

# The Parent Pack

## I. Academic Program

### Our Overall Philosophy

Real knowledge comes from experiences that are authentic and engaging. Young people learn when learning is connected to the real world they live in, to the other things they are studying throughout the day, and to issues they care about. At Paulo Freire Freedom School we create learning environments that support powerful teaching and learning. Learning can be hard work, but at Paulo Freire we believe that learning can also be a joyful experience. Our students are encouraged to pursue individual passions, to explore their issues with peers, and to experience the satisfaction of knowing how to navigate through complex ideas and problems.

At Paulo Freire we do not shy away from thinking about the environmental and social problems facing the world - instead we immerse our young people in thinking about them. Our curricular focus on social justice and environmental sustainability is reality-based, but grounded in hope. Students not only learn about issues and problems, but are encouraged to think about solutions. Students are required to act on these solutions through an integrated service learning program and have opportunities to develop leadership, conflict resolution, and peace-building skills. At Paulo Freire we not only learn about the world as it is today, we also dream about it as it can be and work towards the fulfillment of that dream together.

At Paulo Freire we believe that children grow not only academically and physically, but emotionally, socially, and spiritually as well. The growth they experience in these areas is interconnected with their academic success and with their health and happiness as a whole person. We are committed to supporting and challenging every child to rise to their full potential. Within carefully designed learning environments individual students are supported and challenged to grow and become...to rise and transform ...to develop into integrally whole human beings (body, heart, mind, and soul).

### Our Curriculum

All students take math, science and humanities. Whereas the curricula in these core classes are aligned with Arizona State Standards, students are also challenged to ask and seek answers to open-ended, provocative questions about relevant topics. Teachers design and implement hands-on and field-based experiences that engage students in active learning.

#### Science

Paulo Freire's science program incorporates concepts from physical, earth and life sciences into integrated units of study. We are committed to making science hands-on, relevant and fun. Students have ample opportunities to conduct experiments and observe natural phenomenon in field experiences through our Friday Expedition program. In addition to learning the scientific inquiry method and conducting rigorous research, students also master the ability to communicate their findings and methods.

#### Math

Students at Paulo Freire use the Connected Mathematics curriculum which was designed to help students develop mathematical knowledge, understanding and skill, as well as, awareness and appreciation of the rich connections among mathematical strands and between mathematics and other disciplines. In Connected Mathematics important math ideas are embedded in the context of interesting problems. As students explore a series of connected problems, they encounter these abstract

mathematical ideas, develop understanding of the embedded concepts, and learn to employ appropriate problem-solving strategies and ways of thinking.

### Humanities

Humanities is taught on a two-year cycle for 6th and 7th graders. The course content is informed by the Arizona Content Standards and organized around essential questions. Interdisciplinary by design, the course integrates skills and concepts from language arts, literature, social studies and philosophy. Our focus upon social justice is addressed in each unit. The humanities course in the 8th grade continues this themed-based and interdisciplinary approach, providing multiple opportunities for student demonstration of understanding and authentic performance and preparing eighth graders for their portfolio exhibitions at the end of the year.

### Literacy

Writing will be an integral part of the core curriculum, both as a tool for understanding content and as a measure for assessment. Students will be well versed and have continual opportunities to participate in Writer's Workshop - where students learn and practice the process of writing. The Humanities courses at Paulo Freire will be full of rich literature, exposing students to both the artistry of the written word while at the same time reinforcing the thematic units of instruction. Our school schedule incorporates time for students to participate in silent, sustained reading on a daily basis. Students who read and write frequently are better readers and writers and when they are given a choice in what they read and/or write they develop, more readily, the literacy habit. By fostering a love of the written word at this young age, we have an impact on their intellectual development for years to come.

### English Language Learners & Spanish

All students are required to learn Spanish. Students who already speak Spanish take a Spanish literacy class where they work on reading and writing in Spanish. Our English Language Learners are incorporated into the regular classes with teachers knowledgeable in the SIOP method, who help them with their transition to English fluency. They are given additional support as provided in their Individual Learning Plans.

