

U.S. Department of Education
2023 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mrs. Margarita Lopez Taboada
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Hector J. Garcia Early College High School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 5241 University Boulevard
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Laredo State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 78041-1920

County Webb

Telephone (956) 273-7700 Fax _____

Web site/URL <https://earlycollege.elisd.org/> E-mail mtaboada@Laredoisd.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.

(Principal's Signature) Date _____

Name of Superintendent* Dr. Sylvia Guerra Rios E-mail sgrios@laredoisd.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Laredo Independent School District Tel. (956) 273-1000

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.

(Superintendent's Signature) Date _____

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mrs. Monica Garcia
(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.

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature) Date _____

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, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

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. 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, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2023 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.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2018 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2022.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 or 2022.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

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.

The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if one of these eligibility requirements is later discovered to have not been met or otherwise been violated.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the current school year (2022-2023) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools. For charter schools: If a charter school is part of the public school system, information should be provided for the public school district. If a charter school is considered its own district or part of a charter district, the information provided should reflect that.)

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

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. **Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not for the district.**)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

☒ Urban (city or town)
☐ Suburban
☐ Rural

3. Number of students in the school as of October 1, 2022 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Students
PreK	0
K	0
1	0
2	0
3	0
4	0
5	0
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	102
10	91
11	101
12 or higher	105
Total Students	399

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0.3 % Asian
 - 0.3 % Black or African American
 - 98.6 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 0.3 % White
 - 0.5 % 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 2021 - 2022 school year: 1%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

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, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 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, 2021	407
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 12 %
49 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 88 %

Total number students who qualify: 352

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 0 %
Total number of students served 0

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services with an IEP should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

<u>0</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>0</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Developmental Delay	<u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>0</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 7 %
Total number of students served: 28

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 3

11. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	18
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	1
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

12. 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 22:1

13. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018
Daily student attendance	98%	99%	99%	98%	98%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

14. **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 2022.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	88
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	82%
Enrolled in a community college	7%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	1%
Joined the military or other public service	5%
Other	5%

15. 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. 2017

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

The Hector J. Garcia Early College High School at Texas A&M International University believes that all students, regardless of their economic and social backgrounds, can acquire a college degree through a rigorous and challenging curriculum that prepares them to earn 42 or more university hours while earning a high school diploma.

17. Provide a URL link to the school's nondiscrimination policy.

earlycollege.elisd.org

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

Recruitment meetings, presentations, and an open house occur during the year before the application opens to inform interested students about our program. A weighted lottery is applied using the data provided by middle school counselors and the information on the submitted applications. The categories used are students who have not had access to the academic preparation needed to meet college readiness standards, English Language Learners, economically disadvantaged students, and underrepresented backgrounds. In an effort to increase opportunities for post-secondary success, students of all backgrounds are encouraged to apply.

PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW

In 2017, Hector J. Garcia Early College High School (GECHS) set a precedent as being the first high school in the city to earn the National Blue Ribbon School award. This distinction continues to foster a sense of pride and high expectations for teachers, staff, and current and incoming students.

GECHS is located in Laredo, Texas, a border town between Mexico and the United States. Laredo has a population of approximately 330,000. GECHS is a partnership between Laredo Independent School District (LISD) and Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) and is the fourth high school in the district. Recruiting students from the four LISD middle schools and servicing ninth to twelfth grade, GECHS is a small public high school with approximately 400 students.

The school's demographics reflect those of the community it serves. Laredo is a Spanish-speaking dominant town. Its population is 95.5% Hispanic and approximately 20% of the population is at poverty level. Additionally, according to the United States (US) Census Bureau as of 2021, 69.7% of Laredo's population have earned a high school diploma or higher; they also report that only 20% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Consequently, GECHS targets students who are identified at-risk, economically disadvantaged, and first-generation college students. The school's current demographics parallel that of our district as a whole, with a 98.75% Hispanic student body, of which approximately 12% are identified as Emergent Bilingual (EB), 88% as economically disadvantaged, and 23% identified as at-risk.

