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## FOUNDING GROUP

The founding group of the Valley Arts & Science Academy is a community group initially composed of James and Rebecca Richardson and Susan Anderson, parents of young children. They were concerned with the choices available in existing public and private schools in the Fresno area. They recruited Dr. Brad Huff, recently completing five years as Head of School of University High School, a highly successful charter school, to be the Project Director to found a new elementary charter school with an emphasis on the arts and science. The first decision was to locate the school in the Cultural Arts District of downtown Fresno and to enlist the support of the several museums and public television station to be within walking distance of the school. Dr. Huff obtained the support of Frank Sandall, an experienced school business manager with whom he had worked at University High School. Several additional community members expressed an interest in and commitment to the founding of the Valley Arts & Science Academy.

### Founding Advisory Committee:

James Richardson, Chair - Financial Advisor, Northwestern Mutual Financial Services and parent and Rebecca Richardson, homemaker and parent;

Susan Anderson - Fresno County Supervisor and parent;

Cheryl Chancellor-Freeland - Professor of Biology, San Jose State University and parent;

Cynthia Merrill - Community member;

Rosamond Herling - Child Development Psychologist and parent;

Suzanne Henderson - Artist and Art Teacher;

Andra Christensen - Elementary Curriculum Specialist;

### Consultants:

Brad Huff - Project Director, founding Principal of University High School, charter #198;

Frank Sandall - Business Manager, founding Business Manager of University High School.

### Project Director – Dr. Brad Huff

AB-Hamilton College; AMT-Harvard University; MS/PhD-University of Washington

Dr. Huff has a distinguished career in private and public education and was singularly involved in the creation of University High School, which has become one of the top high schools in California. His duties, as sole administrator of the new school, included recruiting faculty and staff, planning and overseeing obtaining facilities, making purchasing decisions on school furnishings and instructional materials, promoting the school, recruiting students, supervising

faculty, monitoring curriculum and assessment, and all other day-to-day executive decisions affecting the smooth running of the school.

Dr. Huff's experience immediately prior to being appointed Head of University High School includes nine years as K-12 Science Coordinator for all public schools in Fresno County. In that position he was a resource on science curriculum, instruction, and assessment. He was Director of the Regional Science Fair and Science Olympiad and in charge of creating the Golden State Examination in Physics.

Dr. Huff was the California State Director of the Odyssey of the Mind creative problem solving competition for six years and a Regional Director for ten years. He served on the Writing Committee for the current California Science Framework and was a member of the Advisory Committee for the California Science Project. He serves as Chair of the California Curriculum Correlating Council, a statewide federation of professional education associations.

Dr. Huff's full resume is included in the Appendices.

#### Business Manager – Frank Sandall

BS-California State Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo; MPA-University of Southern California

Mr. Sandall has a distinguished career in school finance and business management. Following 16 years as the Director of Budget and Finance for the Ventura Unified School District, Mr. Sandall served the newly formed Golden Hills School District in Fresno County for two years before it merged with the Sierra Unified School District. In that position he formulated the business services division including policy, procedures, and staffing assignments, negotiated initial certificated and classified collective bargaining agreements, consummated two school site property purchases, conducted comparative studies and received board approval for reorganization of maintenance/operations and food services departments, secured facility funding through COP issues, coordinated a middle school construction program, and developed district policy and administration regulations.

For 11 years Mr. Sandall served as Assistant Superintendent for Business for the Sierra Unified School District. In this capacity he was responsible for all aspects of business services operations including finance, maintenance, operations, transportation, food services, purchasing, facilities, classified personnel, and risk management.

Mr. Sandall was the Business Manager for University High School where he provided oversight for all business operations including budgeting, finance, facilities, personnel, and risk management. He also served as initial project manager for the construction of a permanent school facility.

Mr. Sandall's full resume is included in the Appendices.

### Partners in Planning VASA

The Fresno Metropolitan Museum of Art and Science, Arte Américas, the African-American Museum, the Fresno City and County Historical Museum, and KVPT, the public television station, have expressed a strong interest in being involved in the creation of VASA. Letters attesting to their desire to collaborate with VASA in areas of both curriculum and facilities are included in the Appendices.

Mr. Jan Biggs, legal advisor to the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, was instrumental in providing advice to Dr. Huff during the first five years of University High School. He has indicated his willingness to serve in the same capacity for VASA.

## **Element A: Description of the School's Educational Program**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Mission of VASA is to fulfill all seven statutory purposes of charter schools (Ed Code 47601) by demonstrating that proficiency in the core subjects of English/language arts and mathematics can be achieved by employing a traditional, site-based, classroom program rich in the arts and science for its students in grades K-6. Students will benefit from small, single-gender classes, if allowed by changes in the federal Title IX regulations, and from access to the resources of the several museums, the public television station, and the Fresno County Library located within a few short blocks of the proposed site for the school.

The school's formal Mission Statement as adopted at the December 19, 2005 Founding Advisory Committee meeting is:

*VASA's mission is to provide a culturally and economically diverse K-6 student population with a high quality public school program taught by qualified teachers. It is designed not only to help young children perform at grade level and above but to promote their desire to learn and to value education. VASA will provide an engaging, culturally rich curriculum using the arts, science, history, and physical education to motivate the need for and to reinforce achievement in mathematics and basic literacy skills development.*

### **WHOM WILL THE SCHOOL EDUCATE? – STUDENTS TO BE SERVED**

VASA, a site-based charter school, will ultimately serve a school population of approximately 300 students in grades K-6 representative of the diversity of the Fresno Unified School District. There will be two classes of approximately 20 students at each grade level separated by gender, if federal regulations allow, for instruction in the core areas. The school will mix students from low-performing, nearby, neighborhood schools with students attracted from outside the area by the focus of the school's program. The targeted population is, first and foremost, students in the downtown core of Fresno attending Program Improvement schools in this ethnically diverse, economically depressed area.

It is the goal of the school's founders to attract at least 60% of the students from the overcrowded, low performing schools in the immediate vicinity of the proposed location of VASA. The remaining 40% of the student population is anticipated to be composed of children

of diverse backgrounds who live outside the core downtown area and who are attracted to the school by its educational program.

The founder plan to open the school in the Fall of 2006 with grades K, 1, 2, and 3. In each of the three succeeding years the school will add one grade level until it offers a K-6 program.

If practicable, VASA will implement a pre-kindergarten program in the second or third year of operation.

VASA will be non-sectarian in its programs, admissions policies, employment practices, contracts, and all other operations, shall not charge tuition, shall not discriminate against any pupil on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, or disability, and shall not otherwise to any extent engage in unlawful (federal and State of California) discrimination.

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN EDUCATED PERSON IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY?**

In this century an educated person is one who:

- has completed college
- possesses intellectual curiosity and skills for life-long learning
- has acquired sufficient grounding in academic disciplines
- has engagement with the arts
- is a responsible citizen

Success in life requires mastery of elementary school skills. In middle school, high school, and college or vocational training students use these fundamental skills to hone their ability and academic curiosity to continue learning throughout life.

Elementary school is where students learn thoroughly the basic ideas, theories, vocabulary, and facts of the disciplines that comprise the arts and humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. An important goal of VASA is to develop literacy and academic curiosity in students, enabling them to become self-motivated, competent, and life-long learners. During these years, it is imperative that students practice habits that characterize educated people in any century: to think logically, read critically, write and speak clearly, solve problems creatively, organize time effectively, and make choices wisely. An important goal of the school will be to help students develop habits that will enable them to learn all their lives and to face unforeseen challenges.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century belongs to those who have a grounding in the academic disciplines and the appropriate use of technology, for they will be in a position to understand and to lead change. Students have at their fingertips more technology, more information, and more choices about almost everything than ever before. Their education must provide a context for that information, including the important skill of knowing how to separate the important from the non-important. For the past 2,500 years, classical studies have provided the educational framework that has been partly responsible for the amazing progress of western civilization. Classical studies have also helped generations of students to become thoughtful, engaged, and responsible citizens. In the last few years, the classical tradition of a liberal education has been almost completely abandoned, replaced by a narrow focus on “teaching to the test.”

## **HOW DOES LEARNING BEST OCCUR?**

VASA bases its academic program on principles derived from cognitive and school research as old as Socrates and as new as the work of Dr. Theodore Sizer, Dr. Lee Shulman and Michael Gurian. The six principles that will guide the school are:

1) Learning best occurs when students have the opportunity to study with teachers who have what Dr. Lee Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, has called "pedagogical content knowledge." Such teachers are extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subject matter, and they know how to convey that knowledge in ways that engage students actively.

