

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [X] Title I    [ ] Charter    [X] Magnet    [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Ms. Diana Vega Nunez

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Dallas Environmental Science Academy

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 3531 N. Westmoreland

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Dallas State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 75212-3747

County Dallas County

Telephone (972) 794-3950 Fax (972) 794-3951

Web site/URL http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/2516 E-mail arzuniga@dallasisd.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Dr. Michael Hinojosa E-mail hinojosam@dallasisd.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Dallas Independent School District Tel. (972) 925-3700

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board  
President/Chairperson Mr. Dan Micciche  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## **Part I – Eligibility Certification**

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2011 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
10. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
11. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
  - 156 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 41 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 41 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools

238 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
  - Urban or large central city
  - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
  - Suburban
  - Small city or town in a rural area
  - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	69	82	151
7	84	58	142
8	80	55	135
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	233	195	428

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 2 % Asian
  - 14 % Black or African American
  - 79 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 3 % White
  - 2 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2015 – 2016 school year: 1%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	5
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	5
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	403
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.012
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 38 %  
163 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, Vietnamese, Nepali

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 86 %  
Total number students who qualify: 369

8. Students receiving special education services: 1 %  
2 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- 1 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 1 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 2 Other Health Impaired
- 0 Specific Learning Disability
- 0 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 2
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	26
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	0
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 16:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	99%	98%	98%	98%	98%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**  
Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2016.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.  
Yes X No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2011

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

Our mission is to develop the foundation of a scientific workforce that will protect and sustain our environment today and for future generations.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

Students are selected based on five factors: grade point average, standardized test scores, an on-site math assessment, writing skills, and a face-to-face interview. Grade point average is computed based on the applicant's most recent official report card. Standardized test scores accepted include the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), Stanford 10, or Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Each applicant composes an on-site essay in response to a prompt. Students also take a district-developed math assessment on-site. After the assessment and essay, students are interviewed by teams consisting of two teachers. The interview assesses, thought process, interest in science and math, communication skills, and student motivation. All applications are scored, applicants are ranked by our district.

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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The Dallas Environmental Science Academy (DESA) is a specialized middle school that offers a one-of-a-kind educational program for students in grades six through eight who have a strong interest in science, mathematics, and technology. At DESA, students have the opportunity to study and explore the environment within an urban setting supporting continuous achievement in science and mathematics. DESA employs a hands-on approach that takes learning beyond the school doors. Our mission is to develop the foundation of a scientific workforce that will protect and sustain our environment today and for future generations. Our motto is, “On time, on task and on a mission to provide and achieve academic excellence for all with no excuses.”

Located in the heart of West Dallas, DESA is a public middle school with a total enrollment of 427 students from all parts of Dallas. The school’s population is 97 percent minority and 86 percent economically disadvantaged.

DESA fosters a positive learning environment that produces autonomous and critical thinkers, creative problem solvers, effective communicators, lifelong learners, and technologically skilled citizens who graduate with life skills and an understanding of civic responsibility. This knowledge helps prepare students for admission to competitive high schools, colleges, and universities.

At DESA, emphasis is placed on developing leaders at school and in the community. Morning announcements recognize students for acts of leadership and character such as responsibility, citizenship, trustworthiness, honesty, respect, caring and fairness, and daily inspirational leadership quotes help get them off to a great start each day. To promote college readiness, staff members share their college experiences, what motivated them to succeed, and challenges they’ve overcome. Students are encouraged to walk with a purpose and perform at their highest potential every day.

DESA students are actively involved in extracurricular activities such as National Junior Honor Society, Robotics, Yearbook, Guitar Club, Intramural Sports, Diva Steppers, Green Team, Science Fair, Academic Pentathlon, Texas Math and Science Coaches Association Competition, Destination Imagination, University Interscholastic League, Archery Club, and Debate. These opportunities are vital to developing a sense of belonging for a student population that lives all across the city.

