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## Arizona School ‘Best in Nation’

Tucson— An analysis prepared for *Newsweek* ranks BASIS Tucson #1 among America’s public high schools. BASIS Tucson is one of two charter schools operated by BASIS School, Inc., a non-profit corporation. The other school, BASIS Scottsdale, does not yet have data available for this ranking. The report assesses schools according to the “Challenge Index,” devised by Jay Mathews, educational writer for the *Washington Post*. The index assesses the rigor of a high school program by calculating the number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate or Cambridge tests taken at the school in relation to the number of graduating seniors.

The most common of these tests, the subject-specific Advanced Placement (AP) exams, are developed by the College Board, the same organization that publishes SAT exams. Doing well on an AP exam generally earns students college credit for an introductory course at state universities or provides verification of their subject mastery at highly selective colleges. The exams are graded on a scale of one to five with three representing a passing grade. In the 2006-07 school year, the overall AP pass rate was 57 percent nationwide compared to 75 percent at BASIS Tucson. Moreover, nationwide most students taking AP exams are juniors or seniors while BASIS students start taking AP Exams in 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

While the “Challenge Index” is only a single number, its simplicity belies its significance. In the case of BASIS Tucson, what stands behind the high Index number is a superb world class college prep education. BASIS Tucson’s mission is to provide a rigorous liberal arts education to middle and high school students. The curriculum is centered on the College Board’s Advanced Placement (AP) program in all core subjects. At most high schools, Advanced Placement Courses are optional for high achieving students in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. At BASIS, all students take at least 6 AP exams during their high school tenure, beginning in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Moreover, the AP exams, paid for by the school, count as the final exam for the course. By their junior year, students have completed their AP courses and earned enough credits to graduate. Most students choose to remain at BASIS for their “post-AP” senior year in anticipation of graduating with high honors after passing advanced Capstone courses and completing a senior research project off campus.

“The success of the AP-dense BASIS high school program is really due to the rigorous middle school program that supports it,” says Michael Block, Co-Founder of the school. “The Middle School is really the ‘magic bullet’ for the whole program.” The middle school requires high levels of accountability through a “must pass” comprehensive exam system and a curriculum which involves teaching biology, chemistry and physics as separate sciences starting in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, as well as Algebra 1 in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and college level economics in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. In addition to English and history courses in all grades, students also take Latin in both 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade and a modern foreign language, including Mandarin as an option, beginning in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

BASIS offers the type of education that students receive in other industrialized countries and the type of education that Americans will need to compete in the global economy. “The strength of Arizona’s business community and state economy starts with students receiving a quality education. Those students go on to become the innovators and wealth producers of tomorrow. BASIS Tucson does an outstanding job preparing students to embrace bright futures and achieve great things,” said Glenn Hamer, president & CEO of the Arizona Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

Since the school opened in 1998, the founders Olga and Michael Block have made it their personal mission to offer as good a college prep education as is available anywhere in the United States. But, according to Olga, the accomplishment of reaching the top spot is not theirs alone. “It is the hard work of the teachers and students that makes this possible. If they were not willing to put forth a lot of effort and long hours we would never have gotten to the top spot.”

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