

Director's Message

Sierra Academy of Scottsdale is approved by the Arizona Department of Education as a special education day school and a leading provider of multisensory, systematic, explicit and science-based instruction for students at all levels of literacy, mathematics, and cognitive processing abilities. We serve students in grades 1 through 8 who are confronted by learning, language, and social challenges. Our school is successful with providing special educational programs including related services for students who face various learning challenges. Sierra Academy provides optimum instruction for students in many unified school districts in Arizona. Leading educational psychologists and physicians provide referrals for our academic therapy. While meeting the individual needs of our students, we focus on developing comprehensive educational programs. Our mission is to remediate the learning gap for student success through academic achievement and improve self-esteem.

Many students with learning challenges may have low self esteem related to their previous school failures and lack of achievement. Our students may have learning disabilities, discrepancies in speech/language, auditory processing, sensory integration, social skills deficits, and neurological or other health impairments. These students who are unsuccessful in a traditional classroom, who learn differently due to their identified disability, will find Sierra Academy to be a place to build on successes, grow self-esteem, and achieve academic goals.

We tailor our academic and learning experiences to fulfill the personalized goals of each student. Our individualized intensive tutorial-based classroom instruction and our use of Orton-Gillingham approaches, allow our team of professionals to custom-design programs that foster and build on learning strengths and abilities of each student. Sierra Academy takes pride in the fact that we use research-based curriculums that incorporate and integrate language-based approaches. As a result, each student can advance at their own pace in a supportive, small student/teacher ratio setting, which is conducive to learning. To monitor the success of each student's achievement, we frequently progress monitor using AIMSweb.

Students are able to make the most of their learning opportunities at Sierra Academy by incorporating various support services which supplement our "no one size fits all" core programs. These services include occupational therapy, speech/language therapy, physical therapy, counseling/social skills, and behavioral interventions.

Coming to Sierra Academy for a guided tour to see our successful students and outstanding staff is the best suggestion I could make. Enclosed are some materials describing Sierra's methods. Once you have had a chance to review them, feel free to contact me with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Debi Watland, Director

Academic Programs

Small Classroom Size

Our instructional model provides for a small student-to-staff ratio which allows our instructional teams to teach in the style most appropriate for each student, while allowing each student to progress at their own pace. Each classroom is limited to 3-5 students who are educated by a highly qualified special education teacher and one teaching assistant. Every student is provided with an assigned individual workspace to maximize their comfort level and minimize distractions while working independently. At Sierra Academy we want students to experience success in the classroom quickly. By starting with achievable goals the student is able to feel excited about learning. We introduce more challenging material gradually so that the student is not overwhelmed. Thus, children are able to feel successful in the classroom. As a result, these successes translate into a healthier self-esteem which gives the student the confidence to aim for higher levels of achievement. This classroom environment allows the student to trust and feel supported enough to take risks with new learning challenges.

Important Academic Skill Instruction

We customize a program for each child because disabilities manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Students who are in the same class will use different curriculums reflecting the uniqueness of each child's abilities, learning style, and interest. Our teachers take the time to find the right instructional approach for each student. At Sierra Academy the morning is reserved for core academic instruction in these areas: reading, writing, mathematics, and language arts. The teaching staff provides direct instruction using the Arizona state standards while following the individual educational program. The students participate in a 30-minute rotation schedule that keeps them focused and actively engaged with their learning material. This rotation includes: individualized instruction, independent practice, and supplemental instruction through computer based software. During this instruction reading is the essential core subject that allows students to continue with a lifetime of learning. Therefore, our teachers employ a variety of reading, spelling, and writing methodologies to help students establish these critical skills to build a strong foundation.

Learning computation skills and problem-solving applications are essential instructional areas in mathematics. At every age, we emphasize mathematical reasoning skills, analytical skills, computation, and calculation skills. Our balanced math curriculums emphasize the importance of problem solving in our modern, global, and technological age. By using incremental math instruction and incorporating time for practice, process and mastery of skills become evident. At Sierra Academy we provide content-area instruction in science, social studies, physical education, health, technology education, art, and music.