### Electives & Learning Labs

Twice a week students participate in electives of their choosing. Each trimester we offer more than a dozen different elective options including PE, visual art and music classes. We are particularly proud of our partnership with the ZUZI! Dance Company who provide multiple classes each trimester. Additionally, twice a week students participate in Learning Lab which is an opportunity for students to develop an independent project of their choosing, under the supervision of their advisor.

### Health

The Arizona Health Standards are delivered to our students through our Advisory Program. Activities are developed around areas such as nutrition, stress/anger/grief management, sexual harassment, conflict resolution, drug/alcohol information etc. Students also are required to participate in Active Lunch on Wednesday and the Friday P.E. program to ensure that all students get a minimum amount of exercise per week. Finally, pursuant to Arizona law, PFFS students are given the opportunity to participate in sex education classes with parental permission.

## **Our Instruction**

Our curriculum is developed collaboratively and designed 'backwards' meaning that we start by designating what learning is essential (from the articulated standards and our unique curricular focus), and then work backwards - planning how to get students to meet those desired outcomes. Because we believe that 'less is more' and that it is better to go deeply into a subject than cover breadth superficially, teacher collaboration is critical to rectify both redundancies and gaps that might emerge. Subjects are organized around essential questions that are provocative, relevant and multifaceted.

In addition to their academic work, all students work towards developing 6 habits of mind, articulated by the National Turning Points Center, which we believe are particularly relevant to middle school development. At Paulo Freire students will be able to:

- Think creatively
- Identify and solve complex and meaningful problems
- Know their passions, strengths, and challenges
- Communicate and work well with others
- Lead healthy lives,
- Be ethical and caring citizens of a diverse world

### Staff Development

The staff of Paulo Freire is a professional learning community dedicated to examining teacher and student practice on an ongoing basis in order to adapt practice to improve student learning. For ongoing improvement to the Program of Instruction, all staff members participate in a Critical Friends Group where they examine student work, conduct peer observations, and discuss current research on best practices. The staff meets weekly on Wednesday from 2:00-5:00 to discuss student needs, school programs and improvement of teaching practice. At Paulo Freire we resist the 'closed door' culture found in so many schools/classrooms and instead cultivate a collaborative climate where teaching and learning is public.

### **Our Assessment Program**

At Paulo Freire we evaluate the work of our students through authentic performances and demonstrations of understanding, public exhibitions of student work, and portfolio assessments, as well as, more traditional testing instruments (standardized tests, course-level assessments and classroom-based diagnostics). Whereas teachers make on-going formative assessments of student learning, the primary means at Paulo Freire for determining what students know and are able to do is through authentic demonstrations/exhibitions of student learning. Exhibitions could include students conducting a trial, publishing a school newspaper, or presenting data obtained from their scientific studies to a regulatory panel.

PFFS students facilitate student-led conferences twice a year in which they reflect upon their academic growth, their strengths and stretches, and their passions. These bi-annual conferences prepare them for their 'end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade' portfolio exhibitions which are presented to a panel of judges consisting of peers, parents and faculty members. Successful completion of these 8<sup>th</sup> grade exhibitions is a requirement for participation in the final 8<sup>th</sup> grade promotion ceremony.

Because of the vagueness associated with most report cards and the potential they have to cause harm, our student reports do not have single grades indicating student performance in classes. Instead, students at Paulo Freire receive Narrative Report Cards at the end of each trimester, which have student proficiency levels for the major learning outcomes of the course as well as written descriptions detailing their performance. We do have a conversion process for high schools requiring a single grade and/or GPA.

### **Personalization/Community**

Because Paulo Freire is a small school, we have the opportunity to personalize our learning environment in ways that large schools can only dream of. We are committed to knowing our students and their families well and we have very deliberately created structures to enhance further personalization.

### Advisory

Student advisories meet twice a week to address both the academic and interpersonal needs of our students and allow teachers to ensure that each student's work and emotional life (both critical to student

success) remain on track. Each advisor is responsible for no more than 15 students. The primary point of contact between home and school is the student advisory, guaranteeing that each student has at least one adult advocate at the school who knows them and their family very well.

