and students in achieving these goals. *Our test scores are outstanding and generally trend upward.* Staff and parents speak confidently regarding the content of our curriculum and the performance of our students. As a result of hard work and collaboration, our students are succeeding in all facets of their education.

Individual Staff Professional Growth Plans go well beyond the group activities occurring within the building. Our principal is a district leader in the development of a new Teacher Evaluation System that emphasizes and encourages professional growth plans for teachers. Beginning with individual fall conferences, our principal reviews these plans to explore and develop strategies for growth that are focused on the skills and knowledge needed to improve student achievement in their classrooms. Formats for professional growth include graduate level classes and degree programs, district and regional seminars, participation in professional conferences, and school-based workshops. Our teachers actively participate in these opportunities. Over 90% of our teachers have already achieved advanced degrees, and most other teachers are in the process. Four teachers, including the principal, have obtained National Board Certification.

Collective inquiry is an important element utilized daily at Sonoran Sky. We approach this philosophy through a myriad of practices. Certified and classified staff participate in a variety of in-services to receive training in different teaching strategies which enable them to reach many styles of learners. These opportunities allow the staff to explore and incorporate new ideas with recurring concepts.

These and other staff development trainings are offered to provide staff with knowledge and application of the best and most effective research-based instructional practices. We align daily classroom objectives with national, state, and district standards. An annual review of national, state, and district testing, by grade level, directs purposeful adjustment and alignment of teaching strategies and materials to effect student outcomes. Non-teaching staff members are provided with opportunities for professional development which directly align to their role within the school.

F: Describe how leadership moves your school toward its vision. Define the instructional leader role and describe how it is implemented. Tell how the leadership engages internal and external stakeholders in the decision-making.

One of the greatest opportunities we have at Sonoran Sky centers on our ability to develop leaders and foster leadership skills. During the past two years as a staff and community we have taken the time to evaluate our school's mission, vision, and plan for the future. To effectively make decisions which will propel our school forward, it has been the responsibility of the building principal to identify the need, articulate the desire, and motivate the differing constituents of the necessity of vision, mission, and program evaluation. Through this process it has been necessary to monitor group affect and dynamics. Therefore, *the role of the principal/instructional leader has been to mobilize the leadership skills which are evidenced in the staff, students, and community.* The instructional leader has sought to effectively communicate with all group members the rationale for evaluating school goals and vision as well as direction for school progress. The message has required communicating forward thinking without criticism. The instructional leader has strived to monitor this delicate balance.

This year the building principal chose four members of the staff who serve in a decision making role identified as the "Integration Team". All committees within the school have been condensed under these four committees, and the four Integration Team members serve as the committee chairs. The four committees include (see question E): *Community Awareness* – responsible for handling all areas related to developing community relations within our school and community; *Literacy* – oversees the implementation of our district *Project Read* (see page 7)

initiative, which is in alignment with the literacy goals of *No Child Left Behind*, as well as other writing initiatives; *Philosophy* – monitors all programs to ensure they align with our school vision and mission; and *School Climate* – coordinates staff support, social events, PTO events, and student recognition. A mission of these committees is to increase awareness of our student and school successes by communicating a consistent message that aligns with the school vision and envelops all community members' needs. The Integration Team meets quarterly with the building principal to dialogue about the direction and vision of the school and to discuss ongoing improvement efforts. *For example, the team continually discusses our goal of increasing enrollment.* Recent data indicates we have experienced a *ten-percent increase* in our student population since the beginning of the school year. To help with this on going effort the Integration Team has sought to embrace parents and the community as committee members. Additionally, our PTO has developed committees in alignment with those established for the staff. This allows for a consistent flow of communication with a relevant message.

Teachers, staff, parents, and students are all involved in school-wide decision making. To accomplish this regular meetings are held with these stakeholders. Additionally, the principal meets with the committee members to articulate vision and maintain awareness for the school leadership. Decisions, which pertain to the individual committee mission, are given to the Committee Chair, to present to the entire committee. As a result, *communication is more consistent and effective as a larger percentage of the staff has the opportunity to receive information and give feedback.*

We are very fortunate to have a community who values the opportunity to engage in our school goals and plans and has sought to participate in every aspect of our school. *The staff continuously gathers information and input from both internal and external stakeholders in a variety of forums.* These forums include evening meetings, surveys, School Council, and regular staff meetings which include the PTO. Additionally, the staff and PTO have formed several partnerships with organizations and businesses who seek to invest in public education. This has involved regular communication, meetings, and clarity of school needs and functions to keep the school mission and vision visible and consistently moving in the same direction. Identified areas of student school improvement are reviewed each year and analyzed for future goal setting. Results are published annually at a district level and in our State Report Card. Consistent, positive results are evidenced yearly as students achieve annual growth in their progress.