2) Learning best occurs when students take responsibility for their work - what Dr. Theodore Sizer and the Coalition of Essential Schools refer to as "student-as-worker." Students will agree to a contract stipulating that they take responsibility for their work, and parents will sign a contract that they will support their student.

3) Learning best occurs when students have the opportunity to master academic subjects through a variety of approaches, including both group and individualized instruction, distance learning, media-assisted learning, projects, field experience, cooperative learning, and community service. An extended school day for VASA students, as well as a calendar that includes extra teaching days, will enable students to have learning experiences that are unavailable in most public elementary schools.

4) Learning best occurs in a school atmosphere of civility, trust, respect, cooperation, and intellectual curiosity. It will be the responsibility of all members of the VASA community to create and sustain this atmosphere.

5) Learning best occurs when a school is small enough so that teachers can really get to know each student, and large enough to provide resources needed for a 21<sup>st</sup> century education. VASA students will have the security of a small school while benefiting from the excellent resources of the collaborating museums and public television station.

6) Learning best occurs when brain-based research is used to improve a child's education by knowing the very nature of his or her mind. Michael Gurian combines the fields of neurobiology, anthropology, educational psychology and sociology to show how the growing child's brain works, and, specifically, how girls' and boys' brains work differently, how hormones affect these differences, and how acculturation influences the biology and areas of learning difficulty boys and girls suffer as distinct groups. Gurian focuses especially on innovations developed by teachers in six school districts in Kansas City, Missouri, in which the Gurian Institute trained staff to help boys and girls learn differently.

## **CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN**

Instructional methodologies and materials will be standards-based to guarantee success for VASA students on state-mandated tests. The curriculum design will have a basis in research and in proven effective practice. Emphasis will be placed on active student learning and discovery in

an environment that provides for integrated content understanding and specific, targeted topical focus where appropriate to the student's fullest educational development.

- Instructional Materials will be from state adopted lists

CURRICULUM SPECIFICS – Curriculum will be developed by the VASA faculty, members of the Founding Advisory Committee, and curriculum experts provided by the museums, the public television station and single-gender consultants, if single-gender instruction is approved by federal regulations.) VASA will use instructional materials funds only for state adopted materials, as required by law. All instructional materials will be reviewed for alignment with the California Academic Content Standards in English/Language Arts, Mathematics, History/Social Science and Science. California Frameworks will be consulted and used to evaluate instructional materials in the areas of Visual and Performing Arts, Physical Education and Health. The curriculum committees will explore supplementary materials in collaboration with education experts from the museums and KVPT.

VASA curriculum committee members will be made aware of the materials adopted by Fresno Unified in the core curricular areas, especially:

- English/Language Arts – Houghton-Mifflin Reading: A Legacy of Literature – Grades K-6
- Mathematics – Harcourt Math – Grades K-6; [Houghton-Mifflin – Grades K-5, used for EL students]

It is planned for VASA teachers to integrate instructional content across the curriculum

VASA will apply to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges to receive accreditation.

Taking note of the success of the KIPP Academy schedule of lengthened days and year, staff, parents, and advisory committees will participate in determining the length and structure of school days, a Saturday schedule and a possible lengthening of the school year beyond the minimum 175 days to best meet the needs of the students, especially those who are underperforming and/or below grade level. The number of minutes of instruction will exceed the minimums of 36,000 for Kindergarten, 50,400 for Grades 1-3, and 54,000 for Grades 4 – 8.

**THE BENEFITS OF AN ARTS EMPHASIS** – “The arts are essential parts of the human experience, they are not a frill. We recommend that all students study the arts to discover how human beings communicate not only with words but through music, dance, and the visual arts. During our visits (to schools) we found the arts to be shamefully neglected. Courses in the arts were the last to come and the first to go.” Dr. Ernest Boyer, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching quoted in “Learning Through the Arts”, Dee Dickinson, New Horizons for Learning, 2002 <http://www.newhorizons.org>.

For example, music is the most abstract of the arts and also one of the most ancient. It speaks through barriers of time and language and custom. It is a gateway to the understanding of other cultures and other times. Striving for excellence in musical performance teaches students discipline and commitment; performing music in groups teaches students to work cooperatively for a common goal; performing for an audience is a culminating experience that draws on all of a

student's personal resources. Listening actively to music trains the memory, sharpens the intellect, and enhances life.

A strong case can be made for emphasizing the arts in the face of perennially low test scores in math and English/language arts for the majority of Fresno Unified schools. However, the following paragraphs give ample evidence that schools with an arts focus are successful in achieving not only academic acceleration in the core areas of mathematics and reading/writing but improved citizenship. In "Learning Through the Arts" Dee Dickinson cites numerous examples of arts-rich public schools in low income areas showing huge academic gains:

*At Concord Elementary School, in one of the less affluent areas of Seattle, every student from kindergarten through fifth grade takes part in a dramatic performance each year. . . . Principal Claudia Allen notes that she is seeing "incredible achievement especially in reading skills. Fourth and fifth grade students increased their reading scores by two levels on the Macmillan Reading Inventory from fall to winter quarter 1995-96, and California Test of Basic Skills scores have increased by twenty to twenty-five points.*

*In Needham, Massachusetts at the John Eliot School, the arts are fully integrated throughout the curriculum, and academic achievement is soaring. John Eliot does not cater to superior, talented students, and many are economically disadvantaged, but nonetheless their 1992 MEAP (Massachusetts Educational Assessment Program) scores were the highest in the state.*

In 1995, The United States Department of Education reported in "Schools, Communities, and the Arts: A Research Compendium", that "using arts processes to teach academic subjects results not only in improved understanding of content but it greatly improved self-regulatory behavior." Barry Oreck of ArtsConnection and Susan Baum from the College of New Rochelle observed integrated arts lessons in all major subject areas in fourteen New York City elementary and secondary public school classrooms. They found that "student behavior improved strikingly in such areas as taking risks, cooperating, solving problems, taking initiative for learning, and being prepared. Content-related achievement also rose."

Visual and performing arts experiences stimulate non-verbal awareness, create a common bond and make school more human. Works of art enhance and reinforce verbal and math skills through analysis, discussions and writing. Singing and/or playing music together is a shared experience that teaches language, mathematics and cultures. Such proven programs as Visual Thinking Strategies [[www.VUE.org](http://www.VUE.org)] and Learning Through the Arts [[www.newhorizons.org/strategies/arts/dickinson\\_lrnarts.htm](http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/arts/dickinson_lrnarts.htm)] offered by the Fresno Metropolitan Museum of Art and Science have demonstrated their effectiveness.

VASA expects to demonstrate that student behavior and achievement will both be significantly improved by an arts-rich curriculum.

**THE BENEFITS OF A SCIENCE EMPHASIS** – Elementary school students are innately curious about the natural world. Research shows that teaching science is an effective strategy to stimulate and reinforce reading, writing, math and thinking skills. Consider the evidence from the review paper **READING-TO-LEARN AND WRITING-TO-LEARN SCIENCE**

ACTIVITIES FOR THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM, Yore, L.D., Shymansky, J.A., Henriques, L., Chidsey, J.L., and Lewis, J.O., [www.ed.psu.edu/ci/Journals/97pap1.htm](http://www.ed.psu.edu/ci/Journals/97pap1.htm)

Several strategies critical to constructing meaning from reading (reading-to-learn) have been identified; they are frequently absent in ineffective readers but respond to instruction (Duffy, G.G., Roehler, L.R. & Pearson, P.D. (1991). Moving from the old to the new: Research on reading comprehension instruction. Review of Education Research, 61, 239264; Pressley, M., Johnson, C.J., Symons, S., McGoldrick, J.A. & Kurita, J.A., (1989). Strategies that improve memory and comprehension of what is read. Elementary School Journal, 90, 332

The following principles should guide the development of writing-to-learn tasks in science (Tchudi, S.N. & Huerta, M.C. (1983). Teaching Writing in the Content Areas: Middle School Junior High. Washington, DC: National Education Association):