### Intersession

For one week at the end of each trimester, we break from regular classroom instruction and students/teachers pursue particular topics of interest in an intensive, 4-day experience. Examples of past intersession experiences include: Japan studies, cooking, biking, law, theater, homelessness, caving, backpacking, Mexican architecture, political art, dance, etc. For students who are struggling to master the academic learning goals in their core classes during a particular trimester, intersession week also provides an opportunity for remediation.

### KIVA

School begins each morning with a 15-minute community gathering to celebrate achievements, share announcements, discuss current events, or experience mini-presentations. KIVA is a daily reminder that we are a community of people gathered in a distinctly human endeavor: to learn collaboratively and joyously.

### AfterSchool Program

Paulo Freire offers after school options developed with the input of our parents and students. Each year we guarantee a quiet space where students can do their homework and receive some assistance if necessary. Other options have in the past included Chess Club, D&D Club, Activism Club, and Yearbook Club. Our AfterSchool program is fee based to cover the cost of adult supervision, but we offer scholarship for those with financial need.

### High School Transition

At the end of their 8th grade year, Paulo Freire students are required to successfully complete our 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Portfolio Exhibition – a public demonstration of what they know and are able to do. This includes a defense of their student work portfolios and a demonstration of mastery of the Six Habits of Mind. After successful completion of this public exhibition of work and demonstrated proficiency in the academic core, Paulo Freire students are promoted to high school.

## **II. Admission**

### Enrollment Eligibility

Paulo Freire Freedom School is open to all students residing in the state of Arizona. Potential students may apply for enrollment for the subsequent school year during the open enrollment period. At the end of this period, should more students apply than are spaces available for the next school year, a lottery will be held. The lottery will be held annually in March and will determine the students to be enrolled in the spaces available and the order of the grade level waiting lists.

### Waiting List

Students who are not admitted as a result of the lottery and those who submit applications after the open enrollment period will be placed on a waiting list on a first-come, first-serve basis. When space is available at their grade level the parents of the next student on the waiting list will be contacted and invited to enroll. If enrollment is declined the student can be placed at the end of the waiting list or dropped from the waiting list at the parents' discretion.

### Returning Student and Sibling Preference

Enrollment preference is given to returning students in any subsequent year of its operation and to siblings of students already enrolled.

### Completion of Enrollment Process

To complete the enrollment process and be admitted to Paulo Freire, all paper-work and pre-admission

processes must be completed. As part of the admission process, Paulo Freire requires a parent/student interview, initial learning profile test, and student/parent signatures on the 'Commitment to Learn' form.

#### Nondiscrimination Policy

Paulo Freire shall not limit admission based on ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, religious or political affiliation, income level, disabling condition, English language proficiency or athletic ability.

#### Expelled Students

Paulo Freire may refuse to admit any pupil who has been expelled or committed an expellable offense from another educational institution or who is in the process of being expelled from another educational institution.

### **III. Community Partnerships**

Paulo Freire's curricular focus on social justice and the environment, as well as its commitment to service learning, makes community partnerships an integral part of the school program. We seek to make connections with Tucson's diverse group of nonprofit organizations in order to enhance our curriculum and to foster student involvement in their community. Our central location provides a unique opportunity for partnerships and mentorships between local activists and artists and our young people. Students will be working closely with artists from the renowned ZUZI! Dance Company and will work to forge relationships with several of the environmental organizations currently residing in the Historic Y.

### **IV. Parent Involvement**

Research tells us what we intuitively know - that parental involvement in schools is critical to their child's educational success. Working as partners, we seek to develop relationships with our students' families that are built on trust, mutual respect and open communication.

Family involvement at Paulo Freire begins at the initial Parent-Student-Advisor conference. At that time the advisor shares information about the school and parents/students share any questions, concerns or other pertinent background information that might help the student's transition to Paulo Freire. It is a requirement that each student participate in two annual student-led conferences – where they publicly reflect on their strengths, stretches and passions. Thus parent involvement for us is first and foremost a matter of parents participating in their children's educational process .

