

## SECTION 2 – Vision of the School

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*(Scored by External Review Panel)*

- a) In succinct terms, describe the educational philosophy and pedagogy of the proposed school.

### *The Purpose*

Broadly speaking, **the purpose of a pre-collegiate education is to prepare a child for fruitful participation as an adult in the culture in which he or she lives.** Parents support (or fail to support) this goal as they inculcate into their children basic beliefs and values and train (or fail to train) their children to use their native tongue as a powerful instrument of thought and communication. Schools support, enrich, and extend these goals, adding to them refined intellectual, academic, or vocational knowledge and skills. The specific purposes of UME Preparatory Academy are summarized in its three major student goals, developed at greater length in Section 4.

UME Preparatory Academy seeks to produce graduates who have acquired

- A strong work ethic,
- A strong background in core academic content,<sup>1</sup> and
- Major intellectual, life, and career skills.

As a school, we are specifically targeting college- and work-readiness<sup>2</sup> as the over-arching goal that ties together these three major goals.

### *The Players*

While there are a host of other factors that influence a child’s development, there are three major players in the educational process. **One of the most important—and often overlooked—is the child him or herself.** Education is something that is not so much done *to* a child as *with* a child. Children are persons in their own right, with their own interests, attitudes, purposes, and goals. All children can and do learn, but they are not programmable machines to be managed by skillful operators, but rather individuals who elect to cooperate to a greater or lesser degree with the adults who are seeking to prepare them for an independent and productive adulthood. **This is why UME Preparatory Academy feels so strongly about, and has designed its entire program to support and encourage, the development of a strong student work ethic.** In the end, students will gain the most where they invest the most. **Our model’s approach utilizes the students’ time and schedule in an innovative method that affords them more time to**

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<sup>1</sup> The TEKS form the foundation for our core academic content. Academic content for honors level courses, should they be developed, will incorporate but also exceed (in terms of breadth, depth, or rigor) the TEKS.

<sup>2</sup> The ACT organization argues that the skills needed for collegiate success are essentially the same as those needed for vocational success (“Ready to Succeed: All Students Prepared for College and Work” [2006]; retrieved from [http://act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ready\\_to\\_succeed.pdf](http://act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ready_to_succeed.pdf); last accessed February 19, 2010). Several conclusions of the NEA studied cited previously support this contention, at least with regard to the importance of English-language reading and writing skills, and others stress the impact of language skills on productive participation in civic life (see pp. 16-18, 20).

**cultivate the kinds of values and skills they need in order to invest their resources (time, effort, and creative thought) in more efficient and effective ways.** We seek to motivate them and teach them how to invest wisely and consistently the key resources of time, energy, effort, and focus into the acquisition of a strong background in academic content and major intellectual, life, and career skills. In short, we strive to cultivate in them a strong academic work ethic and then capitalize on that work ethic to teach them academic content and skills, including especially major intellectual, life, and career skills.

Of course, the child does not stand alone, nor could he or she be expected to achieve much without adult guidance. **Parents have an early and especially profound impact on the beliefs, values, life habits (character qualities), and general linguistic fluency of a child and therefore on his or her later options, choices, and achievements, both in school and beyond.** Parents are the first and most influential teachers a child will have, and the home is his or her first classroom. The impact of the home on a child's success in and beyond his or her formal academic education cannot be overestimated: many of the differences in achievement among children in the same classroom can be traced back to the influence of parent training. Soo Kim Abboud and her sister, after describing the disproportionate academic success that Asian-American students experience, make this point explicitly: "*The reason that Asian students outperform their peers in the classroom has nothing to do with how they are born and everything to do with how they are raised.*"<sup>3</sup> **By intentionally incorporating more parental involvement into the process, our innovative model exemplifies sound educational philosophy and sound (if informal) pedagogy at a level that is often inaccessible to more conventional models of education.**

Schools also contribute in significant ways to a child's training, but their role is more focused and limited. Typically, schools seek to impart specific (generally academic or intellectual) knowledge and skills, as the content of the TEKS attests. UME Prep also seeks to impart academic content and major intellectual, life, and career skills, but also recognizes that not all parents are equally effective in inculcating the kind of work ethic that is so foundational to a child's success in and beyond his or her formal academic education. Many parents simply do not have the time, the tools, or the opportunity to assist in this area. Because of that, we contend that schools can and should provide instruction, practice, and positive adult leadership and modeling in the acquisition and ongoing development of a sound academic work ethic, especially when