- \* *Keep science content central in the writing process.*
- \* *Help students structure and synthesize their knowledge.*
- \* *Provide a real audience for student writers that will value, question, and provide supportive criticism.*
- \* *Spend time pre-writing, collecting information from various sources (concrete experiences, print materials, experts, electronic data banks, visuals, etc.), sharpening focus, and strategic planning.*
- \* *Provide on-going teacher support, guidance, and explicit instruction.*
- \* *Encourage revisions and redrafts based on supportive criticism to address conceptual questions and clarify understandings.*
- \* *Clarify the differences between revising and editing (format, spelling, mechanics, grammar).*

The efficacy of using science to teach language arts skills, particularly to English Language Learners is detailed in What Our Research Shows about Student Learning, Integrating Science with English Language Development, Lee, O and Avalos, M., Southwest Educational Development Laboratory Letter, xv, 1, December 2003) [www.sedl.org/pubs/sedl-letter/v15n01/6.html](http://www.sedl.org/pubs/sedl-letter/v15n01/6.html)

- \* *Hands-on activities are less dependent on formal mastery of the language of instruction and thus reduce the linguistic burden on ELLs;*
- \* *Collaborative, small-group work provides structured opportunities for developing English proficiency in the context of authentic communication about science knowledge;*
- \* *Hands-on activities based on natural phenomena are more accessible to students with limited science experience than decontextualized textbook knowledge; and*
- \* *Inquiry-based instruction provides an introduction to the scientific practices and discourse from which inner-city students are often excluded.*

*The elementary students in our research generally perform higher than their grade-level counterparts, and comparably or higher than middle school students, in the NAEP (national) and TIMSS (international) samples.*

*Although science instruction is often ignored for students from diverse languages and cultures, hands-on and inquiry-based science instruction can be a powerful tool to teach English language and literacy in the context of learning science. Eventually, ELLs understand science*

*concepts, engage in science inquiry, and participate in science discourse, while also mastering English as a new language.*

In addition, the VASA staff will work closely with the staff of and receive professional development from the Fresno Metropolitan Museum of Art and Science including use of the Reeves Science Center, traveling exhibits, and programs and trainings for teachers offered through the Museum's Visual Thinking Skills program and the Institute for Inquiry collaboration with the Exploratorium. These resources will have a significant impact on the quality of the teaching and on student achievement across the curriculum.

**THE BENEFITS OF SINGLE-GENDER INSTRUCTION – IF ALLOWED BY PROPOSED RULE CHANGES TO TITLE IX REGULATIONS** – According to Michael Gurian and others, the dramatic increase in the research of brain function and its effect on the learning processes of growing children indicates clearly that boys and girls learn differently, with differences so distinctive they hold specific implications for how we educate young people. These brain-based differences, and the adjustments classrooms and schools make once educated in them, directly affect school success. A thorough understanding of the implications of new research in attachment and brain-based gender differences on teaching methods, school safety, school and classroom discipline, and specific school programs have resulted in improved standardized test scores, a decrease in discipline referrals, and teachers reporting greater comfort with teaching.

The particular goals and objectives of VASA are clear:

- **to be an experimental school to demonstrate the positive effects a strong arts and science emphasis can have on student behavior and academic success across the curriculum.**

Despite giving over nearly all instructional time to math and language arts, elementary schools in the downtown Fresno area remain in the lowest API decile. Research indicates that schools with an arts and/or science focus foster improved student behavior and accelerated academic achievement. VASA's anticipated successes will provide evidence needed to encourage Program Improvement elementary schools to return to broader curricula.

- **to provide superior learning opportunities by embracing the best practices in school reform efforts in collaboration with museum and public television resources by providing and implementing professional development in activity- and inquiry-based, hands-on learning in both the arts and science**

Reading-to-Learn, Writing-to-Learn, Integrating Science with English Language Development, Learning Through the Arts, Visual Thinking Skills, Institute for Inquiry, Inquiry-based, Hands-on Instruction, and exhibit/project-based activities are best practices that can be replicated at VASA. The collaborating museums and public television station will be rich resources for professional development of teachers and instruction of the students to meet and to go beyond the California Academic Content Standards.

**• to model instruction in which students, teachers, and teachers-in-training will learn in small, single-gender classes in a project-driven environment using appropriate technology and product-based learning including the creation of exhibits as an important tool for learning [Single-gender instruction will only be implemented if approved by federal regulations.]**

Part of the plan for VASA is to team a veteran teacher with a beginning teacher at each grade level. Class size in the core instructional areas is set at 20 students with boys in one classroom and girls in another, if approved by federal regulations. The content presented in both classrooms will be identical. Teacher-trainers and teachers-in-training in local credentialing programs will be invited to observe and/or participate. Product-based learning, such as the creation of exhibits and performing arts works, will be emphasized. Professional development in the most appropriate and creative use of technology will be provided.

**• to encourage meaningful parent participation in the school by providing training and making a written pledge to support their child’s daily attendance, to keep track of their child’s progress, and to encourage good citizenship and habits of life long learning**

An important habit of life long learning that VASA will emphasize is fitness. The California Department of Education estimates nearly 80 percent of California schools are skimping on physical education in violation of state law to make more time for math and English/language arts instruction. Schools with more physically active students tend to rank higher on California's API, according to a report published in April, 2005 by the CDE's "Getting Results" project. Regular exercise is good for the mind as well as the body, and, when supervised by competent, trained physical education instructors, learning disabilities and subtle indicators of developmental problems can be detected early and addressed appropriately.

Research shows that student attendance, citizenship, motivation and achievement are directly tied to parents' understanding of and commitment to the mission of the school. Contracts patterned after those of the KIPP Academies will be developed in concert with parents to be signed by parents and by the school. They will contain specific, mutual expectations including volunteer hours, providing a quiet location and time to work at home, checking on assignments, and attending school conferences and functions. An attendance rate of 95% is expected.

Good attendance and good citizenship starting with mutual respect will be emphasized. Parent training will include workshops based on the federal publication Choosing a School for Your Child, 2005, [www.ed.gov/parents/schools/find/choose](http://www.ed.gov/parents/schools/find/choose), and Henderson, Anne T. and Mapp, Karen L., (2002), A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement, (2002). Austin, Tex.: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

### **PLAN FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS**

VASA will hold all students, including English Learners, to high standards. Given the demographics of the Fresno Unified School District, VASA expects that over 30% of its students will speak Spanish or Hmong at home and will be classified as English Learners. VASA will comply with all federal, state, and judicial mandates for English Learners. The school is

dedicated to providing these students with an exceptional education and to transitioning them to English proficiency as soon as possible. However, VASA also recognizes the importance of valuing students' native languages and cultures and will reinforce an appreciation for the cultures, customs, and languages of all its students.

Students at VASA with limited proficiency in English (an "English Learner," or "EL") will achieve proficiency in the English language as quickly as possible through the use of the school's services and teaching methods. VASA ensures that EL students will not be excluded from curricular and extra-curricular activities based on an inability to speak and understand the language of instruction, and, also, that EL students will not be assigned to special education because of their lack of English proficiency. Parents whose English proficiency is limited will receive notices and information from the school in their native language whenever possible to encourage participation in the school by all members of the VASA community.

VASA will directly provide or make referrals to appropriate support services that may be needed by EL students in order to achieve and maintain a satisfactory level of academic performance. Such services may include individual counseling, group counseling, home visits, and parental counseling.

Structured English Immersion Program – All students who are English Learners will be expected to become proficient in the English language at a rapid pace. Based on a substantial research base proving the benefits of a structured English immersion program, VASA will implement a comprehensive structured immersion program in every mainstream classroom for its EL students. [*The Benefits of English Immersion*, Educational Leadership Magazine of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, January, 2000] Research shows that with the passage of Proposition 227 California students have made significant gains in reading and writing in English as well as math. [Amselle, Jorge and Allison, Amy C. *Two Years of Success: An Analysis of California Test Scores After Proposition 227*, READ Institute, August, 2000] It is the goal of VASA that all of its students will leave the school proficient in the English language and with pride and support for their home language.

Teachers at VASA will teach to the English Language Development standards set forth by the California Department of Education. Students of limited English proficiency will receive the same academic content as those students who are native English speakers. In addition to the core content, students who are assessed as English Learners will receive assistance in oral language development using a program such as *Avenues* by Hampton-Brown. VASA will ensure that all EL students have access to the core content and will employ or contract with the necessary specialists in order to do so. All instruction will be in English, however the level of English used for instruction – both oral and written – will be modified appropriately for each EL student. Language acquisition will be enhanced by exposing students to experiences in a variety of learning modalities (kinesthetic, auditory, and visual) that correspond to the subject matter and grade level curriculum.