DESA teachers participate in ongoing content-specific professional development that is focused on inquiry, problem-solving, learning through projects, and technology integration. They also engage in job-embedded professional development in our professional learning communities where they share best practices, analyze data, evaluate student work, provide support, and discuss student achievement. The goal is always to facilitate high academic performance.

Stakeholders of the Dallas Environmental Science Academy are valued and given multiple opportunities to provide input and collaborate with faculty and staff on issues such as campus improvement planning, use of resources, enrichment activities, Site-Based Decision Making Team (SBDM), and community service projects through the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA).

As a previous recipient of the Blue Ribbon Schools Award, DESA has earned recognition throughout the city, which has helped to attract students and families to DESA, nearly doubling our enrollment and boosting school morale. Thanks to the related media exposure, DESA attracted the sponsorship of a local hotel that has contributed to school beautification efforts, created an outdoor learning environment, and funded a staff appreciation dinner. DESA has increased the number of courses offered for high school credit from four to eight, and teachers have received numerous grants to expose our students to opportunities to learn about the environment, participate in enrichment activities, and access technology. The staff has benefited from community partnerships leading to professional development opportunities from a local university and participation in an educational focus group with the local public broadcasting network. Still another partner organization provided support in helping teachers promote positive growth mindsets and to ensure equal gender access to science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM).

DESA's culture of high expectations, "whatever it takes with no excuses" mindset, and focus on college readiness have contributed to the school's success and public recognition. The recipient of all seven Texas Education Agency distinctions three years in a row, DESA received the TEA's Title I Award for High Performance and High Progress for two consecutive years along with an A+ rating from Children at Risk, which rates schools based on student achievement, campus performance, growth, and college readiness. Dallas ISD has identified DESA as a district excelling campus, the district's highest possible rating.

Through hard work and unyielding dedication to students, DESA has increased the number of students it serves while enriching the rigor in the curriculum. DESA remains true to its mission by maintaining an environmental focus and exposing students to careers in the math and science fields. Strategic planning and individualized interventions ensure there are no performance gaps among the students and increase the number of students performing at advanced levels. DESA believes in developing the whole child ensuring they have all the skills needed to be successful in life.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum:**

In addition to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) mandated learning standards, DESA offers a stimulating, hands-on educational program that incorporates social and emotional development and a curriculum enriched with real-world applications and field experiences.

DESA has adopted a curriculum built around the distinct needs of its students. Teacher training in gender equality has helped support the balanced development of every student in the areas of math, technology and science. Pre-AP (advanced placement) courses address the needs of the talented and gifted (TAG) population (73 percent of the school) by promoting mastery of the TEKS as well as offering a more challenging academic environment. Thirty-eight percent of DESA students are limited English proficient (LEP). Although the curriculum is advanced, it incorporates essential components of the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) to sustain the growth of our LEP population.

DESA's Reading and Language Arts (RLA) curriculum utilizes a balanced literacy model as designated by the RLA TEKS and ELPS while providing rigorous instruction in writing, reading, vocabulary, and listening and speaking skills. These skills are developed using complex literary and nonfiction selections, online-learning activities, and authentic writing instruction. Student-centered activities, including higher level blooms taxonomy pieces, facilitate the accomplishment of lesson objectives. DESA's RLA program focuses on high achievement in Pre-AP courses in grades six through eight. One-third of eighth-grade students take an English I course for high school credit. Students are challenged with innovative techniques that emphasize strategies to imbue inference skills, questioning, analyzing, summarizing, and synthesizing to connect and comprehend complex texts. Metacognitive reading strategies, Socratic seminars, and evidence based textual responses are practiced in literacy rich classrooms. A writing plan was developed based on the writing TEKS to increase mastery on the writing STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) and to promote the college readiness skill of written communication. Students work through a writing process that utilizes one-on-one conferences to improve style, clarity, and purposeful diction. Mentor texts guide students by modeling proper conventions to create strong essays.