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<sup>3</sup> *Top of the Class: How Asian Parents Raise High Achievers—and How You Can Too* (New York: Berkley Books, 2006), p. 2; emphasis is original. Sociologist Richard E. Nisbett also emphasizes the connection between cultural values and practices on the one hand and academic achievement on the other, in *Intelligence and How to Get It: Why Schools and Cultures Count* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2009), especially in chapters eight and nine. Given that the family is the first and most significant means of enculturation, by implication this highlights the impact family values and practices have on educational accomplishment. One can also infer much the same from the National Endowment for the Arts Research Report #47, *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (2007, Retrieved from <http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead.PDF>; last accessed January 15, 2010). On p. 11 the study notes that "American families are spending less on books than at almost any other time in the past two decades," and that "[t]he number of books in a home is a significant predictor of academic achievement." A reasonable assumption here is families invest money in those things that they value, so by implication one that spends less on books is less likely to value reading than one that spends more. A second reasonable inference is that the children of families that value reading typically enjoy higher rates of academic success.

parents are unable to do so. **Thus we believe that the fundamental purpose of the school—or, at least, our school—is to help students acquire a strong academic work ethic, critical academic content, and major intellectual, life, and career skills.** This view finds practical expression in our three fundamental institutional goals.

### *The Process*

UME Preparatory Academy's general school structure reflects the beliefs and values described briefly above. **Utilizing an innovative design—the University Model of Education (UME)—that clearly distinguishes us from more conventional schools, we seek to work in close partnership with parents;** we see our institution as only one of the critical players in the process. The values, beliefs, character qualities, and linguistic fluency that parents instill in their children forms both the foundation and the context for the knowledge and skills we strive to impart. We believe that the parent-child and school-parent relationships must be cultivated throughout the years of pre-collegiate education in order to derive maximum benefit from the process. Because of that, UME Preparatory Academy has built into its basic institutional model a program—the **Parent Equipping Program (PEP)**—designed to help and encourage parents to participate actively and productively in the education of their children. The school, through its policies and practices, works to reinforce the same values, character qualities, and intellectual abilities that we encourage parents to teach in the home and assumes an even more active adult leadership role, through programs like the **Tutorial and Guided Studies (TAGS) program**, when poor student conduct or academic performance reveal a need for such added attention. UME Prep will not require parent participation in the Parent Equipping Program (PEP), understanding and confining that all such activity by parents or legal guardians is completely optional and voluntary.

UME Preparatory Academy's classroom teachers will utilize a wide range of pedagogical practices, ranging from straightforward direct instruction (reading, lecture, etc.) to open-ended discovery approaches, to enhance instructional effectiveness. Instructional choices and practices will be guided by the basic principle of using techniques that fit the instructional goals being addressed. Put differently, content and objectives drive instructional methodology rather than a commitment to certain instructional methodologies determining what kind of content can be taught. In short, form will follow function.

Other significant factors in determining instructional practices are efficiency and effectiveness: some techniques are much more efficient than others in communicating large bodies of information, while others are more effective in developing a deep understanding of the content being addressed. Time, of course, is a critically important resource for teachers and the university model of instruction affords teachers even less time than do more conventional models. Because of this, teachers will be trained to utilize available resources as efficiently as they can to meet demonstrated student needs relative to student performance objectives, using proven instructional techniques while embracing opportunity and innovation to achieve our instructional goals as effectively as possible with the means and resources available to us.

**UME Preparatory Academy's innovative approach to curriculum design and unique instructional setting highlight our commitment to being college preparatory.** This approach necessarily places a premium on students' ability to engage in independent practice, thus highlighting the importance of developing a sound work ethic.

Our model's approach utilizes the students' time and schedule in such a way that they are afforded a greater opportunity and ability to demonstrate individual responsibility and ownership of their education while under the supervision and guidance of willing parents at home or caring professionals at UME Prep. With nearly 20 years of accumulated data, gathered from stakeholders involved on all levels in the private UME version of this model, we know too that students who have developed a sound work ethic are more college ready. Students within the UME process complete their academic course of study while learning to independently manage their time, energy, and effort in an environment that most do not experience until they enroll as college freshmen.

Through this process, our students will not only be required to learn the same content as those in any of the other public schools in Texas, but they will also be challenged to think, and think deeply and flexibly about the knowledge and skills they are mastering.

