

MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

Mountain School, Flagstaff, Arizona
Charter Elementary School Profile

Mountain School, a charter elementary in Flagstaff, Arizona, has gained an admirable reputation for its student success. Its accomplishment stems from the excellent and diverse staff, the art and environment based curriculum, the competitive test scores and county reputation and the parent participation program (for information on Mountain School's Parent Ambassador Program please go to [LINK](#).). Mountain School has a permanent and admired home in this small mountain city in Northern Arizona, and as Flagstaff's Mayor Joe Donaldson commented at a recent Mountain School Open House, "Mountain School is a special place."

History and Facilities

In 1982, Mountain School was a private elementary with three students, and it was managed out of director Renee Fauset's living room. Now, 600 students and five borrowed buildings later, Mountain School's dream of providing an intimate, down-home, elementary education to many Flagstaff children in their own school building has come true. Mountain School is the oldest independent successful elementary school in the northern Arizona region and, under the same director, is almost to capacity in its brand new building.

The campus is nestled in a new subdivision in Flagstaff on 1.2 acres with a 7,000 square foot facility. Mountain School has eight classrooms serving grades Pre-K-6 and has room for 140 students. The natural surroundings include a Ponderosa Pine forest and an urban trail that loops the neighborhood, starting and ending at the school. A city park is adjacent to the playground and has a field the City allows Mountain School to use for PE and other activities. A building boom continues to surround the school, solidifying prospects for the school's growth. Mountain School is fortunate to be part of such a thriving community.

Mountain School has shown growth as the facilities improved. The first year as a K-6 charter found the school in a church facility with an Average Daily Membership of 45. Within the year, Mountain School had two sites and added a Pre-K. By 2000, the ADM was at 54, and an opportunity to build a private facility presented itself. However, delays required a temporary move into a warehouse in late 2001. By mid-year the building was finished and the move complete, but the school lost some students due to geographical



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complications. Then, in school year 2002/2003 the ADM was up 76, and although still shy of the 88 originally projected, numbers continued to improve. And now, the 2003-04 school year waiting list shows a jump to 94 ADM with 120 students enrolled. Mountain School will be able to fully meet its financial obligations and the needs of the neighborhood that the new facility graces

Staff and Programs

In this beautiful new facility, Mountain School houses its current 90 students and talented faculty. Mountain School prides itself in the skilled teachers it has employed over the last 20 years. Currently the Mountain School core staff includes 3 masters degrees, 2 early childhood specialists, 1 special ed counselor, 1 language specialist and 2 environmental specialists. With a combined 90 years of teaching experience, Mountain School teachers inspire enthusiasm for learning and manage rigorous curriculums, thereby achieving classroom success.

Additionally, the staff maintains a positive and supportive working atmosphere for each other with participation in monthly staff meeting, bi-monthly in-services, the annual retreat and daily interaction in the teacher's lunchroom. Mountain School received the Coconino County award for being the Most Frequent Participant in professional development services. Continually developing professionally, teachers always bring new and exciting ideas to the table and keep the dream going. Dawn Mahoney, a Mountain School graduate and currently a student at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, loved Mountain School because it was a tight-knit community where "the teachers' concern was limitless."

Mountain School's success can also be attributed to its dedication to low student to teacher ratios (consistently under 1:18) and to its multi-grade classrooms where curricula is tailored to individual student needs. Gail Mills, original board member, former teacher and parent, attributes Mountain School's success to its multi-level classrooms. "The kids rely on each other: the older teach the younger, and they never even know they're learning." In addition to teaching the standards, Mountain School always includes art, performance, and music in its curriculum. Each year the school holds both a winter and spring concert, a talent show and welcomes artists such as Joe Sorren, Anindo Marshall or Denise Chávez into the school community. The school also provides physical education as well as maintaining special ed services for students. Mountain School has a gardening program, an after/before school art program, an explorers club and a community service program that has improved a local pond, sung Christmas carols for senior citizens and assisted neighbors with shoveling their snow.



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There are always special activities and events going on at Mountain School from the monthly Character Counts assemblies to the monthly Star Nights where one classroom gets to show off its special accomplishments. There are field trips to the Lava Tubes or Montezuma's Castle and camp outs to the Grand Canyon or Karchner Caverns. Mountain School's teachers build their curriculum to keep the kids active with hands on activities while assuring that all state standards are met and surpassed. Alec Ballesteros, who attended Mountain School for seven years and graduated in 2002, said, "I leave here every day feeling accomplished." Children's sense of accomplishment is also reflected in the school's test scores.

Accountability and Test Scores

The accountability of charter schools encourages innovative, successful programs. Therefore it has had a favorable impact on the children who attend charters. One measure of accountability is the tracking of students test scores as a measure of adequate yearly progress. The questions we must ask include: Are the children meeting the State's academic achievement standards? Is the school showing one year's growth for each child? Are the achievement gaps in math and science closing between the races and gender? These questions have been answered by the data collected through the Stanford 9 Achievement Test and Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards.

Mountain School testing data has shown that at least 80% of the students have shown one year's growth and that 75% of the students have met or exceeded the state standards overall. The Stanford 9 data shows that 98% of the classes have shown a steady increase in the overall partial battery scores. With a U.S. Department of Education status of "Extremely Small School," the rest of the classes may have included students that didn't qualify for special needs, but have enrolled with learning problems. The data shows that over time these students make their year's progress each year, and often catch up to their peers. Our most recent success is that for the 2002 AIMS results, our third graders all showed 100% in their MAP scores, which measure one year's growth.

U.S. Department of Ed. Dissemination Grant

The school has been able to market itself using its test scores and other factors mentioned thus far, and in 2001 Mountain School received a wonderful boost toward further marketing with the receipt of a 2-year U.S. Department of Education dissemination grant. With this funding, Mountain School was able to formally establish its art programming by developing the Art Unites Kids project. This project successfully brought 20 reputable artists into Mountain School, shared the artists and the projects with 12 community public and charter schools, and created seven pieces of public art including an African drumming and dancing performance and a stone sculpture that were shared with the



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community at large. The grant additionally allowed Mountain School to formalize its parent involvement program (for information on Mountain School's Parent Ambassador Program please go to LINK), provide further professional development for parents, faculty and staff, and to carry on the Flagstaff Community Celebration of Education.

The Flagstaff Community Celebration of Education is a November event that brings teachers, staff and administration from all schools in Flagstaff together for an evening designed to honor the great work that educators do in Flagstaff. Last year's event, the fourth annual, brought 360 educators from all schools together, honored 36 community parent volunteers who help in the schools and made the front page of the daily paper http://www.azdailysun.com/non_sec/nav_includes/story.cfm?storyID=53374&syr=2002 Stemming from this gathering, the Flagstaff Education Think Tank has continued to meet and discuss the issues of education in the Flagstaff vicinity including bridging curricula across school levels as well as locating funds to continue both the Flagstaff Community Celebration of Education and the Think Tank.

These grant activities, along with 22 years of successfully educating Flagstaff's youth have put Mountain School in a very stable location on the northern Arizona education map. It started with the dream of one educator, Renee Fauset, and the community has nothing but accolades for this pioneer in charter school education. Her selfless dedication is noted by business owner and former Mountain School parent, Elyse Herndon, "Renee is in the right profession. Her fairness and compassion make every Mountain School student feel safe and nurtured; they will go to her with any concern." And as enrollment numbers climb (only 20 short of the school's max) this dream can only continue to grow and benefit this small mountain town.

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