September 30, 2020

Complaint re: Sequoia Choice Schools

Arizonans for Charter School Accountability

The Five Year Evaluation of EdKey Sequoia Choice School was conducted on April 18, 2018 and EdKey revised the Program of Instruction at Sequoia Choice immediately afterward (a copy is in Appendix 1). The Academic Systems Review (ASR) (see Appendix 2) conducted in the Five Year Evaluation and the new Program of Instruction are no longer valid because Sequoia Choice now utilizes multiple new academic programs that do not meet state academic standards. Sequoia Choice is enrolling students that participate in private, for-profit micro-school programs that do not use the educational program or the teachers evaluated in the 2018 ASR and are not addressed in the Program of Instruction.

Sequoia Choice is in violation of their charter contract by failing to amend their Program of Instruction to include the curriculum offered in “partnership” relationships with private micro-school companies where EdKey’s only role is to submit ADM to ADE generated by partnership enrollment and to administer the AZMerit test. EdKey is not providing the educational program or instructional support for these students.

EdKey Sequoia Choice has failed to provide the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools with an amendment to their Program of Instruction to encompass the following new educational programs now offered by Sequoia Choice:

* **Prenda Inc.**
	+ The curriculum at Prenda, The Empowered Learner Program, includes the following commercial programs that are not a part of the Sequoia Online educational program and have not been certified to meet Arizona State Standards:
		- Lexia
		- NoRedInk
		- Khan Academy
		- Zearn
		- Dreambox
		- Treasure Hunt Reading and PrendaWorld developed by Prenda
	+ Instruction at Prenda micro-schools is either by individual home school parents or by uncertified Prenda Learning Guides that work with groups of 5-10 multi-aged students in their home. Learning Guides are paid about$25,000/year from funds supplied by EdKey. Sequoia Choice teachers are not involved
* **Venture Upward Inc.**
	+ Venture Upward is not registered as an Arizona corporation. The curriculum at Venture Upward is fluid and can be purchased at parent discretion using funds supplied by EdKey to Venture Upward:
		- Edgenuity Courseware
		- K12
		- BYU Independent Study
		- Acellus Academy
		- Mathseeds
		- Mathletics
		- Studies Weekly
		- Venture Ahead (developed by Venture Upward)
	+ Venture Upward does not supply instructional support. Parents are expected to facilitate the program and are given $1,000, derived from payments by Edkey, to purchase and keep computers, art and music supplies, pens and markers, magazine subscriptions, and individual music and sports lessons.
* **AZ Learning Communities**
	+ AZ Learning Communities utilizes Moby Max for the four core subjects but leaves parents free to determine the specific curriculum used
	+ AZ Learning Communities pays parents to home school their students utilizing funds provided by EdKey to provide monthly stipends for “external planning and coordinating community events”
* **Primavera Elementary**
	+ EdKey is also partnering with charter school Primavera Elementary. EdKey collects ADM and administers state testing while providing Primavera Elementary with an online K-5 program from Accelerate Schools. It is unclear if Sequoia Choice, Accelerate, or Primavera Elementary is supplying instructional support.

EdKey Sequoia Choice splits the $8,000/pupil ADM with the 4 companies despite the fact that EdKey receives no services from them other than supplying ADM.

Based on the dozens of online programs now offered by Sequoia Choice and the exclusion of Sequoia teachers from providing instruction and academic support to these “partners”, the 2018 ASR below is now longer valid. There are no teachers, no professional development plans, no teacher evaluation plan, no curriculum map, no pacing guides, and no systematic review for the Sequoia Choice “partners” listed above. Sequoia Choice is in violation of its charter contract by failing to amend its program of instruction to include the programs and curriculums of its “partner” schools.

ASBCS needs to immediately conduct an Academic Systems Review of Sequoia Choice to assure that public funds are not being diverted to private school companies that fail to utilize state approved curriculum and qualified professionals to provide instruction and instructional support.

**Appendix 1. Sequoia Choice Program of Instruction**

**Edkey, Inc. – Sequoia Choice**

**Entity ID: 4329**

**Program of Instruction**

Rationale for the Change to the Program of Instruction

As a result of the 5-year review process it was evident that the program of instruction for Sequoia Choice Schools needs to be revised.

Proposed Changes to the Program of Instruction

The program of instruction on file with ASBCS is out of date. The changes to mission, vision, educational philosophy, curriculum, assessment, methods of instruction and promotion requirements will be reflective of the current academic approach.

Previous Mission Statement

The mission of Arizona Distance Learning Sequoia Choice Labs is to deliver high quality educational opportunities to students, helping them develop the competencies, character, and confidence needed to fulfill their individual goals and meet challenges of a changing world.

Mission Statement

The mission of Sequoia Choice is to deliver high quality educational opportunities to students, helping them develop the competencies, character, and confidence needed to fulfill their individual goals and meet challenges of a changing world.