### *The Potential Problem and Our Solution*

All parents face their own set of unique circumstances and challenges as they seek to raise and educate their children. As such, parents are not always able to fulfill their educational responsibilities at home as effectively as others. In order to address this need, UME Preparatory Academy will develop and implement two major support programs, the **Parent Equipping Program (PEP)** and a **Tutorial and Guided Studies program (TaGS)**. The PEP will be designed to help parents understand and apply values and practices that encourage growth in positive character traits and foundational intellectual skills that support higher academic achievement. It will also help improve school-family communication and coordination so that both parents and classroom teachers can work together more efficiently and effectively as co-stakeholders in the instructional process. Thus, the PEP is designed to help students indirectly by helping their parents in their role as learning coaches. The TaGS program, on the other hand, is designed to focus the school's time and resources to directly aid those students who need it the most. It will provide students whose poor academic conduct or academic performance indicate a need for greater intervention with additional instructional attention during a time outside of the regular class schedule when such students can receive more focused help in developing the needed work ethic, acquiring academic content or skills, or both. It will be mandatory for struggling students, who will be required to participate until their improving performances indicate that they no longer need the program. **Thus UME Prep will not only expand the variety of charter schools in operation but will also be well positioned to meet the needs of a diverse student population.** UME Prep will not require parent participation in the Parent Equipping Program (PEP), understanding and confining that all such activity by parents or legal guardians is completely optional and voluntary.

### **b) Discuss the educational innovations that will distinguish this school from other schools.**

UME Preparatory Academy will continually develop new and increasingly effective ways of educating the young. Our perspective is fundamentally innovative and opportunistic; the rapidly-changing world in which we live demands such an approach. Already there are a number of innovations at the very foundation of UME Prep which set it apart from most others. There are three distinguishing elements of the University-Model of Education that function together to

develop a well-rounded, college-ready, productive member of society. These three key structural elements are

1. **A rigorous academic instructional program** permeated with high expectations.
2. A blend of face-to-face and computer or technology-aided classroom instruction, using **reduced instructional hours arranged in a generally traditional university-model scheduling format.**
3. Adult guidance in the development of the academic work ethic (and study skills) which is facilitated by both the
  - Optional **Parent Equipping Program (PEP)** designed to encourage and equip parents, as well as the
  - **Tutorial and Guided Studies (TaGS)** program, necessary for students as indicated by their revealed need.

***Rigorous Academic Instructional Program:*** Many schools have begun to implement increasingly rigorous academic instructional programs and the 81<sup>st</sup> Texas Legislature, in adopting HB 3 in 2009, has emphasized an educational goal of “rigor and relevance in the recommended graduation requirements for students.”<sup>4</sup> Hence our commitment to offering a rigorous academic program and to upholding high expectations for students is not, in itself, an innovative feature of our program. To do so with a unique university-model course scheduling and instructional format at the pre-collegiate level, however, is. Our students will not only experience a more challenging academic program but will do so in an environment that mimics that which they will experience once they begin postsecondary studies. Thus they will enjoy ample opportunity to become accustomed to a collegiate approach to education while still receiving rigorous academic preparation.

***University-Model of Class Scheduling:*** UME Preparatory Academy will utilize a university-model of class scheduling approach common at the university level, but at best, very rare at the pre-collegiate level. It is this unique course scheduling arrangement that gives the University-Model of Education (UME) its name and is, **perhaps, our most innovative feature.** Students spend less time under direct instruction but more time studying—and learning—either on their own or under the supervision of a parent acting as a learning coach. In addition, they typically attend classes on a staggered format, going to some class sessions on a MWF schedule and others on a TTh schedule. In addition to helping students become accustomed to the kind of environment they will experience in most postsecondary study environments, the university model provides them with extensive, ongoing opportunities to practice and grow in independent learning skills such as their academic work ethic.

The University Model utilized by UME Prep highlights the personal responsibility of the student to a greater extent than do more conventional approaches. Most children, and especially younger children, are not sufficiently responsible by nature to do what they need to do to achieve the academy's targeted learning goals. Because of that, we expect that most will need the help of a "learning coach" to develop the work ethic and studies skills they need to be successful not only in pre-collegiate but also post-secondary studies. However, the availability of a learning coach is not a requirement for successful participation in the school; our students' academic success is

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<sup>4</sup> Texas Education Agency, *Strategic Plan for the Fiscal Years 2011-2015*, p. 12. Retrieved through a link on the TEA website (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147485142>) on February 7, 2011.

measured solely in terms of their demonstrated achievement relative to our curricular standards. Inadequate achievement is taken as an indicator that a student may need more effective coaching (it could indicate a number of other problems, as well). If that is determined to be the case, the academy will seek to help the parent become more involved and effective in that role or, if that is not possible, to offer additional assistance directly to the student (e.g., through the TaGS program). On the other hand, **if a student is achieving academically the issue of parental effectiveness in the "learning coach" role simply does not arise**-some students (even young students) are sufficiently responsible to achieve on their own what they need to achieve. **In short, academic achievement, and not the presence or relative effectiveness of a parent "learning coach," is a key goal of UME Prep; the presence of an effective "learning coach" is viewed as one of the best means for achieving this end, but is not an end in itself.** Therefore, no accommodation is necessary for students who are achieving academically but whose parents are unable or unwilling to act as a "learning coach."