As we look back over the past five years, it has been fortuitous to evaluate our position as a school as we have clarified our vision and mission. *We have been faced with a myriad of challenges centered on the need to increase student enrollment.* These challenges have driven our staff and community to evaluate our direction and purpose. This reflective process has been the impetus for honest and open communication with all constituents. We have developed mechanisms for participation from a variety of perspectives that were once only open to staff members. There has been a clear and intense effort from the entire staff to reach goals according to what is good for the whole, while maintaining the purity of our clarified philosophy. The past five years have presented several transitions for the school including three different administrators. The change in administration has created a wonderful venue for the staff and community to globally evaluate the school's purpose as well staff and community needs. Individuals who have remained during the transition are committed to the school's success. This commitment to excellence has had a positive and lasting impact for our entire school.

One of the greatest *challenges we are facing as a district and school is budgetary constraints*. We, unfortunately, find ourselves forced to make decisions based on reduced financial resources. Although compensation is limited, we continue to recognize the staff for the impact they are making on children's lives. A great challenge we continue to face is creatively finding resources for programs and staff. Our staffing allocation was reduced for the 2003-04 school year, having a tremendous impact on our programs and curriculum. We have strived to creatively incorporate programs which have become trademarks of our school. One example is the incorporation of the Arizona Music Conservatory into our fine arts program. *As a staff and community we have developed methods of marketing* which transfer our thinking from simply being a school to recognizing we must have a business mentality as we seek to retain customers. A challenge we will continue to face is the balance between sound educational practices and meeting the demands of our customers, the students, parents, and community. As we move forward, we consistently evaluate and align all program recommendations with a rubric of the school's mission and vision. A single-minded vision has been invaluable as we are often thrust into a bandwagon mentality of grabbing onto the biggest and best to draw families. Our approach must continue to be one that monitors programs according to "best practices". We will continually be charged with the mission of increasing enrollment and for the purity of our school's program, our vision and beliefs must be first and foremost in all decision making. The role of the principal will continue to be to keep this perspective as the guiding compass in school planning and overcoming obstacles.

The challenge we face by No Child Left Behind and the Arizona Learns Profiles will be to continue to strive toward excellence. Fortunately, Sonoran Sky already experiences high levels of success in the areas identified in these mandates. Therefore, our challenge will be to maintain these high standards and expectations for our students, staff, and community. We constantly develop methods of teaching and learning which propel our school forward. We are committed to this vision of success.

G: Please provide specific examples of activities and projects in which you collaborated with community organizations. Describe how your school involves families in their children's education. Tell which non-school entities use your facilities.

The partnerships between school, families, and the local community of Sonoran Sky exemplify our school theme "Excellence: No Limits." The goal of these partnerships is to support and facilitate those activities and programs that provide for the academic and personal success of each child. Sonoran Sky's *partnership with Barnes & Noble Bookstore* provides the opportunity for children to present and display poetry and other "Principal's Challenge" projects for public enjoyment. This experience allows Sonoran Sky to share beyond its doors the creativity and talents of our children. Another example of working for the community is our *Chrysallis Center* service project. Students, parents, and teachers work together outside of school hours to create and provide scarves for women and children residing in this domestic violence shelter. Additionally, "*Cards for the Elderly*" is a first grade project that allows students to develop writing skills as they design seasonal greeting cards that are distributed to local adult care centers. "*The Manors*" allows sixth grade students to reach out and establish relationships with elderly community members. Their joint monthly lunches provide time for sharing that enriches the lives of all involved. Partnerships like these give the children of Sonoran Sky the chance to experience the gift of selfless serving.