DESA's mathematics curriculum is aligned to state standards, and strengthened through a focus on the process TEKS to promote internalization of math skills. The process TEKS are strategically embedded in the math lessons to ensure students are able to apply mathematical logic to varied situations. One hundred percent of sixth- and seventh-graders take pre-AP Math which incorporates the current and upcoming year's TEKS. These courses provide the foundation for algebra which is taken by 100 percent of DESA's eighth-graders. Students are immersed in the math curriculum through cooperative learning, hands-on activities, small group instruction, technology and modeling. Tutoring and Saturday school provide additional support for struggling learners. Advanced learners explore higher mathematics through online resources and academic competitions. The math TEKS related to Category 4 provide easy integration of college and career readiness discussions at every grade level.

To support DESA's mission of environmental awareness, students take two science courses. Sixth- and seventh-graders take Pre-AP Science and Environmental Studies. Eighth-grade students take Environmental Systems and either Astronomy or Physics for high school credit. The scientific investigation and reasoning skills (process standards) are developed through project-based learning, laboratory activities and a school-wide science fair. Students engage daily with the science TEKS through real-life scenarios, model creations, virtual labs, interactive projects, field trips and collaborative activities. DESA's seventh-grade class attends a three-day outdoor program which supports the eighth- grade science TEKS where conceptual understanding is demonstrated through the construction and testing of cardboard boats, geocaching, and rocket building and launching.

The Social Studies curriculum promotes the retention of historical facts, explores connections between history and present day, and allows the students to interact with history in a way that makes it more realistic. It is based on district and state standards and engages students in history and geography at state, national,

and global levels. Students develop political, economic, geographic, and social perspectives of history and apply knowledge through essential questions and enduring understandings. Students use both modern and historical primary source texts to develop skills for analysis and synthesis and engage with historical artifacts. In eighth-grade U.S. History, students learn through 1:1 technological applications. Students also participate in social studies enrichment activities including debate team, mock elections, and a history-based academic competition.

College and career readiness is emphasized by highlighting staff and students' daily academic achievements daily, an annual career day, and counseling students to promote college readiness skills. Resume development is addressed in eighth grade technology classes and college readiness standards are embedded in the math curriculum. DESA has implemented a college readiness curriculum for seventh graders through a partnership with a local non-profit. Technology is used to determine and grow reading Lexile levels to college readiness standards. STEAM careers are explored across content areas. In 2016, DESA received a distinction designation in post-secondary readiness from the Texas Education Agency, ranking DESA second in its comparison group.

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

All sixth-graders are enrolled in a yearlong visual arts course that is formulated based on state and district standards with continuous modifications centered on the needs of students. DESA's art curriculum is strongly based in science and math to provide cross-curricular content in every lesson. The art program also emphasizes environmental awareness as students learn the production, history, analysis, and elements of art. This is fostered through the creative use of recycled products and alternative resources in the development of their projects.

The physical education (PE) curriculum is built around three programs that teach fitness, health, and social awareness as identified in the state of Texas Health and PE TEKS. Sixth- and eighth-grade students are enrolled in a yearlong physical education program, and seventh-graders are enrolled in a semester long health class and a semester long PE class. Students develop fine motor skills through activities related to the physiological growth of middle school students. The health curriculum seeks to develop a healthy lifestyle that is maintained until adulthood. Social and emotional development in the PE curriculum is nurtured through conflict resolution, sportsmanship, and the promotion of a positive body image. Without many sports activities, the PE classes are the school's primary method of fostering an active lifestyle for the students.

