**Executive Summary**

**Five Stars Academy**

*Describe the School’s size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the school serves?*

Five Stars Academy is in the sleepy town of Santa Clara, in the Province of Coclé, which is a province of central-rural Panamá. Coclé is about 100 kilometers from Panama’s capital city in one direction and about 360 kilometers to the Costa Rican border in the other. It is a town divided by the Pan-American Highway, with one half on the beach side and the other half facing a mountain range. The half where the school is found is the site of beach homes, a fisherman enclave, and boasts of a small tourist industry. The school rents a beach property with a small house and tool shed on a grassy lot with fruit trees. In the last three years, while continuing to use the beach house, the school’s owners and administration have converted the tool shed into a windowed central office and have added six buildings with a capacity of ten classrooms, a teachers’ workroom, a hydroponic garden, and a chicken/rabbit hutch. Towards the back of the lot, the campus buildings are grouped around an outdoor courtyard; its central tree has a shade-offering canopy for the picnic tables clustered beneath. This location is our lunchroom, outdoor work/play area as well as our outdoor stage for celebratory performances. The front of the lot is devoted to the hydroponic garden, a small soccer field, a preschool playground, and a basketball court which doubles as a four-square platform. Smaller fruit trees provide shade here as well.

Five Stars Academy started with five students in 2011 and has grown to 90 students over the ten years. It is a K4 to Grade 12 school, Grades 10-12 being added in the last four years. The school divisions are as follows: Preschool: K4 to Grade 1 (20 students); Elementary: Grades 2 to 4 (32 students); Middle School: Grades 5 to 8 (22 students); High School: Grades 9 to 12 (16 students). Maximum classroom size is a fluctuating ten. The highly elastic demographics of our school is startling; amongst the 90+ students, 25 different countries are represented along with as many as 8 different languages, with all students becoming bilingual and many trilingual. The school’s core population is drawn from the owners themselves and the various communities that line the Pan-American Highway. While these communities have transient populations defined by the mining, tourist, and seasonal-expat populations, they also have permanent populations formed by stable expat, local businesses, Panamanian, and European residents. Parents in these communities, who want an academic curriculum, send their children to FSA.

There are three Administrator/Owners, nine full-time teachers, two part-time teachers, one assistant, and two support staff. The three Department Heads are drawn from the nine full-time teachers; the Director is a teacher as well as an owner/administrator. The two part-time teachers teach Spanish to the youngest students; they live nearby and are retired Spanish teachers from the local school system. The nine full time teachers are either hired directly from the United States and Canada, are Panamanians or a Panamanian blend who had studied in the USA and returned home. Because of the few numbers, each teacher has a variety of responsibilities outside the classroom and needs a collaborative attitude. These added responsibilities are offset by the reduced workload generated by the small class size. Parents contribute to the school by enriching the curriculum with their first language proficiency (advanced French instruction), their artistic talents, or with their time and skills.

Five Stars Academy has an ongoing challenge of finding qualified teachers who are willing to live and work in an isolated setting where Spanish is necessary to function. Adding to the challenges of language and isolation for new teachers are the socio-economic and cultural gaps between North American teachers and the local Panamanian population. These make forming friendships very difficult. While those who take the risk find FSA is adept at expediting the transition, the challenges seem daunting to many. Resistance has been mitigated by FSA only requiring a one-year commitment, instead of the international standard two-year contract. Other challenges have been met gradually, at the same pace that the school has grown. Meeting the challenges created by increasing numbers and the visions of graduating students has been the focus of one Administrator in particular, so challenges have been dealt with singly and in a timely manner.

*Provide the school’s purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.*

FSA’s Purpose is to provide a valuable, forward-thinking education that provides opportunities for students to learn self-sufficiency, develop leadership skills, have empathy, and understand the complex impact they have on their surroundings. Our purpose is to guide, lead and partner with each of our students to tap into his/her innate love of learning and need to be an emotionally, socially, and physically healthy individual.

Mission: Five Stars Academy’s Mission, in cooperation with parents and community, is to provide creative and challenging programs that will empower all learners to make thoughtful, healthy, and informed choices as they realize their unique potential.

Vision: FSA’s safe, effective, challenging, and engaging education will develop individuals who have a keen understanding of social responsibility alongside their sense of individual purpose.