During the past year we have had the opportunity to develop a *partnership with Universal Technical Institute (UTI)*. This partnership began through the City of Phoenix sponsored *Principal for a Day Program*. The Vice-president of Field Admissions originally attended a staff meeting where the staff was told about those peers who would be affected by last year's Reduction in Force (RIF). Our partner took to heart the budgetary crisis within our state and specifically the impact on the Sonoran Sky Staff. He began to ask how UTI could help. Following this, we met on several occasions. UTI has returned to our campus several times and participated in meetings as we brainstormed ways to increase the student enrollment at Sonoran Sky. In collaboration with UTI, we developed a brochure inviting non-enrolled families to attend an Open House in February. *UTI is paying for the production and mailing of the brochures. The partnership we have formed with UTI has opened the door to several other organizations who want to be a part of our school's success. Additionally, we are working on other mechanisms for marketing. This stakeholder provides a relationship that supports our school with in kind services toward a marketing goal of increased enrollment.*

The Junior Achievement Program is another example of how Sonoran Sky provides an excellent opportunity involving our students and community. The program curriculum at the elementary level embraces all students in kindergarten through sixth grade as it focuses on topics such as families, community, city, region, country, and our world. Our school has had a multitude of stakeholders such as parents, an assistant superintendent, and local business members who provide this "real world" experience. Junior Achievement provides our students with a purposeful approach to education and citizenship.

Sonoran Sky's collaborative partnership with *Touchstone Behavioral Health* provides much needed support to the students, families, and staff. Touchstone offers Sonoran Sky's students and their families non-denominational programs and education for developing healthy strategies in coping with divorce, peer pressure, and conflict resolution. The success of this program is evident by the overwhelming participation and character gains that are exhibited by the children in the classroom.

Sonoran Sky's strength comes from the dedication and involvement of our parent community. Our PTO consistently identifies and meets the needs of our classrooms and staff. An example of this would be our *Yellow School Bus Program* which provides field trip funding to families with limited resources. These stakeholders also sponsor many community-building events such as, *Family Fun Run, Family Restaurant Night, Kid's Night Out, Silent Auction, Spring Carnival, and book fairs*. These special events enhance and build relationships with families and community members making our school stronger and more vibrant.

Sonoran Sky is committed to making our school a place of community and shared learning experiences as we involve families in their children's education. *Our school nurtures and facilitates many activities and programs that involve families in the education of their child.* These activities enhance the parenting role through Literacy Nights in which teachers share specific techniques, learning styles, and ideas for the writing process. During these nights, families brainstorm, create, and publish stories together. Families in grades one through three participate in this writing event. Friendly Friday is another family event sponsored each month by the first and second grade teachers. Parents are invited by each student to read together for thirty minutes. The halls are filled with adults and children reading together in the school setting. This provides the opportunity for all students to share their school day with parents.

They are able to see the value adults place on reading. Last year, parents were invited by our principal and sixth grade teachers to participate in a book club. The book selected, *Queen Bees and Wanna-Bees*, deals with issues pertaining to adolescents. They discussed the impact of the concepts presented in this book. Those who participated felt they were better prepared to help their children during this difficult transition time.

Sonoran Sky is excited to be part of a newly formed group called B.E.S.T. (Building Educational Support Together). This group consists of the parents from the high school and middle school that Sonoran Sky students will attend. *The focus of B.E.S.T. is to present educational community programs for parents and caregivers in our community.* Upcoming programs will discuss topics such as AIMS testing, curriculum in middle and high school, and parenting issues. B.E.S.T. is an opportunity to become part of a larger network of parents and educators who are dedicated to doing what is best for all children. The Sonoran Sky Newsletter, "*The Navigator*," also provides the parents with information on a variety of health, safety, and prevention topics as needed. Our school nurse shares pertinent and timely health information. Articles are attached that offer parents hints in many areas such as homework, reading, math, behavior, preparing for school, and conferences. Each family receives this newsletter once a month.

Our school knows that a strong school-family relationship is critical to each child's academic and personal success. We strive to envelop families in a variety of ways through communication:

- **Friday Folders** containing the child's work for the week provide weekly two-way communication between school and home. Parents sign the folder each week to indicate that they have received and reviewed the folder with their child. Each Monday teachers collect these folders and respond to any questions or concerns that may have been noted.
- **Back to School Night** sponsored by the PTO in August helps relieve anxiety about the first day of school. It provides time for the students and parents to meet their new teacher for the upcoming school year. This well attended event usually draws upward of 90% of our student population. It also gives the children an opportunity to get reacquainted with old friends and perhaps make some new friends before the first day of school.
- **Parent Orientation** is held during the first month of school. Nearly 100% of the parents attend as individual classroom teachers provide much needed information about the upcoming school activities and curriculum. All of the teachers at Sonoran Sky welcome parents into their classrooms and encourage parent contact.
- **Every teacher for every student conducts Parent-Teacher Conferences** at a time that is convenient for parents and families. This allows the teacher and parents one-on-one time to discuss each student's academic and social development.
- **On-going Communication** occurs continually through email, voice mail, written notes, and telephone contact. Staff members adhere to the district policy of responding to messages within a twenty-four time frame. Some grade levels have developed weekly office hours allowing parents the opportunity to meet with their child's teacher for an impromptu conference.