DESA students have the opportunity to enroll in various levels of Spanish as a foreign language in seventh and eighth grade. Students are placed in Spanish I or Spanish II during seventh grade in accordance to their performance in a formal assessment administered in sixth grade and then progress through the levels taking either Spanish II or III in eighth grade. This provides the opportunity to earn the two credits needed towards high school graduation. However, students who skipped Spanish I may also test out in order to earn that high school credit. All Spanish classes are aligned to the TEKS for languages other than English. The Spanish curriculum is designed to support the acquisition of language for non-native Spanish speakers, while augmenting the abilities of native-Spanish speakers. Students interact with the Spanish language at every level by speaking, writing and listening to the language in diverse scenarios. While acquiring fundamental skills, students are exposed to the vast diversity of Hispanic modern and classic culture.

Technology courses are offered to seventh- and eighth-graders. The seventh-grade course is divided into three programs: a semester long Robotics course (first semester choice), a semester long Introduction to Programming course (first semester choice) and a semester long Technology Applications course (offered to all seventh-graders the second semester). Through engagement with the Robotics TEKS, students apply critical thinking skills to integrate research, creativity and innovation to create and improve a robot design. During the Introduction to Programming course, students create interactive animations, stories and games that incorporate creativity, innovation, communication and collaboration, and critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The Technology Applications course provides an introduction to technology applications including information on computers, operating systems, networks, WWW, and web applications. Search engine tools are used to help create various forms of digital products. Students learn how to be responsible

citizens by acquiring knowledge in the ethical use of information (copyright and fair use), etiquette, identity, and security in the digital realm. Through this course, all seventh-graders apply technology skills to create their own projects and present them. The Technology Applications course addresses TEKS that build upon the previous semester's foundational skills.

Eighth-grade students are offered a choice between the yearlong high school courses, Gateway to Technology, or Principles of Information Technology. The courses are activities-oriented programs designed to challenge and engage the natural curiosity and imagination of students. In the Principles of Information Technology course, students develop computer literacy skills to adapt to emerging technologies used in the global market place. Students implement interpersonal skills and enhance reading, writing, computing, communication, and reasoning abilities through an information technology lens to prepare for a rapidly evolving workplace environment. The Gateway to Technology course infuses basic technology TEKS with concepts from higher level engineering courses. Students engage with the content using six steps of the engineering design process and reflect on the feasibility of the prototype. These courses prepare students to be successful in twenty-first century careers.

### **3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:**

Teachers employ varied instructional approaches to not only meet the needs of the students, but also to enhance the academic experience in the classroom. A positive classroom culture and atmosphere of high expectations provide the framework for setting high academic goals. Educational strategies vary depending on the content, but some strategies are applicable to all areas. Small group instruction is utilized to support learners who require additional support. Learning menus, student presentations and individual and group projects allow the students to interact with the content in ways that align with their personal learning styles. To support the language acquisition and development of English Language Learners, teachers focus on the growth of vocabulary and allow students to use sentence stems. Critical thinking is promoted through high-level questioning and development of the students' inquiry skills. To strengthen retention of the content, teachers incorporate mind maps and other visuals. Technology is incorporated throughout the content. Its use is not limited to research. It also enhances instruction by providing immediate data that is used to adjust teaching, connect with students about homework or projects, to allow the students to participate in virtual experiments, and to promote non-evasive discussion.

Data are derived from multiple sources. Historical data from the STAAR and Assessment of Course Performance (ACP) are used to analyze trends and determine general academic needs. Professional development is created based on these trends and revised as more data are gathered throughout the year. Common assessment (CAs) blueprints (which list the TEKS to be tested) are analyzed to guide instruction, discuss new strategies and develop the instructional calendar. Multiple strategies to teach the covered standards are developed to address the needs of individual learners. After the administration of the CAs, the PLCs have data discussions that include vertical alignment conversations, collaborative grade level conversations about strategies to reteach, and readjustments to the instructional calendar. Small groups are formed from this data. Data is analyzed through many lenses: individual teachers and students, specific demographics, and grade level and content teams. Student data is aggregated into a tracker used by teachers to monitor students' progress and determine whether a student needs tutoring or other support to reach the next level of academic achievement. Data is shared with students to empower them with ownership of their academic development. Midyear, benchmark tests are administered to provide a more holistic view of each student's mastery level and provide insight to any specific areas of weakness. Lessons and review activities are targeted to the development of specific skills of individual students. Saturday school tutoring is offered to students who are struggling or who may be in danger of falling short of their yearly progress measures. Daily, teachers use data gathered through active monitoring, demonstrations of learning and online resources that provide immediate access to data. This feedback allows teachers to address possible misconceptions. This kind of close monitoring of data has helped to increase scores in every content area.