With a unique learning environment that provides academic and social support, GECHS' mission is to offer students the opportunity to earn at least 42 hours of transferable college credits while in high school. The academic program focuses on rigorous mastery of content, enabling students to succeed in today's colleges and universities. The physical and emotional transition between high school and college is minimized by providing a system of support throughout the students' high school career.

Located on TAMIU grounds, GECHS is the only stand-alone early college campus in Laredo, which is outside of the LISD school boundaries. Therefore, most students require transportation to and from school. With a 98% attendance rate, our students exhibit determination and commitment to earning their high school and college hours. Despite these challenging social factors, GECHS continues to earn distinctions at the local, state, and national levels. For the past five years, excluding COVID years, the Texas Education Agency has rated GECHS an A-plus campus. The school currently ranks 7th in the state and 124th in the nation according to Best High Schools and World Report US News. These distinctions validate the school's continuous efforts in providing students a rigorous curriculum focusing on prescriptive learning and scaffolding strategies.

Although GECHS has always provided a tailored curriculum facilitating students with a smooth transition between their high school and university courses, the recent pandemic challenged teachers to implement more digital learning and social-emotional support. To provide support for struggling students, teachers offer tutorials, workshops, and mentoring services. Moreover, to better serve the EB population, all English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) teachers are bilingual/ESL certified. In courses aligned to the College and Career Readiness Standards, teachers personalize instruction for students, so they may achieve academic success.

GECHS students earn college and high school credit by attending dual-credit classes taught by TAMIU faculty. This allows students to experience a multicultural and academically diverse collegiate environment. Unlike other early college programs in the city, our students academically and physically benefit from having direct access to TAMIU facilities and student services within a walking distance. Students frequent the TAMIU Academic Center for Excellence (tutorial services), the Sue & Radcliffe Killam Library, and the Kinesiology, Wellness and Recreation Center. The strong collaborative approach between GECHS and TAMIU exists because of an Academic Advisory Committee composed of the University President, Provost, and Vice President of Student Success and the LISD Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, Principal, Counselors, and Dean of Instruction, which annually reviews GECHS curriculum and data.

To balance the rigorous curriculum, GECHS provides students with extracurricular outlets such as University Interscholastic League (UIL) academics, student council, student advisory board, chess, and robotics to name a few. In these clubs, students learn organizational and leadership skills; they also participate in community service projects. With support from TAMIU, GECHS holds weekly intramural sport competitions. Students are also invited to participate in university-sponsored events and activities. One particular TAMIU event that GECHS students participated in recently was the Holi Festival, which celebrates Spring, friends, and family. Moreover, in commemoration of International Women's Day, GECHS students were invited to attend a discussion panel with women leaders in education, international business, law, and healthcare at TAMIU hosted by the Office of Global Initiatives Binational Center. These activities promote enriching academic opportunities, multicultural awareness, and social-emotional experiences.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

1a. Reading/English language arts curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

For English, 9th and 10th grade students are enrolled in Honors English I and II, respectively. They must pass both the English courses and the state End of Course (EOC) exam. Students are taught disciplinary literacy skills. For instance, ELAR teachers teach students the tools to critically analyze, thus building important skills like identifying and evaluating literary elements and strengthening rhetoric skills by providing extensive writing opportunities. Teachers implement writing strategies from various writing camps, including the Writing Academy and the South Texas Writing Project. To enhance student learning and creative outlets, teachers organize Poetry Cafes where students share original poems and read from their favorite authors. To prepare students for state assessments, teachers familiarize them with the grading rubric used for scoring EOC essays. In small-groups, students read essays previously scored by the state; together they evaluate and justify their score based on the EOC rubric.

Teachers track data via formative and summative assessments. Through formative assessments, teachers employ observation, group discussion, and one-on-one conferencing to assess student progress and adjust learning as needed. Formally, students are administered curriculum based assessments (CBAs) every three weeks and benchmarks every nine weeks to monitor student progress.

All 9th grade students are enrolled in the Reading I course. In this course, students are introduced to literary works like Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, and Ishmael Beah’s *A Long Way Gone*. Though these texts are usually read at the junior and senior level, the reading teacher provides the needed scaffolding so students comprehend and appreciate these challenging texts. Students participate in small-group reading discussions over assigned text readings facilitated by teacher-produced guided questions. Creative assessments like mock trials and whole class discussions provide enrichment opportunities.