In addition to the structured English immersion modification teachers will make in their regular instruction, within VASA's schedule, there will be ample time that can be used for additional intensive English language instruction as part of a before-school or after-school program. The

school will use proven methodologies including increased time for reading and math, individualized instruction, and extra tutorials for students who are acquiring English.

Examples of instructional models that may be employed with EL students at VASA include:

- Workshop models
- Cooperative learning
- Thematic teaching
- Language experience approach
- Dialogue journals
- Questioning techniques
- Scaffolding instruction
- Think/pare/share
- Kinesthetic activities
- Books on tape
- Graphic organizers
- Caption television
- Pre-teaching vocabulary
- Labeling items in classrooms and school in different languages
- Manipulatives
- Jigsaw
- Storytelling
- Using culturally relevant materials
- Repetition
- Modeling

VASA will seek to hire faculty who have received CLAD (Cross-Cultural Language Acquisition Design) or BCLAD (Bilingual Cross-Cultural Language Acquisition Design) training. All teachers will be trained to teach using the structured English immersion strategy. Furthermore, all teachers will receive professional development on communicating with students designated as English Learners and in techniques for detecting whether a student has English language deficiencies. VASA will provide all necessary staff with specialized curricular materials to enable EL students to achieve proficiency. In addition, staff will be trained in various teaching strategies such as GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design), scaffolding techniques, songs and chants, and the use of graphic organizers, to ensure that all students are provided with multiple avenues to access the curriculum.

Identifying English Learners – CELDT – A home language survey form will be required from each family as part of enrolling a child in the school. A student meeting any criterion requiring testing will be given the California English Language Diagnostic Test (CELDT) at the earliest opportunity and at least within 30 school days to determine his or her level of English proficiency.

Ongoing Detection – VASA teachers will also be responsible for observing each student throughout the school day with an eye toward detecting limited English proficiency. Any student suspected of having limited English proficiency will be tested to determine if and what level of

services, if any, are necessary. Should a child not be officially identified as EL, he/she will be monitored regularly via various assessment techniques to ensure his/her retention of the material.

Parent Notification – All parents/guardians of students classified EL will be notified in writing of all EL assessment and placement procedures for their child. The school will translate materials as needed to ensure that parents of EL students understand all communications and are involved in all processes related to the English Language Development of their child. If there are more than 20 EL students at the school, parent/guardian advisory committees shall be maintained to serve the advisory functions specified by law.

Monitoring and Redesignation of EL Students – The proficiency in the English language of an EL student will be monitored by teachers and qualified evaluators, and will be measured at least annually using the CELDT and other measures, such as the Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM). These assessments will benchmark students’ progress toward proficiency and determine whether continued special services are warranted.

Upon a student’s reaching proficiency in the English language, specialized English-learning services will no longer be required. An EL student may be considered as having acquired a “reasonable level of English proficiency” and may be reclassified as Fluent English Proficient (FEP) utilizing the following four criteria:

- Assessment of English language proficiency utilizing the CELDT
- Comparison of performance in basic skills
- Teacher evaluation
- Parent opinion and consultation

Prior to re-classification, all parents will receive a re-classification meeting notification letter, where they will be invited to a meeting to discuss their child’s English proficiency and academic achievement, and possible re-designation to Fluent English Proficient.

VASA will evaluate each student’s performance in academic content areas to measure the student’s progress in core subjects. If an EL student fails to show appropriate progress in these academic areas, modifications to the instructional program will be made. In addition, VASA will annually evaluate the progress of its EL students as a group to determine if any broader programmatic modifications are necessary.

Parental Waiver Process – The requirement that EL students be placed in a structured English immersion program may be waived by parental consent. At the beginning of each school year, parents/guardians shall be informed of the placement of their child in a structured English immersion program and shall be notified of an opportunity to apply for a parental exception waiver. Parents/guardians will be directed to meet with the Principal to complete the waiver process. Individual schools in which 20 students or more of a given grade level of the same language receive an approved waiver shall be required to offer an alternative program; otherwise, students must be allowed to transfer to a school where such a program is available. VASA will honor waivers whenever feasible, as per the terms of the law.

Communicating with non-English speaking parents is critical to the success of VASA. The Clearinghouse for Multilingual Documents (CMD), a new, free, central service of the California Department of Education provides access to information about who has translated what documents into which non-English languages and increases access to translated documents. The CMD is Web-accessible: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/cm/>.

### **PLAN FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE ACADEMICALLY LOW ACHIEVING**

Identifying and accommodating exceptional students – If a student demonstrates achievement significantly above or below expectations, a meeting with the parent(s), the teacher(s) and an administrator or counselor will be scheduled to determine if specialized testing is indicated and/or to decide on an appropriate course of action.

VASA expects initially to enroll a significant number of students who are not testing at grade level. (Once the school is established, it is hoped that students will enroll in Kindergarten and, because of the school's program, test at the proficient or advanced level in all areas.)

For these students:

- the application of reading and math in other parts of the curriculum will provide both motivation to learn and practice in reinforcing skills not previously learned,
- a longer school day and a calendar with added days (Saturdays) will provide additional time to bring students up to grade level,
- student and parent contracts will emphasize appropriate home support and study skills to effect academic improvement.

### **PLAN FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE ACADEMICALLY HIGH ACHIEVING**

Identifying and accommodating exceptional students – If a student demonstrates achievement significantly above or below expectations, a meeting with the parent(s), the teacher(s) and an administrator or counselor will be scheduled to determine if specialized testing is indicated and/or to decide on an appropriate course of action.

Students identified as gifted and talented will be provided with enrichment opportunities, acceleration or other educational challenges appropriate to the student. The richness of the VASA curriculum will create opportunities for high achieving students. The teaching staff will be recruited with an interest in their ability to identify and interest in working with high achieving students.

Every effort will be made to identify students' interests and to provide challenging activities to enrich their learning. Activities such as contests and competitions will be made available to high achieving students, but VASA will endeavor not to commit the common mistakes that frequently turn high achieving, gifted and talented children off to school.

### **PLAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION**

Identifying and accommodating exceptional students – If a student demonstrates achievement significantly above or below expectations, a meeting with the parent(s), the teacher(s) and an administrator or counselor will be scheduled to determine if specialized testing is indicated and/or to decide on an appropriate course of action.

Students identified as needing 504 accommodations or Individualized Educational Programs will be provided appropriate environments, instruction or assistance.

VASA staff will work in compliance with the California Master Plan for Special Education and applicable federal law. These cooperative arrangements may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Open communication between the parents, the charter school, the chartering district, and staff of the SELPA to ensure that students with exceptional needs are identified and their needs evaluated and served in compliance with any and all applicable laws.
- Delivery of special education services either at the site of the charter school, at sites maintained by the chartering district, or at the locations of other appropriate providers. These arrangements may need to be developed on a case-by-case basis, reviewed and modified on a regular basis and coordinated with applicable laws and IEP's.
- Equitable sharing of the revenues and costs associated with maintaining and operating services for students with exceptional needs between the charter school and the chartering district.

Ongoing staff professional development – The Head of School will identify himself or herself to all special education resources in the chartering district, the county office of education, and the SELPA to ensure he or she is advised of meetings and training opportunities. Members of the VASA staff will participate in all appropriate special education workshops and trainings. A staff member who attends a training will be expected to share with the other members of the staff what he or she learned.

**SUMMARY** – In sum, the purpose of VASA is to:

- (1) improve pupil learning by providing a stimulating curriculum, and achieving a 95% or better attendance rate, in a setting where students, parents and teachers make a commitment to do “whatever it takes” to achieve success;
- (2) increase learning opportunities for all pupils, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for pupils identified as academically low achieving;
- (3) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods, specifically implementing single-gender classrooms, if allowed, and using the resources and expertise of nearby museums and public television to incorporate the visual and performing arts, science, and history to improve achievement in the core subjects of math and English;
- (4) create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be participate directly in decisions affecting the learning program at the school site;
- (5) provide parents and students with expanded educational opportunities within the public school system without the constraints of traditional rules and structure;
- (6) provide schools a way to shift from a rule-based to a performance-based system of accountability;
- (7) provide competition within the public school system to stimulate improvements in all public schools.