**A key feature of our model** – in fact, the feature which most clearly distinguishes it from most conventional pre-collegiate models of education – **is the use of reduced instructional hours arranged in a format traditionally associated with university class scheduling models.** *Students will attend classes five days a week for a minimum of four hours of actual instruction each day - instructional time confirmed by UMEP as not including time for passing periods, lunch, or other non instructional time.* Their classes will usually be arranged according to a Monday-Wednesday-Friday or Tuesday-Thursday block schedule. For example, a student may attend English! Language Arts class on MWF and Science class on TTh. In addition, our students will be responsible for completing on their own or with the help of a learning coach (ideally a parent, though not required) a substantial amount of work and study outside of the regular classroom.

This reduced time for classroom instruction places a premium on the quality of teaching that takes place in the classroom. Because we believe that quality face-to-face interaction between a skilled instructor and the student maximizes opportunities for student success, we anticipate that this approach will predominate in our instructional settings. Nevertheless, we also recognize that modern technologies offer additional opportunities and advantages upon which we may wish to capitalize. For example, such technologies could be used at the discretion of a classroom teacher to enhance or extend his or her instruction in the classroom or even beyond the classroom. In addition, such technologies could be used in lieu of direct, face-to-face instruction to provide complete courses of instruction should the school not have and/or be unable to obtain an instructor meeting minimum legal qualifications or certification standards, as defined by state or federal law. They could also be used if the desire for or enrollment in the relevant course were relatively small (e.g., for more specialized upper-division electives) or additional time or place flexibility were required (e.g., for a home bound student). ***In all cases, UMEP confirms its understanding that all teachers employed at UME Prep will meet the minimum requirements of Highly Qualified as defined in the No Child Left Behind Act.***

Should UME Prep elect to use distance-learning technologies to offer a complete course of instruction, UME Prep understands that any course offered through distance learning technologies such as, but not limited to, satellite, Internet, two-way video-conferencing, online courses, the Texas Virtual School Network (TxVSN), and instructional television, will comply

with 19 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §74.23 and that any shift in focus from traditional instructional methods to a primary use of technology to deliver instruction will require approval of a substantive charter amendment request by the commissioner of education.

Finally, as we continuously seek increasingly effective and efficient means of instruction, we are willing to consider the possibility of blended instruction, in which reduced time under face-to-face instruction is combined with a substantial computer-based instructional element, an approach currently being employed by some colleges and universities, especially at the graduate level. UME Prep understands that a substantial change in the method of instructional delivery, such as the blended instruction method, will require approval of a substantive charter amendment request by the commissioner of education. We do not, however, have active plans in place to offer in the immediate future this model of blended instruction.

***Parent Equipping Program:*** This is another **one of our more innovative components**. It is in essence an adult education program designed to help equip and encourage parents to become more effectively involved in their child's education. It is unique in that it is a proactive and relatively intense approach to not only involving parents, but also giving them conceptual and practical tools that help make that involvement more productive. As discussed in both Section 1 and immediately above, there is now wide recognition that positive parental involvement is one of the greatest untapped assets currently available to all schools, public or private. Often, as the Department of Education has pointed out,<sup>5</sup> confusion on the part of both schools and parents regarding the best ways for parents to be fruitfully involved is a major problem. The PEP is designed to address this problem head-on and provide interested parents with the tools they need to develop a more effective school-parent partnership to the benefit of their children. UME Prep will not require parent participation in the Parent Equipping Program (PEP), understanding and confining that all such activity by parents or legal guardians is completely optional and voluntary.

***Tutorial and Guided Studies:*** The TaGS program is yet **another innovative feature** of UME Prep's basic design. It is intended to provide extra and more focused attention to students who demonstrate a need for such attention, whether because parents are unable to provide the necessary adult leadership or because of other special needs the student may have. Other school models, of course, also provide such students with additional, individualized assistance, but typically do so during the school day in such a way that disrupts the affected student's involvement in his or her regular classes. TaGS will take place on campus and in addition to the regular schedule and so will provide students with additional assistance without diminishing their opportunities to participate fully in standard classroom instruction. This approach will help ensure that all UME Prep students are successful.

"In addition, the TaGS program is structured to provide extra resources to students whose academic, skills, or work ethic performance indicates the need for such resources. These resources (e.g., staff time and attention, guidance in developing and practicing a sound work ethic or good study skills, etc.) are to be reserved for the purpose of helping struggling students. Therefore the TaGS program will not be "offered," in the sense of being made available as an on-demand option to students who

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, footnotes 11-13 in Section 1.

desire to participate (or whose parents desire that they participate) but whose performance does not indicate a clear need to do so. Students whose inadequate performance indicates a clear need for additional interventions, on the other hand, will be required to participate in the TaGS program as directed by the school administration in accordance with relevant (and published) policies and guidelines."