In addition to this on-going commitment we welcome the support of family volunteers in a wide variety of ways. Many of our parents drive students as part of our Friday Expedition program. This is a great way for parents to observe their children interacting with their peers and many of our expeditions are of great interest to parents as well.

Finally we have three committees that parents may participate in: Community Partnership Committee, Facilities Committee and the School Community Committee.

### **V. Governance**

At Paulo Freire we have a strong vision guiding the development of the school which includes establishing democratic processes to help with the governance of the school. The School Governing Board consists of the two School Directors, two teacher representatives, two community representatives and three parent representatives.

Students practice self-governance through our Advisory Council. Each Advisory chooses representatives who meet once a week to discuss student generated concerns and proposals. These are shared with the staff at their early release, Wednesday staff meeting. Also, within our advisory program students learn conflict resolution and mediation skills that are used to resolve disputes. Although a discipline matrix is used by the school to manage serious misconduct, some misbehavior/conflict is resolved in the Advisory or in our more formal Restorative Justice program.

## **VI. Schedule**

Our daily schedule is designed to optimize learning in the classroom. On most days core subjects (Math, Science & Humanities) are taught in 75-minute blocks. Because Paulo Freire is small, we have the flexibility however to adjust the schedule as needed. Core learning activities can be designed for longer blocks and rotated over multiple days to allow for a significant service learning project or interdisciplinary experience that might arise.

During the middle blocks of the day we usually have Lunch, Spanish, Advisory, PE, and Literacy. In the late afternoon we offer Learning Lab and our Elective program. The afternoon schedule allows for a balance of facilitated group instruction and individualized learning opportunities.

## **VII. Calendar**

The Paulo Freire instructional year is divided into three trimesters. After both the fall and winter trimesters there is Intersession Week followed by a week-long vacation. There is also a 2-week Winter Break during the 2nd Trimester.

## **VIII. National Affiliations**

### Coalition of Essential Schools

The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), a network of schools and support centers, promotes higher student achievement and provides strategies for creating more nurturing and humane school communities. Arising out of an investigation of teaching, learning, and school design led by Ted Sizer, CES derives its power as a school reform movement from the authenticity of its principles and its common sense approaches to restructuring schools. CES schools share a set of beliefs about the purpose and practice of schooling. These beliefs, the "10 Common Principles" inspire a school community to examine its priorities and redesign its structures and practices. The principles imply a radical transformation of schooling to promote intellectual excitement, to facilitate teachers improving their craft, and to ensure that all students thrive and excel, regardless of their gender, race, or class ([www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org)).

### National School Reform Faculty

At the heart of NSRF's program are the concepts of Facilitative Leadership and Critical Friendship. We have learned that Critical Friendship, an essential ingredient for learning communities, is best achieved through providing deliberate time and structures to promote adult growth that is directly linked to student learning. Facilitative Leadership skills are needed to engage school communities in this practice, and are valuable for all leaders - school leaders, classroom teachers and administrators. Paulo Freire's Co-Directors are national NSRF facilitators and all staff are trained in these powerful facilitation techniques to be used in classroom instruction and with the staff ([www.nsrffharmony.org](http://www.nsrffharmony.org)).

### Turning Points

A 'New American Design' model for middle schools, based on decades of research and experience which focuses on improving student learning for middle school children, Turning Points seeks to create high performing schools through teacher collaboration and data-based inquiry. Turning Points provides member schools with intensive on-site coaching and professional development relating to school organization and instructional practices. Paulo Freire is a Turning Points demonstration site and its

nonprofit parent organization, El Pueblo Integral - Teaching & Learning Collaborative, currently serves as the Southwest Regional Center for Turning Points ([www.turningpts.org](http://www.turningpts.org)).

## **IX. The Facility**

Paulo Freire Freedom School is currently located at the 'Historic Y' at 300 E. University Blvd. Covering 7,500 square feet, the school has several classrooms, office spaces, a library, and a building-wide wireless computer network. In addition, students use the ZUZI! Dance Company studios and theater for their art/health education program. Students also enjoy access to neighboring nonprofits such as the Audubon Society, Friends of the Saguaro National Park and the Environmental Educators Network. The University of Arizona is within walking distance.