In 11th grade, students obtain their high school credits for English III and IV by earning a passing grade in their dual-college English Composition: Research and Writing (English 1301/1302) courses. In these courses, students build on previously taught skills as they learn to compose research papers. For instance, students are required to write cohesive and coherent academic essays following specific writing formats. Students also develop writing-related technological skills that allow them to locate, engage, and evaluate writing activities and artifacts in various genres and across media formats. The most challenging essay requires students to analyze and synthesize research findings from 10 peer-reviewed sources. This project compels students to work at a rigorous college level. Their final papers must be polished and submitted to professors in a timely manner following the Modern Language Association (MLA) format. In English courses, students learn the skills to analyze and synthesize what they read and to articulate their insights in clear prose and speech.

In 12th grade, students take the Survey of American Literature to the Civil War (English 2327). In this course, students learn major literary development. Students are required to write literary analyses evaluating poetry, autobiographical texts, essays, and short stories. Students’ final exam typically consists of responding to multiple short answer responses where students support analytical claims using text-based evidence.

1b. Mathematics curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

In Algebra I, one lesson students learn about is the foundational algebraic concept of parent functions to understand its application in real life. Students determine and compare the properties of linear, quadratic, and exponential functions. In the “Knowing your Parents” lesson, students pair “children to their parents” based on physical traits. Students are given several graphs and equations to sort into families and describe key features. During class discussion, students summarize the properties of each parent function. To increase

understanding, students learn where these functions are used in real life. For this reason, functions are presented to them in different real-world scenarios such as: changing x dollars to pesos, working x hours at \$7.25 minimum wage, throwing a ball and determining its maximum height, doubling their savings every week versus saving the same amount every week, tagging two friends in social media and asking them to share his/her post with other two friends, and so on. Students collaborate and decide which function best models each situation and justify their thinking. To close the lesson, students are asked to choose a parent function and think about another real-world situation where this function can be used.

In Algebra II, students learn about systems of equations with three variables. Students must understand the importance of implementing the elimination or substitution method to a system of two variables and two equations and relating it to a system of three equations and three variables. As a warm-up activity, students solve a system of two linear equations and process answers as a class. To solve a system of three equations and three variables by substitution, students are given various examples to practice independently. The main focus of this activity is for students to solve the systems and if necessary, correct any mistakes made during the process. This skill requires patience and accurate calculations to arrive at an answer.

In Geometry, students learn about transformations. When learning about reflections, students begin the lesson by reflecting a figure across a line using tracing paper and folding it. They then use MIRA, a mathematical geometry tool, to reflect the figure across the line. They also reflect using the slope of the line of reflection and the slope of the line connecting the points reflected. Students learn to reflect across the x -axis and y -axis using rules of reflection. After completing the transformation unit, students are tested on their transformation skills which are spiraled throughout the course.

In Advanced Placement (AP) Calculus, students learn to sketch a function by using the first and second derivatives. Students learn that the first derivative specifies the intervals where the function increases or decreases. With the second derivative, students learn how to find the intervals where the function is concave up or down. Knowing this information, students can trace or sketch the graph of any function, which is tested on the AP Calculus exam.

For formative assessments, math teachers look at student exams to pinpoint mathematical steps that need reteach. For summative assessments, math teachers use longitudinal data to target specific low-scoring objectives.

1c. Science curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

In Biology, digital teaching tools are used to enhance student learning, such tools are used in the mitosis lab. Students use microscopes to observe stages of mitosis, examining slides of root tip and of whitefish cells. The students have small group discussions on how the cell cycle promotes growth and repair. Students are assessed using software to drag and drop images based on the slides that they observed during their lab.

For Chemistry, students identify and locate elements according to their periodic families. Students organize the periodic table via technology applications and answer questions for understanding. Students participate in small group discussions as they practice with sorting and multiple-choice questions. They are assessed via short quizzes. They complete the unit with a journal entry where they write about the concepts in the unit.