Interventions occur during the school day and before and after school hours. During classroom instruction, interventions are implemented through small group instruction, strategic grouping, differentiated content or product, and scaffolding. Tutoring is offered before and after school. Saturday school is offered in the spring. Parental involvement is a high leverage tool to hold students accountable and reinforce interventions

that need to be completed at home. Teachers constantly communicate student progress to parents and employ technology to strengthen parental contact and provide students with online lessons to support academic growth.

With approximately 74 percent of DESA students classified as Gifted/Talented (GT) and 100 percent labeled high achievers, DESA has created many opportunities for students to strengthen and improve their academic abilities, and teachers work to ensure that they are prepared to address the needs of GT students. Students compete in several academic competitions through the debate club and several organizations that emphasize STEAM skills. Students can earn a maximum of eight high school credits, and teachers are required to complete GT training every year to acquire strategies proven to nurture the academic growth of the GT student. Teachers use progress monitoring as a strategy to ensure that high-achieving students continue growing from year to year.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Student engagement begins before the first day of school, as incoming sixth-graders attend a day of orientation and teambuilding featuring STEAM activities sponsored by an area science museum. Students are motivated to attend school daily and compete between grade levels for the highest percentage of attendance, earning perfect attendance awards and incentives each six-week grading period. Students receive awards for honor roll, and students in good academic standing participate in special campus activities, which helps make students diligent about turning in assignments. Curriculum is tailored to student interests, including courses in robotics, environmental studies, astronomy, and physics. Teachers engage and motivate students through differentiated instruction and hands-on approaches with real-world applications. Seventh graders experience curricular applications through a science-based overnight outdoor learning experience. Students engage in real-world learning through field trips to the planetarium and the district's environmental education center. Eighth-graders conclude their DESA experience with a lock-in, class picnic, and crossover ceremony.

Focusing on the development of the whole student, DESA nurtures social and emotional growth. The counselor plays a key role in this development through one-on-one conferences, small group support, and lessons focused on common middle school issues. Students' social and emotional needs are identified by teachers, parents, and students, and counseling sessions are available to meet specific needs. Positive character development is emphasized through Character Counts and Habits of Mind programs to promote positive interactions with others. Students are engaged and enriched through cultural programs and clubs, allowing students to explore interests in chess, guitar, debate, art, robotics, and archery.

DESA's administrators maintain a supportive presence, visiting classrooms and leaving teachers with "I Noticed" cards, focusing on areas of strength. Awards for curriculum, creativity, innovation, and child advocacy are presented to teachers selected by previous recipients, allowing staff members to celebrate excellence. Teachers are recognized for student achievement and perfect attendance throughout and at the conclusion of the school year, when the Teacher and Department of the Year are recognized. To maintain a positive climate, the principal addresses staff questions and concerns submitted anonymously through the faculty and staff advising committee. PLC teams also provide teachers with a non-threatening environment where they can express concerns. The hospitality committee supports staff with treats and birthday celebrations, and climate surveys help to monitor staff morale and job satisfaction. Positive growth has been noted in every area, and 100 percent of teachers were retained from 2016 to 2017.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

DESA serves a diverse community of learners from across Dallas and has earned a positive reputation by engaging our students' families and the community surrounding the school.

