



# **Executive Summary**

## **Northland Preparatory Academy**

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## **Introduction**

Every school has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the school, and the kinds of programs and services that a school implements to support student learning.

The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide a school with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the school community will have a more complete picture of how the school perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the school to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.

## **Description of the School**

**Describe the school's size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the school serves?**

Northland Preparatory Academy is a public charter school located in Flagstaff, Arizona, currently serving 641 students in grades 6-12. Founded in 1996 by a group of parents determined to provide a rigorous education for their children, Northland Prep is a thriving learning community with an excellent track record of preparing students for college success. Our school does not have any selective entrance requirements; students gain admission through a lottery which determines a waiting list for available spots. While we hold our students to rigorous standards, we do not seek to winnow cohorts down to the fittest survivors. Rather, we move all our students, regardless of ability, toward their maximum level of success. Our mindset is that the school and our teachers are not merely here to teach; we are here to ensure that students learn. Despite a per pupil funding level lower than the majority of Arizona students, and dramatically lower than the US average, we manage to operate with a student: teacher ratio of 15:1. With this level of attention, engagement, and a culture focused on achievement, NPA students are able to develop academically, socially, and emotionally. They become strong learners and leaders, ready not just to be admitted to college, but to excel and make meaningful contributions once there. Northland Prep is fully accredited by AdvancEd. (<http://www.northlandprep.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/NPA-School-Profile-2015-16-pdf.pdf>)

## **School's Purpose**

**Provide the school's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.**

Northland Preparatory Academy provides a coordinated, individualized program of study that promotes academic excellence and provides educational opportunities for serious academic students, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, economic status, or academic ability.

Above is the mission statement for the school. The mission statement was created when the school first began. It states that NPA, "promotes academic excellence and provides educational opportunities for serious academic students...". NPA actually provides such educational opportunities whether or not the student is seriously academic. NPA begins in grade six and not all students are academically serious at that age. Some are not in eighth, tenth or twelfth but that does not matter as the adults at NPA have the responsibility of making sure that all students learn, not just the serious ones. There are systems put in place that will catch the students who are having challenges and that will challenge those who have embraced their academic role.

Furthermore, NPA is an educational community that values not only the academics but those endeavors that create well rounded, community minded human beings.

School Profile: <http://www.northlandprep.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/NPA-School-Profile-2015-16-pdf.pdf>

## **Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement**

**Describe the school's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school is striving to achieve in the next three years.**

### Areas of Notable Achievement

NPA's history has set a very high expected level of performance. With that in mind, note that there are no areas that are above the expected level of performance. This does not reflect a sub-par overall performance level, rather, it reflects the high standards to which NPA holds itself. That being said, the following are areas that show a positive trend in performance.

- Increase in number of AP courses offered by NPA.

o NPA has increased its AP course offerings by two since school year 2011-12. AP Calculus BC and AP Physics 1 were added in school year 2013-14, AP Statistics was added in school year 2014-15, and AP Physics C was offered beginning this school year. Those four new classes offset the discontinuation of AP Psychology in 2013-14 and AP U.S. History 12 in 2014-15. The AP Psychology course was dropped due to the loss of the faculty member who taught it. That faculty member's replacement was not qualified to teach the course, and NPA has not yet found a replacement. AP U.S. History 12 became irrelevant when the AP U.S. History course was reduced from two years to one. The reduction was a response to faculty concerns regarding the coverage of civics concepts. Rather than embed the concepts in the two AP U.S. History courses, a separate course in Government and Economics was developed to cover those topics.

- Decrease in number of D's and F's earned from 2011 - 2015 (49% drop).

o The number of D's and F's earned by NPA students has dropped by 49% between school year 2011 and the beginning of this year. In school year 2011-2012, the average NPA student received 0.496 D's and F's as final semester marks. That rate dropped to 0.254 D's and F's by the end of school year 2014-15. The institution of an Integrated Learning Strategies course for nearly all students has been instrumental in helping the students to develop stronger study habits and to receive additional help in courses in which they struggle. In addition, students who are struggling academically due to a reticence in turning in homework are called in for lunch detentions, in which they are supervised in the completion of outstanding work. For students on the D-F List, there are Saturday School sessions held. These sessions encourage the students to catch up on missing work and to receive one-on-one tutoring in areas and on assignments with which they struggle. The use of the Integrated Learning Strategies class, lunch detentions, and Saturday School will continue and, it is hoped, help to further reduce the number of D's and F's that NPA students receive.

- Consistent performance on AIMS tests.

o NPA has maintained a letter grade of A with the state of Arizona based on its AIMS results. The average score for the three years of 2012 through 2014 was a very strong 157. A comparison of scores with BASIS, Flagstaff, Inc., a school similar to NPA in its purpose and student body, shows that the two schools performed similarly, although NPA earned a higher score in two of the three years.

o Last year the state of Arizona switched its standardized test to the AzMERIT and NPA's performance compared very favorably with the rest of the state. In-house analysis of the results were presented to the faculty at the beginning of the school year and they have had discussions as to how to address weaknesses and reinforce strengths. Last year's results will, then, serve as a benchmark, and future results will be analyzed each year and compared to prior years to determine where resources should be expended to ensure student growth.