In Physics, students are taught basic kinematics equations to apply to projectiles (launched horizontally and at an angle). They also learn how to manipulate equations to find missing variables. Students participate in a laboratory activity using equipment like the marble launcher and a photogate timer. This outdoor activity allows students to measure the distance traveled by the projected plastic marble. They calculate the speed at which the marble is launched at different angles. Students are assessed via a laboratory report where they write up their collected data.

In Anatomy and Physiology, students learn about diseases and disorders. In a major project, students choose one disorder or disease to write a research paper. They create an informational brochure about the disease/disorder they researched. Besides the final draft of their research paper, students are assessed on the knowledge via an oral presentation.

In science, teachers track data from class assessments to provide reteach or tutorials for students struggling with concepts. For Biology, like in math, teachers use longitudinal data to identify low-scoring objectives.

1d. Social studies/history/civic learning curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

In US History, students are active participants in learning. When learning about the Roaring Twenties, a “speakeasy” is set up with low lighting and jazz music. Students wear costumes and are given a secret password to enter their class. There are interactive stations about the culture, politics, and economy of the era. Through project-based learning, students acquire fundamental knowledge, interpret, and apply it to real-life situations. Students evaluate their interpretations and differing perspectives justifying their claims with detailed evidence.

In the dual-enrollment US History to 1877 course, students learn about early American politics and culture. They compose a paper using Chicago Style format creating an avatar adhering to a chosen historical moment. In this project, they must adhere to specific historical events while using primary and secondary sources.

In Economics, students learn about systems. To understand pure capitalism, some students are given five candies and some are given ten, resulting in students saying, “That’s not fair.” The students proceed to play Rock, Paper, Scissors, giving up candies until they run out. After the game, class discussion begins on topics about equal opportunity, profit-motive, and lack of government (exemplified by teacher) interference in the capitalist economy. To simulate socialism, students who have too much candy have to give to other students. After gauging student reactions, they discuss system characteristics. To simulate a command economy, all candy is taken away and the teacher decides how to distribute the candy. Again, class discussion begins with detailing characteristics of this economic system. To assess, students then create a graphic organizer comparing systems and write a paragraph explaining which economic system is best.

History teachers track data from class assessments to provide enrichment or reteach tutorials for students struggling with concepts. For US History, teachers use longitudinal data to identify low-scoring objectives.

1e. For schools that serve grades 7-12:

GECHS offers students a curriculum that supports college and career readiness, learning opportunities through internships, industry certifications, and civic duty preparedness. GECHS offers students SAT Prep and TSIA2 courses that focus on preparing students for college readiness. Curriculum for these courses is designed to closely resemble testing format, and testing objectives are covered throughout the semester. These courses have helped increase the number of students who can enroll in college courses by the second semester of their 10th grade year. For students in dual-enrolled courses, high school support teachers are assigned to facilitate their learning. These teachers work closely with TAMIU instructors providing students with scaffolding throughout the semester.

Students also have opportunities to prepare for future careers and apply for internships. The district offers internships to students each summer; students apply, interview, and if selected, are assigned to work in one of the district’s main departments. Aside from career opportunities, 11th graders take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. Even if students do not enlist, this aptitude test can guide them in choosing a career pathway.

Furthermore, all students take Principles of Information Technology where they learn Microsoft (MS) Word 2016 to prepare for certification exams. The advantage in earning certification in MS enhances students’ technical skills, thus opening job and career doors.

GECHS’ partnership with Webb County Volunteer Deputy Registrars better prepares students for their civic responsibilities. They come to GECHS twice a year, and present information about the importance of voting. They help the senior class fill out their Texas voter registration application. This process is pivotal because their fall presentation occurs prior to November elections, allowing 18-year old students to vote. As 9th

graders, students participate in the Community Safety Training. This training is given so students understand the importance of creating safe interactions between citizens and law enforcement.