Academic Programs

Technology in the Classroom

Technology in the classroom is a vital supplement to instruction. We feel it is important to provide familiarity with computers and technology to prepare our students for their future. Staying up to date with the latest educational initiatives, research, and educational standards is accomplished through our Compass Learning Program, which is a leader in modern educational solutions. Compass Learning Odyssey delivers standards aligned K-12 software based curricula that provide interactive, self-paced, challenging, engaging activities. These activities promote exploration, individual and cooperative learning, problem solving, and real-world connections. Odyssey applies current and confirmed research about how students think and learn. These research based curriculum programs provide standards-aligned content, individualized learning and differentiated instruction, plus management and assessment tools. The learning activities are enhanced with grade-appropriate content, animations, and include audio and video instruction. The focus is to provide highly engaging, interactive content that fosters an interest in learning. While working through the activities, students can use offline resources as well to extend, enhance, and transfer knowledge. Compass Learning helps students, educators, and parents in the ongoing pursuit of higher achievement.

Our teachers use computers and programs to spotlight skills that are currently being taught or to provide review. It is essential for teachers to use computers for monitoring student's progress and provide appropriate instruction.

After School or Summer School 1:1 Educational Instruction

In addition to our school, Parents can access all of our services for students who are not enrolled at Sierra Academy of Scottsdale. This can be done through our after school or summer school instructional programs. This 1:1 academic instructional intervention provides students with remediation of academic skills deficits which allows them to achieve in their district or regular classroom setting. This is an exceptional program individually designed to meet the needs of any student who may require support with the instruction that they receive in a traditional classroom setting. Planning for each student's educational remediation program begins with a thorough assessment of his or her academic strengths and areas in need of improvement. We customize the program for each child and our teachers find the right instructional approach for each student based on this information. Students will find it a warm and welcoming home while working on the specially designed remediation program that will meet their needs. This program will help students achieve success in all facets of their lives.

Occupational Therapy

We meet the demands of our student's environment through occupational therapy which assists sensory, perceptual, and motor skills. Our therapist works directly with children on the foundational skills for motor planning, sensory processing, organization and visual motor integration. Integration of OT within the classroom by our core teachers ensures that each student's therapy plan compliments their responsibilities outside the therapy setting in everyday experiences.

Speech & Language Therapy

Children are required to think, perform, and problem-solve. Language development plays an important role in clarification of these required skills. Each eligible student receives a synchronized and individualized speech program created at Sierra Academy. Our certified speech pathologists work on a variety of areas including expressive/receptive language skills, speech production skills, auditory processing, pragmatic/social language skills, voice and fluency. Engaging in appropriate topic-relevant conversations, establishing pragmatic problem-solving skills, improving decision making, utilizing appropriate vocabulary, and developing conceptual understanding are all components of the strategic instruction of the speech pathologist.

Social Skills

The special education teachers at Sierra Academy focus on helping students develop age-appropriate social and emotional skills, particularly those that relate to improving their classroom performance. Our teachers concentrate on the individual development of each student to increase self-esteem, improve interpersonal relations, and improve their performance. The focus is to provide experiences by using activity-based lessons to teach students how to work with others, make positive choices, accept responsibility, and peacefully work out conflicts.

Behavioral Interventions

Promoting positive school behaviors and the development of appropriate social skills is the basis of our school-wide behavioral program. Students learn to demonstrate positive behaviors that facilitate greater academic successes through our behavioral program. Capitalizing on students' feelings of personal significance and self-management abilities is our goal since the staff is trained in crisis intervention and behavioral modifications.

Physical Therapy

Physical therapy services are provided to students with gross motor, postural problems, balance and coordination deficits, muscle weaknesses, decreased flexibility and/or abnormal gait. Therapists work on foundational skills which are necessary for the performance of daily functional activities.