## **ELEMENT B: MEASURABLE PUPIL OUTCOMES**

### **MEASURABLE PUPIL OUTCOMES**

All students at VASA will be held accountable to meet or exceed measurable statewide performance standards. On an annual basis, VASA faculty will review state standards and assessment systems as they evolve and, if necessary, make curriculum changes to ensure compliance.

Students will achieve proficiency in or advanced understanding of the Academic Content Standards as guided by the California Frameworks and as determined by STAR assessments in the four Core Academic Areas: English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and History/Social Science.

Foreign Language: VASA plans to recruit teachers with multiple language skills and incorporate a rich, multi-cultural experience for all students guided by the California Foreign Language Framework.

Visual and Performing Arts: VASA will follow the guidelines established in the Visual and Performing Arts Framework for music, art, dance and dramatic arts.

- Students will demonstrate appropriate grade level competence and growth in music and dance: history, singing, playing on instruments, aural skills, improvisation, and valuing music and dance, making connections between music and dance and subjects outside of music and dance, and culturally diverse music and dance traditions.
- Students will demonstrate appropriate grade level competence and growth in art history, drawing, design, multi-media, and making connections between art and subjects outside of art, and culturally diverse visual art traditions.
- Students will demonstrate appropriate grade level competence and growth in being involved in classroom and school-wide dramatic presentations, the history of drama, making connections between dramatic art and subjects outside of dramatic art, and culturally diverse dramatic art traditions.

Health/Physical Education: VASA will use the California Health Framework and Physical Education Framework as guides in this area of the curriculum. Personal health and fitness will be emphasized and integrated where appropriate with regular courses and special programs. The music/body connection will be emphasized.

Underlying and utilized throughout each of the above subject areas will be other core skills, such as: problem solving, analyzing and applying knowledge, using technology, and nurturing creativity.

Life-long Learning Skills: Students will develop skills which will enable them to pursue their own path of learning throughout their adult lives, including: study skills and habits; the ability to plan, initiate, and complete a project; and the ability to speak and perform before an audience. As part of the preparation for responsible citizenship, students will receive training in conflict resolution.

Continuous Refinement of the Curriculum: In order to best serve our students and community, VASA will continue to examine and refine its list of student outcomes over time to reflect the school's mission and any changes to state or local standards that support such mission. VASA will submit to the chartering authority at any time prior to expiration a description of any changes to the above student outcomes as an amendment to the charter. The chartering authority must agree to hear and render an amendment decision pursuant to the timelines and processes as specified in the Education Code Section 47605(b).

High Expectations: An attendance rate of 95% or better will be achieved, and at least 75% of VASA students will show one grade or skill level's worth of progress each academic year, as evidenced by scores on standardized tests and successful completion of required performances or exhibitions. Performance standards and assessments for students with special needs or limited English proficiency will be adapted as appropriate to their Individualized Education Plans or English proficiency levels.

On-going Assessment: Teachers will receive training in best assessment practices to evaluate student's skills, knowledge and attitudes through analysis of class work, class participation, quizzes, tests, and reports. Student generated exhibits and visual arts works will be evaluated and displayed. Musical and dance recitals, concerts, and theatrical productions will be scheduled on a regular basis.

**ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE INDEX** – VASA staff will review the results of all standardized testing and the state and federal school performance indicators. VASA will involve parents in evaluating individual scores for their student and the school-wide results. Modifications to the curriculum will be data-driven.

## **ELEMENT C: METHODS TO ASSESS PUPIL PROGRESS TOWARD OUTCOMES**

Pupil Attendance – An attendance rate of 95% is expected as a measure of pupil progress.

### Annual testing

ACADEMIC – VASA will test each student at the beginning of each school year and at the end of each year to assess his or her academic progress during the year. Several commercial tests and testing services are available including the SAT 10 and the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) which provide individual student scores and analyses of strengths and weaknesses. VASA will administer the STAR tests annually in grades 2 through 6.

FITNESS – The school's commitment to and emphasis on fitness and health for its students will result in a program of regularly scheduled fitness tests throughout the year as well as the administration of the state mandated test of physical fitness in grade 5 and tests of hearing and vision.

Baselines and goals – When a student enrolls in VASA, his or her records will be requested from the previous school. These records will be analyzed to discover the student’s apparent strengths and weaknesses. VASA’s fall testing using SAT10, NWEA, or another nationally normed instrument will double-check the accuracy of this first impression. This will set the baseline for each student which teachers will use to establish instructional goals and to devise the best strategies to meet them.

It is expected that initially many students will be below grade level when they enter VASA. VASA expects its students to achieve significant academic acceleration. Based on published experiences in schools with similar program emphases, it is anticipated that students will show dramatic academic improvement each year. Increases of more than one grade level in one year are expected.

### **USE AND REPORTING OF DATA**

VASA will test each student at the beginning of each school year and at the end of each year to assess his or her academic progress during the year. Several commercial tests and testing services are available including the SAT 10 and the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) which provide individual student scores and analyses of strengths and weaknesses that are aligned with the California Academic Content Standards. VASA will administer the STAR tests annually in grades 2 through 6 and will use the annual results in conjunction with the school-site assessment to determine the progress of each student in achieving proficiency based on the Academic Content Standards. Teachers and administrators will review individual results to determine appropriate placement of students and to measure the effectiveness of the program in helping each student achieve proficiency. Parents will be informed of the meaning of a Standards-based curriculum and the meaning and significance of the commercial test results.

Analysis of student achievement by means of daily class work, class participation, quizzes, tests, and reports will be organized, ongoing and cumulative. Teachers will meet regularly by grade level and school-wide to revise planning based on reviews of individual student standardized scores, daily and cumulative individual assessments and the progress of the class as a whole.

Before formal, written, periodic progress reports are sent home, parents will be expected to attend a conference with their student’s teacher to review and evaluate the student’s progress and the parents’ support at home as well as to set goals for the next reporting period. The student will be present to provide input on his or her progress and to participate in setting his or her goals for the next reporting period. Conferences without the student may also be scheduled. Also, parents will be strongly encouraged to observe instruction and to review and evaluate with the teacher evidences of learning or lack of achievement.

PowerSchool – For record keeping and communication the school will employ Internet-based PowerSchool. PowerSchool allows parents to monitor students’ academic progress and attendance 24/7. PowerSchool also features a Daily Bulletin to allow parents instantaneous access to announcements and news of the school. The school will train parents in accessing and using PowerSchool.

Computer/Internet Access – For parents without a computer, VASA will develop a program to obtain computers to loan. This will be at no cost to families qualifying for the federal free and reduced lunch program.

Web site – VASA will create a web site to post the school charter, school policies and general information about the school, staff contact information, and access to teacher web pages.

## **ELEMENT D: SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

A Board of Directors sets policy for the school and hires the principal. The principal hires all staff subject to the approval of the Board and is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school following Board policies.

Founding Advisory Committee –The names and contact information are in the Appendices.

Non-profit Corporation – VASA will constitute itself as a California Public Benefit Corporation pursuant to California law (see California Education Code Section 47604; California Corporations Code Section 5110 et seq.). This corporate form will be created by filing with the California Secretary of State the appropriate Articles of Incorporation, whereupon corporate affairs shall be governed by a Board of Directors and pursuant to Bylaws adopted by the Incorporator(s) as ratified/approved by the Board of Directors, and in accordance with such policies and practices as may from time to time be adopted by the Board of Directors. A copy of the draft Articles of Incorporation and a copy of the draft Bylaws are attached hereto for informational purposes only.

Board of Directors of VASA – The Board of Directors will initially consist of five members, two parents and three community members, serving staggered two-year terms. Advisory committees will consist of parents or guardians from the nearby neighborhood community and from outside the immediate vicinity of VASA, and educational staff from the museums and the public television station will be identified and recruited. The chartering authority will be asked to appoint a person to serve as a liaison to the Board.

Selection of the Founding Board of Directors – The members of the Founding Board of Directors were appointed by the Founding Advisory Committee, following a recruitment and interview process.

### Replacing Members of the Board of Directors

- Once the school is open, parent/guardian members will be nominated by a Parent Advisory Committee.
- Upon the anticipated expiration of a non-parent Board member's term of office, the Board of Directors will follow a recruitment, application and interview process.