1f. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)

As 10th graders, GECHS students are enrolled in a dual-credit course, American Popular Music. They attend this one-hour class on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for a semester. In this class, students learn about various styles of popular music in America such as pop, rock, jazz, ragtime, folk, ethnic, and fusion in the twentieth century. It is an interactive class where students listen and watch videos about different music eras. A student project consists of choosing a band from any era. They research the band and create a Google slides presentation to report about the band's history, chosen genre, and any other interesting facts about their particular music. This is a group project and students must orally present their findings. Throughout the semester, students are given a list of songs to listen to and study. Their final exam consists of listening to fifteen minutes worth of music from their assigned list, and students need to write about the genre and history of the musical selection. Students in this class are also encouraged to attend TAMIU art exhibitions and musical recitals held at their Fine and Performing Arts Center. College credit for this course also applies to their required fine arts credit for high school graduation.

2b. Physical education/health/nutrition

As 9th graders, students take physical education daily for an hour, alternating days with the high school teacher and university instructor. They benefit from TAMIU's recreational center where they have access to two volleyball courts and a classroom. When a volleyball unit is taught, students in the classroom learn about the following basics: tactics and how to play, game formatting, and understanding key terms and basic skills. On the court, students run drills like high knees, lunges, and sumo squats to name a few. Throughout this unit, students learn how to set and spike a volleyball. They also learn how to serve under and overhand. They learn about rotations and officials' signals. At the end of the unit, students play in a volleyball tournament where their skills are assessed.

To further incorporate social-emotional learning, a yoga class was offered to students, which supports student academic success through mental, emotional, and physical wellness. The course was offered virtually during quarantine and offered in-person when students returned to campus. Students are taught yoga flows and stretching techniques. The yoga teacher emphasizes the lasting effect of well-being and having a growth mindset, while strengthening self-efficacy to handle personal and academic challenges.

2c. Foreign language(s), if offered (if not offered, leave blank)

In Spanish I, students learn to conjugate verbs in the past tense and apply the conjugations in different sentences. The objective is to understand the difference between regular and irregular verb endings. Once they master conjugations, they can use the conjugated verbs in dialogue and written sentences, practicing speaking in past tense. Graphs and reading passages are given to students to identify conjugated past tense verbs. Students are assessed at the end of the lesson with an exit ticket where they explain in a few sentences how to use past tense verbs.

In AP Spanish Language and Culture, students learn about global citizenship. In one lesson, students learn about Shakira and Juanes' charitable foundations in Colombia through YouTube videos. Students have opportunities to discuss with a partner the importance of these organizations and share their ideas with the class. They practice with the Spanish language when they write in their journals about a volunteering activity and the impact it has in the community. They also research a different foundation and create flyers

using Canva or other digital tools to encourage people to volunteer. They then give an oral presentation of their creation.

Both of these are daily semester classes lasting an hour and twenty minutes.

2d. Technology/library/media

As 9th graders, GECHS students take the Principles of Technology Information course to learn how to describe, identify, and understand the parts of the ribbon, which consists of tabs, groups, and commands in MS Word 2016. This is a daily class that meets for an hour and twenty minutes for a semester. In this class, they practice the commands and develop an understanding of how the ribbon works. Students explore the ribbon/switch between home tab and page layout tab and discuss the purposes of these tabs. The teacher models the steps students need to navigate the ribbon. They are then assessed through independent practice and a final ribbon tool identification test. Lessons like this one show students how to listen, take notes, practice, and implement knowledge acquired; this content mastery prepares students for Microsoft certification. Aside from learning MS Word, students also learn to use Adobe Photoshop and other software programs. With the skills acquired using these programs, students prepare projects for the district's annual technology expo competition. Within the district, students compete in different categories: digital art, coding app, audio and video, multimedia application, and internet applications. For the past three years, GECHS has won grand champion.

2e. Any other interesting or innovative curriculum programs you would like to share

Driver's Education is a 120-minute daily semester course where students have the opportunity to earn their Texas driver's license permit, saving approximately \$300. One specific lesson they cover is understanding driving under adverse conditions such as heavy rain, fog, and hail. They research and identify how each condition increases risk and danger, explaining how to maintain vehicle control. Students present their information and then take a comprehensive assessment. As a course requirement, students must complete 7 clock hours of teacher-supervised driving in district provided vehicles.