A strong volunteer base of parents is nurtured and encouraged by the principal, teachers, and staff at Sonoran Sky. Parents who volunteer are better informed and aware of how to help their child to be more successful in school. The success of most activities and field trips depends on our volunteers. The staff and principal express the belief that a parent being present and visible

to their child at school has a lasting impact. Our principal, teachers, and core group of volunteer leaders from PTO and School Council initiate the recruitment of volunteers at Sonoran Sky. *Every Thursday PTO Board members are available to take prospective new families on a school tour and speak to the many ways a parent can become involved at Sonoran Sky.* Our PTO and stakeholders support our theme of “Excellence: No Limits”. They raise over \$35,000 each year to enhance important programs and activities in the areas of staff development, teaching materials and supplies, building improvements, student development, enrichment opportunities, and teacher grants. Without the PTO's generous support, most of these programs would not be possible.

We feel our school is a resource to the community and accommodate requests for building use whenever feasible. The following organizations currently use our building:

- Boy Scouts/Cub Scouts
- Girls Scouts/Brownies
- Athletes in Training
- Community Education – providing an array of before and after school programs
- Camp Invention
- Mad Science
- Arizona Music Conservatory
- Our fields continue to be utilized for seasonal games

We welcome the community into our school as we embrace the challenge of needing an entire village to raise a child.

H: Indicators of Success

As you review Sonoran Sky's assessment data, you will see that we consistently score at a high level of performance. Students understand the importance of the testing process as they regularly practice test-taking strategies and review skills throughout the school year. Developing fluency with test taking is an integral part of our school curriculum teaching the students how to take a test effectively as well as having understanding of the content of the tests. These skills help to ease students into the process. There are few disparities in our testing data. This can be attributed to our combined focus on learning within each subgroup.

The SAT-9 and AIMS test reports are one means of identifying the academic needs of students. *Sonoran Sky teachers analyze test results to identify students who continue to meet established standards and those children who are underachieving.* Recently, the teachers spent a half-day inservice analyzing the 2002-2003 SAT-9 scores and trends. This analysis targeted areas for future growth. The percentage of students making one year's growth in reading and math was above 80%. This is a trend we continue to monitor as we strive toward academic excellence.

The analysis of the data becomes the compass by which we plan our programs. As a staff we have sought to evaluate each of our activities to make sure it can be aligned with the state standards and thus providing a continual guide for assessment. *We consistently critique our teaching and learning using the standards.* Programs and practices which support these standards are emphasized and those that do not are deleted to keep our vision fluid. As a staff we evaluate the progress of individual students, teachers, and programs. *We disaggregate data to*

discover trends in areas of lower academic achievement. It is vital that we attend to all data and analyze factors including those that might influence the student, teacher, and testing environment. Additionally, we look for grade level testing trends. This information is shared with the staff in a manner which promotes self-reflection and excellence. Teachers are challenged by the opportunity to increase student achievement within their classrooms.

Alternative assessments of student performance include:

- **District Assessment of Reading, Math, and Writing** – The district has developed assessments which provide teachers with data regarding each student’s achievement in the subject areas. Tests are given to provide information regarding student progress. Our district is in the process of modifying the assessments to align with the standards.
- **Project Read (DRA Assessment)** – Students in kindergarten through third grade are tested on their reading abilities and fluency. This information is used for designing programs to meet individual student instructional needs. This also identifies students who need additional academic support. Data from this assessment allows us to see the growth in individual students throughout the school year.
- **STAR Assessment** – Student reading ability is tested through the STAR Assessment in conjunction with Accelerated Reader. Students’ scores are evaluated and each student meets individually with his or her teacher to determine reading goals. During this conference the teacher guides the student in selecting literature at his or her reading level. As students are appropriately diagnosed in their reading abilities they are able to obtain optimal success in their reading achievement. Results from these assessments provide a prescribed learning strategy for each student.