Meetings – The Board of Directors will meet at least quarterly, will comply with the Brown Act, will conduct meetings according to Roberts Rules of Order, and will elect officers from among themselves.

Training – Training for members of the Board of Directors will be provided through attendance at the annual training for new board members provided by the California School Boards Association, through training provided by the California Charter Schools Association, or by contracting with an experienced and knowledgeable local trainer of school board members.

Finance, Facilities and Business Management – A qualified business manager will be employed on a part-time basis to prepare budgets and oversee the financial operation of the school. The Business Manager will report at each meeting of the Board of Directors.

Insurance Policies – VASA will maintain in effect all necessary or desirable general liability and board errors and omissions insurance policies.

Parent Involvement in School Management – Two parents will be selected to serve on the five member Board of Directors. Before the school opens, an ad hoc parent advisory committee will be created to develop contracts patterned after those of KIPP Academies to contain specific, mutual expectations of parent involvement in supporting their student’s academic success and in the overall operation of the school. The same or a second parent advisory committee will be created to participate in the process of determining the length of school days and a Saturday schedule/lengthened school year.

Once the school is open, VASA will form a Parent Advisory Committee to nominate parent Board members, to advise the administration on curricular and programmatic matters, and to assist in fundraising, classroom assistance, and chaperoning field trips and school events. VASA will also work with parents to develop and adopt a detailed set of parent involvement policies and strategies. Parents and members of the community can serve as members of the Board of Directors, Parent Advisory Council members, transportation or office volunteers, planners and chaperones of special events and field trips, guest speakers, fund raisers, tutors, and mentors. Parents can further their child's school success by limiting television, making sure their student attends school regularly and punctually, encouraging daily reading, and providing a home atmosphere conducive to study and intellectual curiosity. Parents will be asked to contract to give a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer service a year to VASA. A parent’s failure to agree to or to abide by a contract will not affect their student’s admission or enrollment status.

Student Government – To reach VASA’s goal of developing responsible citizens, students’ views and evaluations of school policies and the educational program will be solicited regularly, acknowledged, and used to effect improvements. Students in grades 4, 5, and 6 will form a Student Council to participate in planning school events and to participate in decision-making at the school.

A Non-Sectarian Public School -VASA will be non-sectarian in its programs, admissions policies, employment practices, contracts, and all other operations, shall not charge tuition, shall not discriminate against any pupil on the basis of ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability, and shall not otherwise to any extent engage in unlawful (federal and State of California) discrimination.

## **ELEMENT E: EMPLOYEE QUALIFICATIONS**

Employee Recruitment – Notices of employment openings at VASA will be posted in local newspapers, on professional education association web sites, on the school’s web site, and disseminated by word of mouth.

Administration – It is the intent of VASA to employ a highly qualified administrator with sufficient experience, appropriate training, vision and energy to work with the students, the parents/guardians, the staff and the Board to lead the school successfully through the heady and challenging first years. An administrative credential is a plus but not a firm requirement for this position.

Instructional Staff – “Highly qualified teachers”, instructional assistants, and paraprofessionals must meet the requirements specified under the No Child Left Behind Act. VASA will retain or employ teaching staff who hold appropriate California teaching certificates, documents, or other documents issued by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. These documents/materials shall be maintained on file at VASA and shall be subject to periodic inspection by the chartering authority. The staffing vision is to team a veteran teacher with at least 5 years of successful classroom teaching experience with a beginning teacher at each grade level.

Each student will be assigned to a "teacher of record" who is responsible for overseeing the student's academic progress and who monitors and is responsible for all grading and matriculation decisions as specified in the school's operational policies. VASA may also employ or retain non-certificated instructional support staff in any case where a prospective staff member has an appropriate mix of subject matter expertise, professional experience, and the demonstrated capacity to work successfully in an instructional support capacity. Instructional support staff will not serve as the teacher of record for individual pupils and may not assign grades or approve student work assignments without the approval of the "teacher of record”.

VASA also expects to enter into Memoranda of Understanding with museums, the public television station, the Fresno County Library, the Fresno County Office of Education, and other entities located in the Fresno Cultural Arts District to use resources to enrich the instructional program of the school.

The fundamental philosophy of VASA is that all instructors must possess "pedagogical content knowledge" - outstanding subject matter expertise and training combined with the ability to teach and inspire students.

Employee Development – Professional development will be provided and supported for staff to maintain and upgrade their skills. Teachers needing training or professional development to maintain or obtain their clear credential will be required to enroll in the appropriate courses or training.

Business – A part-time business manager will be employed to coordinate the financial health of the school and to oversee the smooth coordination of such business functions as payroll,

purchasing, and personnel through an existing school district's business office. The business manager will need to be experienced in public school finance and management.

Non-instructional Staff – Office staff will be recruited who have the background and experience to work effectively in a charter school situation, to be the face and voice of the school, to solve problems cheerfully, and to support school staff. The office staff will originally consist of one Office Manager with no fewer than 3 years successful experience in a public elementary school. As the school grows, additional office staff may need to be hired.

Custodial and maintenance staff will be hired or contracted for as needed.

All non-instructional staff will possess experience and expertise appropriate for their position within the school as outlined in the school's staffing plan and the school's adopted personnel policies.

VASA employees are expected to be highly competent and capable people, and, for that reason, it is expected that all employees will serve at will, under hourly or annual employment agreements.

## **ELEMENT F: HEALTH AND SAFETY PROCEDURES**

VASA will adopt and implement a comprehensive set of health, safety, and risk management policies. These policies will be developed in consultation with the school's insurance carriers and at a minimum will address the following topics:

- VASA facilities will comply with the Americans With Disabilities Act.
- Seismic safety - the school will be housed in facilities that have received Fire Marshall approval and that have been evaluated by a qualified structural engineer who has determined that the facilities present no substantial seismic safety hazard.
- Natural disasters and emergencies - policies and procedures will be developed for response to natural disasters and emergencies, including fires and earthquakes.
  - Immunizations, health screenings, and administration of medications - all enrolling students and staff will be required to provide records documenting immunizations and health screenings to the extent required for enrollment in non-charter public schools. VASA will do appropriate vision, hearing, and scoliosis screening of students. Policies will be developed relating to the administration of prescription drugs and other medicines consistent with practices in non-charter public schools.
- Tolerance for use of drugs and/or tobacco - the school functions as a drug, alcohol, and tobacco free workplace.
- Staff training on emergency and first aid response - Instructors and administrative staff will receive training in emergency response, including appropriate "first responder" training or its equivalent including preventing contact with blood-borne pathogens.
- Child abuse reporting – all staff will be required to acknowledge in writing that they understand the mandatory nature and the procedures for reporting child abuse.

- Each employee of the school will submit to a criminal background check and furnish a criminal record summary as required by Education Code Section 44237.

These policies will be incorporated as appropriate into the school's student and staff handbooks and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis in the school's staff development efforts and board policies.

## **ELEMENT G: MEANS TO ACHIEVE A REFLECTIVE RACIAL AND ETHNIC BALANCE**

VASA will actively recruit a diverse student population from the central core of Fresno and the Fresno area using citizen groups, elected officials, and media targeting the desired populations.

The ethnic makeup of the school will reflect that of the Fresno Unified School District: American Indian or Alaskan Native – under 1%, Asian – 15%, Pacific Islander – under 1%, Filipino – under 1%, Hispanic or Latino – 55%, African-American – 11%, and White (not Hispanic) – 17%.

## **ELEMENT H: ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS**

### **STUDENT ADMISSION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

No less than sixty percent of each class is to be enrolled from the nearby Program Improvement elementary schools; up to forty percent of each class is to be enrolled from students residing outside the nearby attendance areas. VASA shall initially admit all qualified pupils\* in grades K – 3 who wish to attend, and shall utilize public random drawings to the extent qualified applicants from the two targeted student populations exceed capacity, provided that preference shall be given to pupils currently attending VASA and to pupils who reside in the specified attendance areas of the chartering district. Federally supported charter schools can reserve a small percentage of spaces for children of founders and staff. Spaces can be reserved for returning students and their siblings. Preferences are legal, if they are implemented by putting names of students into the lottery in proportion to the desired mix.