In Robotics, a 120-minute daily course per semester, students write code to command Sparki, the robot, to follow a specific light and remove itself from the dark. The robot is inside a box and must exit through a side opening. The teacher models how to use the robot's left, center, and right light sensors. Guiding questions are given: How will we compare these three sensors through the logic block? How many comparisons are needed to make Sparki move forward? With these questions, students work in groups to build code so that the robot can complete this mission. To assess knowledge, the teacher has students run their code in a SparkiDuino app to see if the code works.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

To address the needs of every learner, the school incorporates Sean Cain's Fundamental Five framework as a daily instructional process. With every learner in mind, teachers frame the lesson by making objectives clear and easy to follow. Students are given opportunities to initiate learning as teachers facilitate by working in the power zone. As teachers facilitate, they observe student learning and decide how to reinforce learning concepts. Students participate in meaningful small groups and purposeful talk. To validate student learning, critical writing activities, such as exit tickets or journal entries, are assigned to close the lesson.

In class, students performing below grade level are provided instruction via reteach, one-to-one conferencing, peer-to-peer tutoring, and/or lesson modifications. For instance, in the English 1301 support class, the teacher holds a teacher-student writing conference for all students, but specifically for those who earned a C or lower on a first draft. In these conferences, the teacher helps students identify weak writing skills and shows them how to improve the work by the second or last drafts.

Afterschool and Saturday tutorial sessions are offered as well. With the help of Elementary and Secondary

School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, Friday lock-ins are held especially for students needing extra support to pass state and college-entrance exams. For example, in a two-hour lock-in, students who will be taking the English I or Algebra I EOC exams attend the first hour of the tutorial session with an ELA teacher, and then they swap for the second hour with the Algebra I teacher. Moreover, teachers do item-analysis of district CBAs and benchmarks to identify the weak student expectations that need reinforcement. With this information, teachers provide prescriptive lessons and activities. Additional resources like consumable workbooks and educational software are used for extensive practice.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

Similar to assessing students below grade level, teachers use various differentiation strategies accommodating students performing above grade level. For instance, students that have mastered skills can implement their knowledge by participating in various activities such as: science fair projects, citywide poetry and drawing/writing competitions, technology showcases, and cultural festivities. To illustrate, students in AP Spanish courses incorporate their knowledge of Mexican culture by creating altars for Dia de los Muertos celebration. To celebrate Hispanic Heritage month in September, students perform regional Mexican dances in schoolwide assemblies. Although our student population is predominantly Hispanic, all students broaden their appreciation for other cultures by participating in their World Geography class “World Tour End of Course Project.” In this enriching project, students research a given country, create a presentation, and invite the student body to an interactive presentation where students perform cultural dances and share a little taste of a traditional dish.

For students identified as accelerated testers (completed high school Algebra I in 8th grade), SAT tutorials are offered. All 10th grade students are enrolled in a Spring semester class where they prepare for the SAT using software that creates prescriptive lessons.

There is also an SAT seminar hosted by a nationally recognized SAT strategist; in this seminar, students participate in extensive and engaging instruction, are provided a guided outline of test-taking and time-management strategies, and are given a recommended five-week study plan.

Students above grade level are also enrolled in college courses beyond the core requirements. This allows them to complete courses required from their chosen major before graduating high school. For example, a student who is majoring in Criminal Justice, can take CRIJ1301, Introduction to Criminal Justice, or a student who is an education major can take EDCU1301, Introduction to the Teaching Profession. These classes are not typically offered unless students are ahead in their degree plan.

3c. Students with disabilities:

While GECHS currently does not serve any students with an individualized education plan (IEP), it has systems in place if a student were to enroll. To meet the specific needs of students with disabilities, GECHS has the Section 504 committee, which evaluates the needs of struggling students and redesigns their learning pathways with customized classroom and assessment accommodations. The Section 504 committee convenes to discuss possible accommodations like extra time, large print, oral administration, and/or small group testing to name a few.

