

AZ Giving: Summit School of Ahwatukee

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For many, school was seen as an obligation, not an enjoyment. One Valley school is changing that idea and allowing kids to have a hand in their own education. The Summit School of Ahwatukee provides its students, teachers and parents with more than reading, writing and arithmetic.



FROM THE OUTSIDE, the Summit School of Ahwatukee resembles any other school. Students chatter happily as they walk through campus, while sunny classrooms entice guests to come in and learn. Take a closer look and the subtle differences that set Summit apart from its peers become obvious. Whether watching the easy interactions between teacher and pupil or taking part in a specialized group activity, children that attend pre-kindergarten through 8th grade are acquiring the tools to teach them how to teach themselves.

Officially opening its doors as the Summit School of Ahwatukee in 2001, Summit was founded on an ideology of specialized education for each child and incorporates an integrated thematic curriculum with a personal education plan to help foster creativity and learning for students on an individual and schoolwide level. The school's motto, "academic excellence, lifetime success," is actively utilized to help push both students and teachers to reach their goals in and out of the classroom. This fusion of involved parents, skilled teachers and highly specialized instruction has garnered accolades throughout the academic community. The school's ardent passion for learning is reflected in the consistently high AIMS test scores, various teaching awards and exceptional success rates of former students.

Patrick O'Brien, head of school, said that what makes Summit so unique is that it's neither a private nor a charter school, but a private-independent institution. "Private-independent schools are for parents who are really looking for something different with regard to an academic challenge and also developing more things having to do with creativity and problem-solving skills," O'Brien says. "[Summit is a] school where there is more latitude in creating units or projects or fields of study that engages students—not only cognitively and academically but also their own creativity and their passions to explore different things."

Part of this creativity stems from the integrated thematic teaching, which allows students to deviate from a single-minded curriculum and tie multiple subjects together in a cohesive way. Each student follows a program that is specific to his or her needs, allowing parents and teachers to become involved and set appropriate educational goals.

Summit's continuing commitment to education and the betterment of learning has earned the school nationally recognized accreditation from several groups including the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and the National Association for the Education of Young Children. "Those accreditations allow parents who maybe don't have their child in a public school or charter school to have some assurance about the quality of the school," O'Brien says.

In addition to an extensive list of academic achievements, Summit also prides itself on a devotion to the community. As part of their graduation requirements, 8th graders are responsible for completing a minimum of 20 hours of community service. The Summit Excellence Reflected in Volunteer Experience program (SERVE) allows these

preteens the opportunity to interact with younger students through reading or tutoring within the walls of their own school. Teachers also urge students to dedicate time to local philanthropic organizations like St. Vincent de Paul and Homeward Bound.

Ultimately, Summit holds the success of their students in the highest regard. Every class, project and assignment is formulated to guarantee that children will be not only well rounded, but happy as well. Marissa Patel, a recent graduate from the school, is looking forward to attending her freshmen year at Xavier College Preparatory where she will pursue a rigorous honors curriculum. "Summit has given me a superb education, enjoyable memories and many leadership opportunities," she says. "My experience at the Summit School of Ahwatukee has been life-changing."

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Summit School of Ahwatukee

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