Values: Everything FSA teaches promotes: respect for the emotional-intellectual-physical individual regardless of age, gender, race, wealth; respect for the many families with their cultures and languages that intermingle on our campus; respect for the environment which is ours to protect as well as enjoy; respect for the local populations to encourage inclusivity with an expanded sense of community.

Embodying Purpose Through Programs and Expectations:

* Emotional needs of the student are strengthened through a self-awareness/academic guidance class offered by one of the owners, who is a trained counsellor.
* All students become at least bilingual and bicultural through the Panamanian studies that are part of the Social Studies classes.
* Parents are invited to share elements of their cultural heritage at school fairs and in the classroom when relevant.
* Academic and social behavior expectations are made clear from the first day.
* Students of all ages and grades are encouraged to play together, study together, and offer protection one to the other. (Any beginning of an infraction is reported directly to the Director, who works with student and family.)
* Academic Programs, especially AP, that a student desires which the school does not offer are sought and made possible through online options.
* Art and Music Programs are out sourced; access to these programs is made available on-campus by the Administration when numbers make sense to the visiting teachers.
* Information on how to access off campus Sports courses and activities is made available from parental and school sources.
* Community Service includes a clean earth focus: teaching through modeling what clean beach and public environment look like.
* Community Service includes outreach to remote communities where individual families need a helping hand to have a healthy lifestyle.
* Community Service includes FSA students offering basic English instruction in remote areas.
* Community Service includes expanding the educational opportunities for deserving and ambitious students in remote communities by financially supporting their move to a larger community.
* Parents are encouraged to join their student in the remote Community Service.

*Describe the school’s notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school is striving to achieve in the next three years.*

Much has happened to and at Five Stars Academy during the past three years. Two years ago we graduated our first group of seniors. When each passed standardized tests with flying colors and was accepted into the schools of choice, we had a defining moment of confirmation that what we are doing is good and of high quality. Each of the past three years has seen a growth in student numbers and a corresponding addition to the campus infrastructure. To expand in this manner, we have had to plan how each bit of space is used to maximize its potential.

FSA has never had to advertise; people hear about us through word of mouth, the best sort of publicity. This has been enough in the past and continues to suffice. The past three years have flooded us with applicants. We have wanted to accept all, but recognize that we are not the right school for every child and his family. We have become increasingly adept at recognizing who will be happy with us, who will be frustrated, and whose needs we can or cannot meet. We have become increasingly adept at searching out potential teachers of the caliber we want and at selling the school to those we find.

The school’s resources initially depended on the depth of the owners’ pockets and commitment in terms of time and finances. The last three years have found FSA self-sufficient, with tuition providing what is needed for current expenses and anticipated future expenses. The proof that the quality of FSA education is well above average will be met in the subsequent three years when future graduating classes match or surpass the success of the first graduating class. With that confirmation, long-range plans can be firmly formulated. During the past three years, increasingly sophisticated and stable internet access has been added to the school’s list of necessities; it is not a commonly available commodity in rural Panama. This past year, in anticipation of the Coronavirus impact and longevity, computers were supplied to all teachers as either their main internet access tool or a backup. The determination is to maintain the technological skills developed during lockdown well after online learning is not mandated. We want these skills to remain sharp, so they continue to be a viable resource, a supplementary option, as well as one that adds depth and breadth to more traditional teaching platforms. For small schools, teacher and student online competency could solve other obstacles, like those caused by unexpected teacher or student absences.

An ongoing challenge FSA faces is to keep what we have and value as a small, intimate, personal school while we become larger. This will require a conscious, knowing effort to achieve; nothing must be left to chance. This is one of the future challenges that can be identified clearly, while others are less obvious. So the broader challenge is to be prepared for what is clearly in our future, and have a game plan for what is in the murky vision of what could happen but may not. One change that may or may not happen is that our lease expires and is not renewed. A suitable alternative space would need to be found and purchased to avoid this recurring. Purchasing land is a financial burden. As well, as the school grows, each administrative job becomes more complex requiring either the current owners acquiring additional skills and/or tools, or hiring new personnel and relegating responsibility. This would cause a shift in control. While the control of the business office may be an easy transition for the current business manager, disseminating and delegating a portion of the responsibilities of the current director/owner/Nursery-Grade One teacher, will be more jolting. The reassurance we can walk with is that the probability is that we will be successful in maintaining what we value as the school goes through growing pains simply because we know what excellence looks like and how it was acquired.