Vision Statement

Sequoia Choice provides a caring environment of high expectations, individualized attention to empower each student with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college, career and life.

Educational Philosophy

1. Knowing each student on a personal and data-driven basis, through conversations, meaningful assessments, and highly interactive teaching;
2. Promoting a consistent, caring environment of high expectations and accountability, and by creating effective policies, fun incentives, and opportunities for family involvement;
3. Being an integral part of our learning community, in which students, families, teachers, partnering organizations, and staff share knowledge and support one another;
4. Using all talents and resources to achieve our mission, with a reflective, teachable, forward-looking attitude of constant renewal;
5. Preparing students for successful continuing-education experiences and careers by allowing them to build individualized, relevant, and creative curricula within a standards-based framework.

Curriculum and Methods of Instruction

Students in grades K-6 experience their instruction in a hybrid model that includes both pencil/paper and online work. The K-6 teachers work closely with the parent, who is at home as the learning coach, to ensure fidelity in the instruction of the ACCRS, provide interventions, and regularly assess and discuss data with the parent. The K-6 teachers actively assess student learning through submitted work, online assessments, regular benchmarks, and observations during virtual teaching sessions.

Students in grades 7-8 access their entire curriculum through our online platform, ELMS. Each course is aligned to the ACCRS, and all of our courses are written by teachers, incorporating best-practice teaching strategies while using research-based instructional resources. The online teacher individualizes instruction based on the analysis of data from benchmarks, pre-tests, assessments, and state tests. Courses are adjusted to meet the needs of the learner as well as provide specific feedback, virtual group sessions, and one-on-one instruction.

All students are able to work through courses at their own pace as long as adequate progress is consistently being made. Progress is monitored by both the teacher and academic advisor.

Students in grades 9-12 experience their instruction in both hybrid model that includes both the traditional classroom setting as well as online work and an online setting similar to students in grades 7 - 8. Teachers instruct with fidelity to the ACCRS, provide interventions, and regularly assess and discuss data with the parents and students. The 9-12 teachers actively assess student learning through submitted work, online assessments, regular benchmarks, and classroom interactions.

Methods of Assessment

Edkey utilizes state, organizational, site-based classroom assessments to monitor and plan for students learning. A standards based comprehensive assessment program allows for both benchmark and formative assessments that are directly tied to the standards. The data from this assessment platform shows strong correlation between student performance on the assessment and AzMERIT.

Formative: Including but not limited to classroom based assessments, curriculum based assessments, formal and informal observations, pre-tests, and post-test.

Summative: Including but not limited to multiple benchmark assessments and annual state assessments.

Edkey policies and procedures outline expectations for formative and summative assessment schedules.

Promotion and Graduation

Elementary students are expected to meet the grade level defined standards as evidenced by progress on report cards, and are promoted based on the academic performance and readiness for the upcoming grade.

3rd Grade Students - The Arizona “Move on When Reading” statute (A.R.S. § 15-701) requires that all parents/guardians of K-3 students be made aware of the potential for retention at thirdgrade if their child is not reading at the prescribed level.

In order to be promoted to high school, students cannot have failed more than one course. In the event they fail 2 or more courses, they will need to attend summer school or repeat 8th grade, depending on the decision of the academic team which includes the student and their family.

At the high school level, students are promoted based on the completion of prerequisite courses. Failure to pass cohort appropriate core coursework results in mandatory summer school.

In order to earn a high school diploma, our students must meet the minimum requirements set forth by the state of Arizona, which requires 4 years of English, 3 years of history, 4 years of math, 3 years of science, a fine art credit and 7 additional elective credits, for a total of 22 credits. Our students are encouraged to pursue the university path graduation plan, which adds a 4th year lab science, two years of consecutive foreign language, and pre-calculus or higher for a 4th year math. As part of our partnership with Central Arizona College, students may also earn credit towards their Associate’s degree while earning high school credit. As a result of this dual enrollment program, students are eligible to receive both their high school diploma and an associate’s degree at the same time.

Alignment between Program of Instruction to the revised Mission Statement

The revised mission statement, educational philosophy and program of instruction were developed to align to the academic model utilized at Sequoia Choice. An amendment has also been submitted to change the mission statement for the charter to ensure alignment.

Changes to the Program of Instruction work to improve pupil achievement for the target population in the following ways:

By defining the instructional methodologies and the emphasis to increase rigor, student outcomes will increase. The continuity and consistency in instructional expectations will help staff and students achieve greater success both academically and socially.

Transition Plan

The need for instructional and operational resources is reviewed annually during the budgeting process.

Training is provided to all returning and new staff annually that focuses on academic and operational tool, in addition to Edkey policies and procedures.

**Appendix 2. 2018 Sequoia Choice Academic Systems Review**

 