To develop community partnerships and expand learning opportunities for students, DESA invites area business leaders to serve as career day speakers. In turn, a science museum provides STEAM activities for the sixth-grade orientation event. DESA invites business and community leaders to visit as Principals for a Day to build relationships between the school and the community. A local business sponsors a weekly student club meeting, and the school partners with a local university to provide parent training focused on early adolescence and the changes that accompany students' transition from elementary to secondary school. A partnership with a botanical garden resulted in grant funding for a butterfly garden, which enriches and extends the environmental science curriculum, and grant funding received through other partnerships has provided students with books, a 3D printer to enhance technology instruction, and field trips.

Parents and family members actively participate in their student's education. The school volunteer coordinator communicates the needs of the school and provides guidance to volunteers. Parents accompany students on field trips, serve as guest speakers, and support campus projects. Teachers,

students, and parents participate in the district's Prep University events, allowing parents and teachers to better prepare students for college. DESA's PTSA includes non-English speakers in active leadership roles. Parents, teachers, and students work together to plan field trips, in-school activities, and end-of-year functions. Parents show appreciation for staff and students during the year, decorating the school for holidays, and providing meals and treats. Family literacy events focus on reading, math, science and social studies. Parents and teachers advocate for the school to school board members and district leadership.

To promote communication and family involvement, DESA has a parent center stocked with parent information in English and Spanish, and a dedicated wall space showcases student, teacher, and volunteer activities and accomplishments. Weekly newsletters and a phone callout system keep parents and families informed of upcoming events and deadlines in English and Spanish. Translation services are available at meetings and trainings to facilitate communication, and the popular Pastries with the Principal event promotes communication and feedback. Parental involvement has resulted in increased attendance and reduced failure rates and provided students with a strong support system aimed at improving quality of education and increasing access to opportunities.

### **3. Professional Development:**

DESA leadership assesses and adapts professional development (PD) to meet the unique needs of teachers and students. PD is aligned with the TEKS and the campus improvement plan, which is developed through the collaboration of the administrative team over the summer based on the prior year's STAAR and ACP data and teacher feedback. Initial PD topics are based on strategies designed to increase overall advanced performance and specific content topics derived from the tested TEKS. For example, after analyzing the Writing TEKS, supporting PDs were developed to support the writing plan. The PLCs are an intricate part of the PD plan. PLC teams are used for strategy shares, increasing rigor in lessons to align with the demands of the TEKS, evaluating data and campus goals and vertical planning. Based on teacher input, PD is presented as content specific (TEK driven), teacher-driven and/or optional topics. These PDs are presented with the support of district specialists, academic partners, and/or assigned DESA teachers. As school needs change, topics change.

About 70 percent of DESA teachers are distinguished as established by the district's distinguished teacher review (DTR) process. To challenge those teachers and support their growth as educators, DESA leadership encourages teachers to attend outside training. All teams attend content-specific professional conferences annually, affording them the opportunity to collaborate with and learn strategies from other educators. Strategies obtained are shared during campus PD, with the entire faculty benefiting from their colleagues' outside PD experiences. Administrators receive regular training in areas such as effective feedback and effective PDs. This training supports the one-on-one sessions conducted by administrators following classroom observations. The campus instructional coach meets with the academic facilitators and other coaches each six weeks to share strategies for supporting teachers. Annual GT training is required for all teachers to ensure teachers learn how GT students acquire knowledge. Learning walks allow teachers to visit their colleagues' classrooms and are used as a modeling tool for teachers to support their craft. At the end of each school year, teachers meet with the principal to create individual Summer PD plans that are partly based on the growth areas observed during classroom visits and personal growth goals. The effectiveness of the PD sessions are evaluated through monthly temperature checks. All teachers and administrators take an active and collaborative role in planning and implementing PD that meets campus needs and goals.

### **4. School Leadership:**

DESA's leadership philosophy is to empower staff by building positive relationships through team building and collaborative decision-making. By embracing lifelong learning and reflection, academic achievement is fostered through a growth mindset.

