



grant awards snapshot

PUBLIC SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Our Fund provides access to fast capital that will jump start new approaches to learning and educational excellence in Arizona.

Arizona families have responded to the current pandemic by finding creative ways to ensure a successful educational environment for their children. Meet A for Arizona's newest Public Small Learning Communities — all community-driven, small scale solutions by public schools across Arizona benefiting nearly 1,000 students this

spring 2021 semester. These grants provide seed funding for new small models and approaches to teaching and learning that support student populations that have been significantly disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic and make access to Small Learning Communities free and more equitable.





ARIZONA AUTISM EARLY LEARNING CENTER

Maricopa County - Central Phoenix

PROBLEM TO SOLVE

Many of Arizona’s youngest students are still not enrolled this school year. The gap in services for young students with special needs is acute.

SOLUTION EXCITEMENT POINT

Arizona Autism Charter School made the strategic decision to open the Early Learning Center (ELC) to better support working families during the pandemic and meet a long-underserved student needs. In the ELC, their team will grow full-day eight-student small learning communities specializing in early intervention needs of children diagnosed with autism and related disorders. As part of the extended day model, in partnership with Arizona Division of Developmental Services and Arizona Autism United, students will have wrap-around services and after-school programming at no cost. Arizona Autism Charter School is designing the Early Learning Center to become a one-stop-shop, offering a best-practice school with small learning environments, onsite therapies, parent training and support for families of young children with autism, especially PreK – 2 since that is the highest demographic not in school right now.

student focused

DEMOGRAPHICS

- A Title 1 school, with approximately 75% of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch
- The ethnic make-up of the student population reflects the community in the Phoenix Urban Core: 51% Latino, 28% White, 15% African American, 5% Asian and 1% American Indian students
- Primarily serves students on the autism spectrum and students with related developmental conditions

75

Total Students Served Year 1

K-1

Grade Levels Served Year 1

community partners

Arizona Autism United, Arizona Division of Developmental Services, and Psychology Department of Arizona State University

WHY IS THIS APPROACH SO URGENT?

This seed funding is critical for creating an ideal learning environment for small clusters of Arizona Autism’s youngest learners. The ELC allows working families to return to work and other activities during the pandemic and has alleviated the worry about where their young special needs children will go during the day.



CASA ACADEMY

Maricopa County - Central Phoenix

PROBLEM TO SOLVE

CASA Academy has felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in multiple areas, but one of the most prominent is that the opportunity gap with their scholars has been amplified, widening the learning gap. Scholars, especially in the third grade, are mastering fewer objectives than in the past and teachers have less time to reteach critical material. Interventions tried this fall are not closing the gap fast enough.

SOLUTION EXCITEMENT POINT

CASA is designing after-hours small learning communities of 2-5 learners, with one qualified mentor per group, for all third grade scholars. Scholars will be grouped by academic needs as well as options that meet the scheduling needs of parents and families. Virtual options will ensure the highest need scholars do not miss out due to transportation barriers or parents needing to reorganize work schedules. To ensure success, CASA plans to leverage certified teachers not currently in the classroom and highly qualified college students to run the after-school acceleration small learning communities. This program will help close the achievement and opportunity gaps, providing pre-recorded lessons and materials by the third grade classroom teachers for mentors to review in advance of the SLCs.

student focused

DEMOGRAPHICS

- The ethnic make-up of the student population reflects the community in the Phoenix Urban Core: 59% Latino, 28% African American, 10% Asian, 2.5% white and 0.5% two or more races
- 100% of scholars are on free and reduced-price lunch
- 67% of scholars are emergent bilingual or multilingual learners

45
Total Students
Served Year 1

3RD*
Grade Level
Served Year 1
*with plan to scale to
K-2 and 4th grade

community partners

Teach For America-Phoenix, Grand Canyon University, and Arizona State University

WHY IS THIS APPROACH SO URGENT?

CASA recognizes how critical third grade is and saw their current interventions this fall were not closing the gaps or supporting students social and emotional needs well enough. Students would not have access to small learning communities like this at other local schools, and most CASA families do not have the resources to pay for tutoring programs or acceleration coaching. Research was cited on how models such as these consistently lead to large improvements in learning outcomes for students, especially when targeted at earlier grades. With these small learning communities, CASA is aiming for 100% of scholars to move into fourth grade with true skills mastery.