\* Prospective students and their parents or guardians will be briefed regarding the school's instructional and operational philosophy and will be given a copy or summary of the school's student-related policies. A pupil shall be qualified based on his or her parents or guardians being willing to sign a contract specifying home support for the student including a time and quiet place for home assignments, a commitment to getting the child to school on time on a daily basis, a commitment to attending teacher conferences, a commitment to volunteering time at the school, and agreeing to other policies such as student discipline, dress code and others to be determined by the initial parent advisory committee. For students in grades 4, 5 and 6, a pupil shall be qualified based on his or her being willing to sign a contract specifying his or her agreeing to adhere to school policies of behavior, dress, discipline, and others to be determined

by administration, faculty, staff, parents, students and the Board of Directors during the first year of the school's operation.

Students will be accepted to VASA in the spring of the year. Student selection will be done through a public, random drawing from the overall pool of qualified applicants in April of each year (the drawing will take place after the charter has been approved and appropriate publicity and outreach to the community has been conducted). Gender balance will be assured, if allowed, because of the proposed single-gender strategy of the school. If federal rules prevent single-gender instruction, gender balance will be attained by publicity and recruiting to ensure a gender-balanced pool of applicants. Vacancies during the year will be filled as they occur by public, random drawing from a waiting list.

A pedagogical philosophy of VASA is to teach students in a single-sex environment. This means that there will be four admissions pools of applicants for each lottery at each grade level: males from the nearby attendance areas, females from the nearby attendance areas, males from outside the attendance areas, and females from outside the attendance areas. Names will be pulled at random from each pool until each class is filled in the desired proportion of students living nearby and students living outside the nearby attendance areas. Except as otherwise expressly provided in this charter, admission to VASA shall not be determined according to the place of residence of the pupil, or his/her parent or guardian, within this state.

In the second and subsequent years of operation VASA will add grades 4, 5, and 6 in sequence until it is enrolling students in grades K – 6.

Children of school staff, development team, or Advisory Board who meet entrance requirements will be eligible for admission to the school.

Siblings of currently enrolled VASA students who meet entrance requirements will be eligible for admission to the school.

VASA will be non-sectarian in its programs, admissions policies, employment practices, contracts, and all other operations, shall not charge tuition, shall not discriminate against any pupil on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, or disability, and shall not otherwise to any extent engage in unlawful (federal and State of California) discrimination. There are no admissions requirements for students. Parents of prospective students will be expected to read and sign a contract listing the school's expectations of them in helping their student be successful and their agreement to provide this help.

### **NON-DISCRIMINATION**

To the maximum extent allowed by law, VASA will implement a student recruitment outreach strategy in order to ensure a student body at least as diverse (variously in consideration of race and ethnicity) as the general population of the chartering authority, including the following:

- An enrollment timeline and process that is scheduled and adopted to include a timeline that allows for a broad-based recruiting and application process.

- The development of promotional and informational material that appeals to all of the various racial and ethnic groups represented in the district.
- The appropriate development of promotional and informational materials in languages other than English to appeal to limited English proficient populations.
- The distribution of promotional and informational materials to a broad variety of community groups and agencies that serve the various racial, ethnic, and interest groups represented in the district.
- Outreach meetings in several areas of the region to reach prospective students and parents.
- The use of radio, newspaper, television, the Internet, and other media to inform parents and prospective students about the school.

**PUBLIC SCHOOL ATTENDANCE ALTERNATIVES**

The chartering authority shall not require any pupil enrolled in a chartering authority’s school to attend VASA. Students who opt not to attend the charter school or are suspended or expelled therefrom, may seek to attend other chartering authority schools or pursue an inter-district transfer in accordance with existing enrollment and transfer policies of their district or county of residence.

Each parent or guardian who chooses to submit an application for a child to enroll in VASA will be required to attend a parent meeting at which the consequences of the choice the parent is making will be explained. In particular, the parent or guardian of each student enrolled in the charter school will be informed that the students have no right to admission in a particular school of any local education agency as a consequence of enrollment in the charter school, except to the extent that such a right is extended by the chartering authority.

**ELEMENT I: FINANCIAL (AND PROGRAMMATIC) AUDIT**

**BUDGETS**

The first-year operational budget, including startup costs including reasonable estimates of all anticipated revenues and expenditures necessary to operate the school – including special education – and budget notes that clearly describe assumptions or revenue estimates, including, but not limited to the basis for average daily attendance estimates and staffing levels is included in the Appendices.

Cash flow and financial projections for the first three years of operation and plans for establishment of a reserve are also included in the Appendices.

**INSURANCE**

VASA will acquire and finance general liability, workers compensation, and other necessary insurance of the types and in the amounts required for an enterprise of similar purpose and circumstance, and provide evidence that the cost and availability of such insurance has been researched by the petitioners.

**FINANCIAL REPORTING**

The VASA Board of Directors will form an audit committee each fiscal year to oversee the preparation and completion of an annual audit of the school's financial affairs. The audit will

verify the accuracy of the school's financial statements, revenue-related data collection and reporting practices, and review the school's internal controls. The audit will be conducted in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles applicable to public schools. To the extent required under applicable federal law, the audit scope will be expanded to include items and processes specified in any applicable Office of Management and Budget circulars.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and subject to its approval, it is the responsibility of the Business Manager to oversee the selection of an auditor experienced in education finance and the entire audit process.

### **AUDITS**

By December 15 annually an audit report will be submitted to the charter-granting agency, the California Department of Education, the County Superintendent, and the State Controller (Education Code 47605(m)). VASA will compile and provide to the chartering authority an annual performance report. This report will, at a minimum, include the following data:

- Summary data showing student progress toward the goals and outcomes from assessment instruments and techniques listed in Element C: Methods to Assess Pupil Progress toward Outcomes.
- An analysis of whether student performance is meeting the goals specified in Element C: Methods to Assess Pupil Progress toward Outcomes. This data will be displayed on both a school-wide basis and disaggregated by major racial and ethnic categories to the extent feasible without compromising student confidentiality.
- A copy of the school's Board of Directors' self-evaluation on prior- year management performance, summary of major decisions and policies established during the year, and upcoming year goals.
- Data on the level of parent involvement in the school's governance and summary data from an annual parent and student satisfaction survey.
- Data regarding the number of staff working at the school and their qualifications.
- A copy of the school's health and safety policies and/or a summary of any major changes to those policies during the year.
- Information demonstrating whether the school implemented the means to achieve a racially and ethnically balanced student population.
- An overview of the school's admissions practices during the year and data regarding the numbers of students enrolled, the number on waiting lists, and the number of students suspended or expelled.
- Analyses of the effectiveness of the school's internal and external dispute mechanisms and data on the number and resolution of disputes and complaints.
- Other information regarding the educational program and the administrative, legal, and governance operations of the school relative to compliance with the terms of the charter generally.

VASA shall promptly respond to all reasonable inquiries, including, but not limited to, inquiries regarding its financial records, from its chartering authority, the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, or from the Superintendent of Public Instruction and shall consult with the chartering authority, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, or the Superintendent of Public Instruction regarding any such inquiries. The school's audit committee will review any audit findings,

exceptions or deficiencies and report to the school's Board of Directors with recommendations on how to resolve them. The Board will report to the chartering authority regarding how the findings, exceptions and deficiencies have been or will be resolved. Any disputes regarding the resolution of audit exceptions and deficiencies will be referred to the dispute resolution process.

It is anticipated that the annual audit will be completed within six months of the close of the fiscal year and that a copy of the auditor's findings will be forwarded to the chief financial officer of the chartering authority, the Fresno County Office of Education, the State Controller's Office, and the California Department of Education by December 15 of each year.

VASA will receive funding pursuant to Education Code Section 47613.5 and its successor provisions and may opt to receive its funding directly from the state or through any other available mechanism. In the event that the regulations to create a charter school funding system authorized by Education Code Section 47613.5 are not adopted or not fully implemented, the chartering authority agree to take all reasonable steps to ensure that VASA is funded pursuant to the principles and standards contained in Section 47613.5. Any funds due to the school that flow through the chartering authority shall be forwarded to VASA as soon as practical. The school and chartering authority will negotiate in good faith on an annual basis to develop a memorandum of understanding that establishes the specific financial and service relationship between the two parties.

## **ELEMENT J: PUPIL SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION**

### **SUSPENSION/EXPULSION PROCEDURES**

VASA will develop and maintain a comprehensive set of student discipline policies. These policies will be printed and distributed as part of the school's student/parent handbook and will clearly describe the school's expectations regarding attendance, leaving school during the school day, mutual respect, substance abuse, violence, and safety. The school administrator may, pursuant to the school's adopted policies, suspend students who fail to comply with these policies at any time.