The administrative team is comprised of the principal, assistant principal, and counselor. The principal collaborates with the staff and key stakeholders regarding the mission, vision, and goals for the campus. The principal encourages students by meeting with them about strategies to help them reflect on their

academic progress and self-management of learning. The counselor continuously monitors and motivates students through sessions in organization, study skills, college and career readiness, and the high school selection process. Teachers are encouraged to initiate new strategies, seek innovative programs that enhance curriculum, and improve existing programs to have a positive impact on student achievement. Administrators solicit feedback from sources such as the Site-Based Decision Making Team, PTSA, students, teachers and parents, to ensure decisions are in the best interests of the school. Strong relationships with parents are nurtured through weekly newsletters in English and Spanish highlighting upcoming events, assignments, and other important information.

DESA's campus instructional leadership team (CILT) is comprised of the instructional coach, department chairs, administrators, and the counselor. The CILT gathers information and resources from various local, regional, and state sources to share with their peers. Principal-led and teacher-led professional development and professional learning communities foster collaboration and build leadership capacity among the staff. More than two-thirds of the teaching staff qualify for the district's distinguished teacher review process. Their vast knowledge of pedagogy allows opportunities for frequent collaboration among staff to strengthen curriculum alignment, identify best practices, analyze data, and design interventions. Time is set aside in the summer to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of our systems, align programs with student achievement data, identify professional development needs, and set the tone for the year. The team ensures the campus action plan is aligned to district policies and focused on student achievement.

Leadership is fostered by encouraging students to lead the extracurricular programs at DESA. Through programs such as National Junior Honor Society and opportunities to serve as recruitment guides, students can contribute their perspectives and affect the future of the school. Students are encouraged to participate in leadership and academic programs in conjunction with local universities that exposes them college preparation, opportunities to lead and impact their peers, build relationships, and develop their communication skills.

## **Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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Feedback has proven to be a key lever for academic success at DESA. It is embedded throughout the school's day-to-day interactions, methods of communication, and ways of assessing success. All members of the DESA community are involved in the feedback process.

Feedback has been essential in the academic maturation of students and as a form of communication between students and teachers. Active monitoring is applied in every content area and provides immediate feedback from the teacher to the student. This feedback provides the opportunity for students to reflect and make more conscientious academic choices. Specific feedback is used in the writing curriculum through writing conferencing. Student data sheets provide TEK-specific individual feedback after tests. Student feedback occurs through student representation on the SBDM committee, district and class surveys, and general surveys. Through the district's student perception surveys, students provide valuable feedback on engagement, relationships and effectiveness of communication. This gives teachers concrete areas of improvement from the lens of the student.

Parent feedback improves the relationship with the school, fosters trust, and is shared through several channels such as SBDM, PTSA meetings, and Pastries with the Principal. The staff constantly receives feedback from parents through emails and in-person. Surveys gauge parent satisfaction with school initiatives such as whether the school is providing a safe learning environment for the students. This feedback loop empowers parents to have an active role in their student's success and provides the staff with valuable insight on how to better support students.

Feedback between teachers, staff and administration involves everyone in the creation of a positive culture. Through forums such as FSAC, PLC teams, and faculty meetings, the staff is allowed to share ideas and engage in activities aimed at developing school initiatives. These opportunities are used to strengthen the culture and positively impact school morale. During PLC meetings, teachers provide each other content-specific feedback on strategies used with the students to positively impact student achievement and understanding. Administrator observation feedback has improved through the incorporation of teacher input. Observation scores are assigned after a discussion between administrator and teacher. The school's PD plan was derived from feedback shared during the one-on-one meetings between the principal and each teacher at the beginning of the school year. Beyond the district survey given twice a year, every six weeks teachers participate in a survey aimed at monitoring progress on specific questions from the climate survey. Continuous feedback has contributed to DESA's academic success.