CRANE ELEMENTARY DISTRICT, GOWAN SCIENCE ACADEMY

Yuma County - Yuma

PROBLEM TO SOLVE

Given the high COVID-19 numbers in Yuma County, Gowan Science Academy has operated primarily remotely, resulting in an uptick in absentee rates, social and emotional disconnect, and diminished student engagement. Their team needed a quick solution to re-engage learners, provide reassurance to teachers with concerns about in-person learning, and a way to reinforce the idea that learning can take place anywhere.

SOLUTION EXCITEMENT POINT

Gowan is designing a new Outdoor Learning Hub for lessons and learning outside their traditional classroom walls, recognizing most learning in life does not take place in a formal setting. This outdoor dedicated learning space is an innovative concept for their remote region and reduces barriers to time and place for learning. With the expanded WiFi and partnership with Yuma Parks and Recreation Department, this community-driven public learning hub can be utilized after school hours and on weekends for additional learning opportunities and experiences for both kids and families.

student focused

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 100% of students receive free breakfast and lunch, with the school located in the north end of the city where the highest rates of poverty and family disruption occur, including homes without running water
- The student population is 60% Latino, 30% White, and roughly 5% Asian and African American
- Higher-than-average number of gifted students, especially for an incredibly remote school site

600

Total Students
Served Year 1

K-8

Grade Levels
Served Year 1

community partners

Yuma Parks and Recreation Department

WHY IS THIS APPROACH SO URGENT?

Many teachers shared that they would be more comfortable returning to school if they could teach outside and this open outdoor learning setting minimizes coronavirus transmission. Research cited also shows that time in a natural classroom increases student engagement and has a restorative effect on kids. This learning hub provides the space for students to return to campus for in-person learning experiences and engage in city programs at night and on weekends – a win-win situation for students. No schools in Yuma have such a space for such nontraditional learning.



EDISON SCHOOL OF INNOVATION

Maricopa County - Glendale

PROBLEM TO SOLVE

With COVID-19 cases on the rise, providing in-person learning has been the biggest challenge for Edison School of Innovation. In their small Title One school, any cases impact staffing at a greater level when they have to quarantine. Students living in poverty, children of essential workers, Exceptional Student learners, and English language learners have especially struggled academically from the remote learning and have demonstrated a greater need for access to reliable internet, additional instructional support, meals, and a safe place to learn while parents are at work in essential roles.

SOLUTION EXCITEMENT POINT

With an incredibly inclusive student body and leveraging research, Edison aims to build a meaningful learning hub for in-person engagement and social-emotional supports for students suffering from trauma and lacking support from many learning options right now. This model will provide interactive opportunities away from the screen for students to improve focus, physical, and mental health and also have access to counseling services for additional social-emotional support.

student focused

DEMOGRAPHICS

- The ethnic make-up of the student population is 49% Latino; 35% White; and 16% African American
- 39% of the student population are Exceptional Student learners
- 11% of the student population are emergent bilingual or multilingual learners

46

Total Students
Served Year 1

K-3, 4-8

Grade Levels
Served Year 1

WHY IS THIS APPROACH SO URGENT?

This proposal was developed in real-time this school year based on student needs, parent surveys, and caregiver communication on a need for an alternative to distance learning. The social-emotional learning hub aims to increase level of learning engagement, improve student behavior, and expand social-emotional skills.



PATAGONIA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT #6, PATAGONIA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Santa Cruz County - Patagonia

PROBLEM TO SOLVE

The impact of COVID-19 has exacerbated existing achievement gaps with learning loss being greatest among low-income, African American, and Latino students in this remote Southern Arizona town. Data and student engagement this fall made it clear to leadership they had to rethink learning opportunities this school year and beyond.

SOLUTION EXCITEMENT POINT

Patagonia is building scalable after-hours public Creative STEM learning pods – proving what’s possible and accessible for more rural families. Each blended pod will host 10 elementary students at no cost, with virtual options available to remove geographic barriers. Patagonia is utilizing its expert math and science teachers and reverse engineering approaches to ensure that students will make academic progress exceeding their grade level and the education gap is closed as a result of participating in the Creative STEM pod.

student focused

DEMOGRAPHICS

- A rural Title One school with over 73% of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch
- 26.7% of Patagonia residents had an income below the poverty level in 2017, which was 44.4% greater than the poverty level across the entire state of Arizona
- The ethnic make-up of the student population is 61.4% Latino, 1.9% African American, and 36.6% Caucasian

30

Total Students
Served Year 1

2-6

Grade Levels
Served Year 1

community partners

University of Arizona School of Mathematical Sciences and Mat Bevel Company

WHY IS THIS APPROACH SO URGENT?