- Students who habitually fail to comply with these policies and/or who present an immediate threat to health and safety may also be suspended and later expelled by the school's Board of Directors upon recommendation of the school's administrator.
- The policies will be developed to conform to applicable federal and state law regarding students with exceptional needs.
- Prior to expulsion, students will be accorded due process unless the student's conduct presents an immediate threat to the health or safety of others.
- The school will notify the chartering authority of any expulsions and will include suspension and expulsion data in its annual performance report.

## **ELEMENT K: STAFF BENEFITS AND RETIREMENT SYSTEM**

A study will be made of salary schedules and benefits in area school districts to ensure that VASA's offers of employment will be competitive and attractive to prospective employees. VASA will participate in the State Teachers' Retirement System for administrators and instructional staff. All employees with over a halftime assignment will be provided with school supported medical, dental, and vision benefits, life insurance and long term disability policies, and opportunities to participate in individual coverages and retirement programs as allowed by state and federal law.

## **ELEMENT L: ATTENDANCE ALTERNATIVES**

Students enrolled in schools operated by the chartering authority who opt not to attend VASA may attend other schools in the district or those operated by the county or pursue an inter-district transfer in accordance with existing enrollment and transfer policies of their district or county of residence.

## **ELEMENT M: DESCRIPTION OF EMPLOYEE RIGHTS**

Permanent employees of Fresno Unified School District who leave their positions to work for VASA shall retain any rights that the District specifies. To the extent that it is consistent with the District's policies, as well as VASA's adopted personnel policies, such employees may opt to purchase employee benefits from the District, or have the school purchase employee benefits on their behalf. Any rights of return to employment in the District shall be specified by the District.

The governing board of the chartering authority shall not require any employee thereof to be employed by VASA.

## **ELEMENT N: DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS**

Consonant with the foregoing and controlling law, the VASA Board of Directors will adopt policies and processes for airing and resolving internal and external disputes, including disputes arising under this charter. The governing board of the chartering authority agrees to refer all complaints regarding the school's operations to the school's chief administrative officer for resolution in accordance with the school's adopted policies. Parents, students, board members, volunteers, and staff at VASA will be provided with a copy of the school's policies and dispute resolution process and will agree to work within it. The governing board of the chartering authority agrees not to intervene in the dispute without the consent of the school's Board of Directors unless the matter directly relates to this charter.

The terms of this charter are severable. In the event that any of the provisions are determined to be unenforceable or invalid for any reason, the remainder of the charter shall remain in effect, unless mutually agreed otherwise by the chartering authority and Board of Directors of the

charter school. The chartering authority and VASA agree to meet to discuss and resolve any issues or differences relating to invalidated provisions in a timely, good faith fashion.

VASA and the chartering authority may voluntarily agree to mediation to resolve disputes. Any costs resulting from the resolution of a dispute will be born equally by VASA and the chartering authority.

## **ELEMENT O: LABOR RELATIONS**

VASA shall be deemed the exclusive public school employer of the employees of VASA and shall follow all appropriate provisions of the Educational Employee Relations Act (EERA). *[Ref. Education Code §47605(b)(5)(O)]*

## **ELEMENT P: SCHOOL CLOSURE PROCEDURES**

In the event of closure or dissolution of VASA, the Board of Directors shall delegate to the Principal the responsibility to manage the dissolution process, which shall include a final audit to determine the disposition of all assets and liabilities of the school, and notification to parents of children enrolled in the school. Additionally, a list of students attending the school will be sent to the Fresno Unified School District.

Student Records – VASA shall transfer student records to the Fresno Unified School District and the parents of the enrolled students shall be notified of the transfer of records.

Assets – The remaining assets of VASA, after satisfaction of outstanding debts, shall be transferred to another charter school within Fresno County. If OPSC funds are used for buildings and/or furnishings, these buildings and/or furnishings become the property of the chartering authority

## **IMPACT ON THE CHARTER AUTHORIZER**

### **ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CHARTERING AUTHORITY**

VASA will seek the chartering authority's agreement to allow VASA to separately purchase administrative or other goods or services as outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with fees imposed as appropriate. VASA will contract with an appropriate outside agency for the provision of administrative support services. Such goods or services shall be made available to the charter school at cost. The specific terms and fees imposed, as appropriate, may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Accounting, payroll, and fiscal support services.
- Student information, assessment, and other data processing services.
- \* Categorical programs management and grant development and compliance services.
- \* Legal counsel and insurance services.
- \* Purchasing, delivery, and warehousing services.

- Child nutrition services.

### **FISCAL IMPACTS ON THE CHARTER AUTHORIZER**

In addition to the income of 1% of the charter school's revenue provided by charter school law, should the charter authorizer be the Fresno Unified School District, there are three potential negative financial impacts.

The first is the loss of the ADA per each student that attends VASA instead of a Fresno Unified school. VASA may attract students living in other districts, so it is impossible to state that every VASA student would represent a loss of ADA by Fresno Unified.

The second fiscal impact is the potential special education liability for a student with special needs. For a Fresno Unified special education student who enrolls in VASA, there should be no impact, since Fresno Unified is responsible for the student whether or not he or she attends VASA. If a student with special needs residing in another district enrolls in VASA, Fresno Unified, as the chartering authority, will have the additional responsibility for meeting the needs of this student.

A third possible fiscal impact is if VASA applies to the Office of Public School Construction (OPSC) for funding for 14 proposed classrooms. This may reduce Fresno Unified's elementary construction grant funds.

A positive benefit to Fresno Unified, an impacted district, is a reduction of students in overcrowded schools.

Another benefit to Fresno Unified and other districts in the Fresno area would be to provide a model for improving instruction and test scores. Assuming VASA fulfills its stated goals of enhancing student learning by using an arts and science rich curriculum, the program developed at VASA will be made available to anyone wishing to use VASA's approach as a means to improve test scores.

VASA is not asking Fresno Unified to provide physical facilities or to provide administrative or business services.

This form is intended to be signed by a duly authorized representative of the applicant and submitted with the Full Application.

As the authorized representative of the applicant, I hereby certify that the information submitted in this application for a charter for Valley Arts & Science Academy (VASA) to be located at or near 1605 Van Ness Avenue, Fresno, CA 93721 is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; I also certify that this application does not constitute the conversion of a private school to the status of a public charter school; and further I understand that if awarded a charter, the school:

Will meet all statewide standards and conduct the student assessments required, pursuant to Education Code §60605, and any other statewide standards authorized in statute, or student assessments applicable to students in non-charter public schools. [Ref. California Education Code §47605(c)(1)]

Will/will not (**circle one**) be deemed the exclusive public school employer of the employees of the charter school for the purposes of the Educational Employment Act (Chapter 10.7 (commencing with §3540) of Division 4 of Title 4 of Title 1 of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> [Ref. California Education Code §47605(b)(5)(O)]

Will be nonsectarian in its programs, admissions policies, employment practices, and all other operations. [Ref. California Education Code §47605(d)(1)]

Will not charge tuition. [Ref. California Education Code §47605(d)(1)]

Will admit all students who wish to attend the school, and who submit a timely application, unless the school receives a greater number of applications than there are spaces for students, in which case each applicant will be given equal chance of admission through a random lottery process. [Ref. California Education Code §47605(d)(2)(B)]

Will not discriminate against any student on the basis of ethnic background, national origin, gender, or disability. [Ref. California Education Code §47605(d)(1)]

Will adhere to all provisions of federal law relating to students with disabilities, including the IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1974, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, that are applicable to it. .

Will meet all requirements for employment set forth in applicable provisions of law, including, but not limited to credentials, as necessary. [Ref. Criteria for Review, §11967.5.1(f)(5)]

Will ensure that teachers in the school hold a Commission on Teacher Credentialing certificate, permit, or other document equivalent to that which a teacher in other public schools are required to hold. As allowed by statute, flexibility will be given to non-core, non-college preparatory teachers. [Ref. California Education Code §47605(l)]

Will at all times maintain all necessary and appropriate insurance coverage.

Will follow any and all other federal, state, and local laws and regulations that pertain to the applicant or the operation of the charter school.

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Authorized Representative's Signature

Date

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of any petition to establish a charter school that is approved by the State Board of Education, the charter school must be deemed the exclusive public school employer.