### Areas in Need of Improvement

As mentioned above, NPA's lofty standards mean that all of the areas mentioned in this section are below the expected levels of performance. Any negative trends are a cause for immediate concern, and, certainly, will receive due attention. The areas of greatest concern are the drop in SAT and ACT scores, as these are assessments used by colleges and universities in their admissions decisions. As a college preparatory school, it is imperative that we prepare students to succeed on these assessments.

- Drop in ACT scores by NPA students since 2013.

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o Between 2011 and 2013, ACT scores for NPA students grew from an average composite score of 26.5 to 27.6. Since that time, scores have fallen to a 25.2 average for the composite. That 8.7% drop can be explained in large part by an increase in the number of students taking the ACT; the pool of ACT test-takers grew by 25% in those three years. This increase reflects both the college preparatory nature of NPA and the growing acceptance of the ACT by universities and colleges around the country. An additional factor in the drop in scores is the lower average GPA of NPA ACT test-takers. Between 2006 and 2010, the average GPA of an NPA ACT test-taker was 3.674. In 2015, the average GPA of an NPA ACT test-taker was 3.384. This, too, is a reflection of the larger pool of test-takers. Thus, there are more students who are not as academically advanced sitting for the ACT than in previous years.

o Scores by NPA students dropped in all content areas between 2013 and 2015. The most dramatic drops were in Reading (-11.5%) and Science (-9.9%) scores. Close Reading strategies have begun to be employed by all NPA faculty, and this additional instruction in strategies to glean meaning from text should be reflected in better test scores in these areas.

o In an effort to bolster students' preparedness for the ACT, an ACT Preparation class has been offered each year by NPA. The enrollment in these classes is much lower than the number of students taking the ACT, approximately 10-15 students in each class, and no studies have yet been done to determine the effectiveness of the course.

- Drop in SAT scores by NPA students from 2011 to 2015.

o Similar to the ACT, SAT scores for NPA students have dropped. The mean score for Critical Reading in 2011 was 632, but it fell to 579 in 2015 - an 8.4% drop. In Mathematics, the mean score on the SAT for NPA College-Bound Seniors fell from 601 in 2011 to 568 in 2015. That represents a 5.5% drop. And in Writing, NPA College-Bound Seniors achieved a mean score of 599 in 2011 and 547 in 2015. This drop of 8.7% was the largest decline of the three subject areas.

o Unlike the ACT, the decline in scores cannot be attributed to an increase in the pool of test-takers. With the exception of one year, 2012, between 20 and 24 students have taken the SAT. In 2012, 40 NPA students took the SAT, and their average scores were similar to the 2015 test-takers, a group of 24 students.

- Decrease in number of AP courses taken by students.

o Juniors and seniors at NPA are enrolling in fewer AP courses. From 2011-12 to 2015-16, the average number of AP courses taken by an NPA junior has dropped from 1.58 to 1.41, a decrease of 10.8%. Seniors reduced their AP course load to an even greater degree. The average number of AP courses taken by an NPA senior went from 1.74 in 2011-12 to 1.31 in 2015-16, a decline of nearly 25%. Overall, the average junior or senior at NPA took 1.66 AP classes in 2011-12. This year, the average for those two classes is 1.36 - a drop of 18%.

o And NPA juniors and seniors are not just taking fewer AP classes, fewer students in each class are enrolling in them. In school year 2011-12, 72.58% of the junior class were enrolled in at least one AP course. That figure dropped to 70.00% by school year 2015-16. And senior enrollments declined even more. 81.54% of NPA seniors took at least one AP course in school year 2011-12. This school year, 72.22% of the seniors are enrolled in at least one AP course; a decline of over 11%. The classes combined for a decline in the rate of participation in AP courses between 2011-12 and 2015-16 of nearly 8%.

## **Additional Information**

**Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.**

The process of reviewing oneself is never easy, often daunting, but always invaluable. As we move forward, we will work toward improving those areas that have come to our attention. For example, our D and F list was decreasing but for some reason, spiked in the fall semester. We will have to investigate why that is occurring and work toward decreasing the students listed on that weekly list. Similarly, we instituted an attendance policy to encourage seat time and will have to determine what effect that policy has on student grades. We will also need to build our capacity to collect and analyze data. Our staff feels this as a need, so will work to address that gap in our professional development. And of course, we will continue to work on improving and expanding our technology.

What the data doesn't show...A significant key to NPA's success and the successful student stories that come out of this community are the long-term relationships forged among faculty, staff, administration and students. Alumni return to share with their teachers how prepared they were for the college experience as well as how well they were prepared for life after NPA. As a matter of fact, there is an Alumni Day the first day back after the winter holiday. The event began as so many students would return on that day to see their teachers and their friends. Now Alumni Day is generally between 20 and 25 former students who lead breakout sessions for Juniors and Seniors describing how to be successful both in the college classroom and within the college community. This is but one structured example of the bonds that are formed between NPA and its students but it is emblematic of the long-term effect that this institution has on its students. They value us and we value them.