By providing learning pods in various locations, Patagonia will be able to strategically address students’ academic gaps, including enhanced creative problem-solving skills, increased knowledge of math, science, and engineering well beyond their grade level, greater empathy for community-wide challenges, and improved presentation skills. Patagonia has ambitious plans to scale the pods into Cochise County and more schools in Santa Cruz County to increase rigorous and stimulating learning opportunities with a focus on STEM.



VAIL UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Pima County - Vail

PROBLEM TO SOLVE

This school year, VUSD lost 1,400 students, with 457 students choosing to homeschool, and they are not willing to ignore this fact. Late fall, many families expressed their interest in returning to the District once COVID-19 has ended, but the learning gaps for these students with limited resources and access to teachers is of great concern. There are also a large number of students that are either too remote without cell service to access one of the VUSD options or are part of the high school cluster struggling to graduate.

Students in the more remote portion of the district have proven especially difficult to serve this year because of the COVID-19 school closures. Many of these students do not have access to the internet—without cell service at their homes even personal hotspots will not work--and have not been able to adequately participate in remote learning due to issues with accessing technology or family situations, thus rapidly falling. The third priority student population are the high school students that are struggling to keep up and on track to graduate.

SOLUTION EXCITEMENT POINT

Vail yet again is leading the way as a model for public stackable education via a menu of services and options to enhancing learning and recognizing that education is not defined by where students receive their education but how. Under this new option, families can choose which components of district support they would like to opt into: academic, social/emotional, or extracurricular. Families who opt in are eligible to receive special services including two full-time teachers housed at the Vail Innovation Center, a counselor, a speech pathologist, and a school psychologist. With this Small Learning Community grant, Vail is implementing a cutting-edge service provider approach – the future of education post COVID.

student focused

100

Total Students
Served Year 1

DEMOGRAPHICS

The Vail Unified School District serves approximately 14,000 students. Many of these students live in very rural areas, spanning 425 square miles. They are targeting three subgroups of students falling behind the quickest.

K-12

Grade Level
Served Year 1

community partners

Beyond Textbooks and Vail Chamber Connection Center

WHY IS THIS APPROACH SO URGENT?

VUSD believes Small Learning Communities that are customizable to student skills and courses would be the ideal way to meet their needs. Vail's proven track record of achievement and success will provide these students with the supports they need to be successful in the environment and model that works the best for their families during this time. Long-term, Vail believes a Small Learning Community model is a critical fixture in their comprehensive school portfolio.



TANQUE VERDE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, TANQUE VERDE HIGH SCHOOL

Pima County - Tanque Verde

PROBLEM TO SOLVE

Tanque Verde High has had numerous families reach out over the past 4 months from schools where their students are not challenged and fear their child is losing ability to stay on track for college. Because Tanque Verde High School is open for in-person learning and their neighboring district is still remote with no confirmation of when they will open, they are experiencing a boom of families who want their child to receive high-quality instruction on campus. Over 200 students have applied to attend Tanque Verde High School since July.

Near the high school, the district also has a unique halfway house/treatment center for parents battling addiction to drugs and alcohol where their children can stay with them in addition to housing for homeless and low-income veterans and families. These children often fall through the cracks due to the tremendous trauma they have experienced and the proposal focuses on providing support, academic achievement and high expectations for these students.

Students are being recruited for the new school-within-a-school to bring in diverse backgrounds, experiences, and ethnicities, especially subgroups of students most underserved during the COVID-19 pandemic in Pima County, including African American, Latino, and Homeless youth as well as students living in high-poverty neighborhoods.

SOLUTION EXCITEMENT POINT

This Small Learning Community is designed to serve new underserved students from the Tucson area not yet at TV High. Any student is eligible for this public school-within-a-school model. It does not have testing restrictions and is focused on helping students with learning gaps not usually targeted for advanced coursework. Students will work with a counselor, receive specialist academic and socio-emotional support, and have teachers who are specially trained to create learning experiences that are interdisciplinary and reflect the honors college experience.

student
focused

60

Total Students
Served Year 1

9-12

Grade Levels
Served Year 1

community partners

University of Arizona Honors College, Biosphere 2, University of Arizona Agriculture Department, IBM, Center for the Future of Arizona, and the Tucson Metro Chamber of Commerce

WHY IS THIS APPROACH SO URGENT?

This meets the immediate need of working parents and families worried about students learning at home alone or disengaged from virtual curriculum. Students will be provided intensive support, mentoring, and authentic learning while attending the first Honors College high school in Arizona that partners with a 4-year honors college. In order to achieve equity, all students who want to participate in their honors college school-within-a-school experience will be able to. This approach increases rigor and expectations while focusing on true opportunity with completion of the program and students graduating to attend an Honors College.