

## LESSONS LEARNED

Masada's path to becoming an academically and financially exemplary Arizona charter school originated with Leanne Timpson's passionate desire to create a school that was truly a community choice within a rural Arizona small town. Masada invested time in engaging the community in developing a vision for the school while preparing its application to become a charter. GCI believes that this involvement with the community and the support that evolved around an educator's vision a vital component in the long-term viability of a new charter school. Masada has stood the test of time.

The lessons learned from Masada's experience include:

**Educational excellence is a priority.** Leadership at Masada has invested in staff development training and professional learning communities. This effort is reflected in the academic performances at this charter school and the commitment of its staff.

**Community engagement is an essential part of how Masada operates.** Masada was founded based on a vision that evolved out of a community engagement process. Since then, the school has developed on-going relationships with a local private school and the district, and is governed by community-based boards. Through these relationships, Masada remains responsive to its communities' needs and sustains ongoing interest in the school.

**The loans that Masada has taken have allowed it to thrive while it builds equity.** An atypical type of financing was chosen by Masada's board and leadership. Masada is one of three Arizona charters to obtain USDA funding for its buildings and equipment. Commercial and low interest USDA loans provide viable alternatives to IDA financing of charter debt if the charter can prove that they can meet the standards for these competitive rates. The school has never over-leveraged its properties.

**Staff compensation and professional development are important for retention.** Masada provides its staff with competitive wages, generous health benefits, and a commitment to participation in the Arizona State Retirement System. Management is committed to its staff's professional growth and encourages development of all staff, including its instructional assistants.

**Cash reserves are fundamental.** A charter school must have sufficient cash reserves to meet its financial obligations and to sustain any fluctuations in revenue due to changing enrollment. The ASBCS performance standard for cash liquidity is 30 days. A charter holder must be prepared to manage financial resources with this benchmark in mind. Masada had a 204.4 day available reserve in FY2019.

**Strong governance provides steady leadership.** Masada's governance has played an important role in maintaining the vision of the school and guiding it through change over the years. This ensures that decisions made by the school will be supported by the community.

Masada Charter School is an exemplar of starting slow and acquiring facilities and increasing enrollment in a fiscally sustainable manner while consistently building an “A Exceeds” program. This small school does this while accepting all students from the community in an inviting and supportive manner. This case study provides a framework for others to follow this successful model.

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**Amy Pedotto**  
**Executive Director**

**Grand Canyon Institute**

[www.grandcanyoninstitute.org](http://www.grandcanyoninstitute.org)

[apedotto@azgci.org](mailto:apedotto@azgci.org)

602-595-1025, Ext. 3