Data for the past five years:

	2002-2003	2001-2002	2000-2001	1999-2000	1998-1999
Daily student attendance	<u>96 %</u>	<u>96 %</u>	<u>95.9%</u>	<u>96.2%</u>	<u>96.3%</u>
Daily teacher attendance	<u>97 %</u>	<u>97 %</u>	<u>96 %</u>	<u>96 %</u>	<u>97 %</u>
Teacher turnover rate	<u>4 %</u>	<u>17 %</u>	<u>13 %</u>	<u>17 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>
Promotion rate	<u>99 %</u>	<u>99 %</u>	<u>99 %</u>	<u>99 %</u>	<u>99 %</u>

The teacher percentages are based on the number of certified homeroom teachers within our school. Percentages of turnover are in direct correlation to issues of funding within our district and state as well as natural changes such as marriage and starting a family.

Sonoran Sky has established an impressive record of **accomplishments and recognition**. An abbreviated list includes the following:

- **Seventy-five State winners** in the **Grand Canyon State Games Essay Contest** - For the past eight years Sonoran Sky has participated in The Grand Canyon State Games Essay contest sponsored by Ottawa University. With each grade level writing essays, Sonoran Sky has remained one of the top ten participants in the state. Sonoran Sky Elementary has produced 75 state winners including numerous gold medal winners.
- **Cox Technology Award** - In 1998 two teachers were awarded the “Cox Excellence in Education and Technology Grand Prize Award” in recognition of their creative teaching techniques in the area of technology.
- **Battle of the Books** – In 2002 our students placed Second Place in the Regional competition of Battle of the Books, a contest held for fifth through seventh grade students, measuring reading comprehension and recall.

- **Four Nationally Board Certified Teachers** - Currently our school has four staff members who have completed and received national board certification. Few schools have this number of nationally certificated staff members.
- **Eighteen selected participants in Rutgers Discrete Mathematics Institute** – In the summer of 1995, a team of six teachers were selected to participate in an intense, two-week math institute, developed to give teachers a deeper understanding of the science behind mathematics and to provide teachers with tools to teach students these vast concepts. Over the past eight years, eighteen teachers have been accepted into this program.
- **One of three Arizona schools in the California Early Literacy Learning (C.E.L.L.) and E.x.L.L.** – In both 1999 and 2000, our kindergarten through sixth grade teachers participated in these programs that provide a framework for teaching literacy including using reflective teaching, coaching, and research-based strategies for teaching reading and Guided Reading. Sonoran Sky is one of a small number of Arizona schools whose staff members have received this training.
- **Arizona Game and Fish Department Heritage Native Habitat Grant** - In 1995, we received a Heritage Grant through Arizona Game and Fish for a pond habitat to house Native Arizonan endangered Gila Topminnows & Desert Pupfish. The students have the opportunity to learn about the habits of the fish and to record data regarding change.
- **ARISS Communication With the Space Station** - In 1999, we received funding from Scottsdale Charros for the creation of an amateur radio station. The station has been granted a special call sign from the FCC that represents Sonoran Sky Elementary, KA7SKY. In March, our students will have opportunity to talk with the astronauts aboard the International Space Station. ARISS (Amateur Radio on the International Space Station) is a program created through a partnership with NASA and the Amateur Radio Relay League. Schools are selected through a thorough application process.
- **Math Olympiads** – Our students have participated for ten years in this problem-solving math contest, and in 2001 our fifth grade students received an award for scoring in the top ten percent of students participating across the United States.
- **Stock Market Game** - Through the Arizona Council of Economic Education, our students participate in a contest with other fifth through eighth grade students across the State. In 2000 our school had a fourth place winner in this category where our fifth grade team was recognized with all other winners being seventh and eighth graders.

These examples were chosen as they embrace the school's population and philosophy. They are indicative of the achievements of our students and staff and reflect the quality of our programming. We have been recognized in a multitude of arenas encompassing varying curricular goals.

Conclusion:

It is without a doubt that throughout this application you are able to sense our school pride and efficacy. The journey to obtain these outcomes is marked by a dedicated staff and community permitting nothing less than excellence. It is with this same pride and commitment to excellence that we submit this application for consideration for A+ school status. With this submission we renew our commitment to be a school which has a lasting and powerful impact **not only** within our building, our community, and our district, but throughout the entire State of Arizona. Today, we again embrace the challenge to obtain academic excellence and change lives.