Moreover, teachers provide one-to-one conferencing and allow students the opportunity to acquire ownership of their learning by pinpointing skills not mastered. Classroom physical accommodations are also made when necessary, such as but not limited to, preferential seating, text color overlays, extra time to finish assignments, text-to-speech audio assistance, etc. In addition to academic accommodations, our campus ensures that students suffering from any permanent or temporary physical disability are provided with the necessary tools to continue learning. For example, the school provides transportation to the university via a golf cart for injured students. Furthermore, counseling is provided to students that have experienced anxiety, depression, or any emotional breakdown due to unforeseen personal circumstances, ensuring that their high school and college academic standing goes unaffected. Counselors respond to student situations affecting their emotional well-being by providing short-term crisis intervention. If counselors believe students need further support, they make recommendations for students to seek help and find resources from local

organizations, such as Serving Children and Adults in Need (SCAN). Some of our students under Section 504 receive services on campus from SCAN. If students with identified special needs are enrolled, the district assigns support staff to help meet their needs. Teachers will also adhere to the student's IEP. Support for students with disabilities is further extended at the university level by working closely with the Disability Services for Students office.

3d. English Language Learners:

For the emergent bilingual (EB) student population, our campus strives to incorporate differentiated strategies to not only assist students in learning English but also strengthen their native language. A priority for all teachers, dean of instruction, and district bilingual strategist is to help close the achievement gap between the performance of all students and the EB population.

Two teachers, the school principal, bilingual strategist, and a parent representative convene as the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) to discuss EB progress, accommodations, and criteria for exiting the program. This committee creates an intervention plan for EB students who fail a course, monitoring closely that necessary accommodations are provided in the classroom. Along with close monitoring, the district bilingual strategist visits the campus on a weekly basis to discuss progress and ensure that teachers are provided the resources necessary to help these students succeed. Teachers also meet with the bilingual strategist to identify instructional strategies and assessment accommodations that support EB students in the classroom and when taking the EOC exam. All teachers are trained to incorporate proficiency level descriptors (PLDs) as they plan their lessons. Teachers also use graphic organizers, sentence stems, pictorial representations, mnemonic devices, and translation devices to support student learning.

Furthermore, our campus has adopted a digital support program to make literacy connections through listening-speaking and reading-writing activities. Using this program, students take pre-assessments that create prescriptive lessons to help students strengthen their English literacy, most specifically their reading/writing and listening/speaking skills. Students also take mid-term and post-evaluative assessments. The program has recording capabilities to help prepare students for the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) speaking portion of the exam. In addition to digital programs, our campus promotes cross-curricular journaling in all classes to strengthen literacy skills.

3e. Other populations, if a special program or intervention is offered:

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

As a small school, GECHS prides itself in creating a safe, engaging, and welcoming environment for all students and staff. With Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) and the school's power-word-RISE (Respect, Integrity, Safety, and Engagement), students encourage and maintain safe spaces for learning and socializing. The school's Phoenix Pledge was an open opportunity for the school student body to submit their entries; a school-wide vote was cast, and two 12th grade students won. Their pledge is proudly displayed in each classroom and recited each morning during announcements. Staff and faculty strive to create engaging and positive environments through campus-wide activities promoting strong academics.

Counselors schedule presentations throughout the school year focusing on the following: emotional, mental, and physical health; college, career, and military readiness; scholarship advice and financial aid. For instance, several city agencies have presented topics such as eating disorders and drug abuse (Fentanyl, opioids, vape, etc.). The school also hosted a career day, inviting local lawyers, pharmacists, engineers, veterinarians, import and agricultural specialists, and optometrists, to name a few. The uniqueness of this career day was that alumni and former GECHS teachers were among the guest speakers; this motivated our current students to continue studying and striving to meet their academic and personal goals. Furthermore, staff and faculty work diligently to provide students time to socialize with their peers. For instance, clubs like Student Council and the Spanish Honor Society work together to create diverse recreational activities. To illustrate, the Student Council organized a school-wide "Elf on the Shelf" scavenger hunt. This was part of the school's twelve days of holiday celebration in December. Students were tasked to find the elf and in return received prizes. Although many might see this as a simple activity, it engaged students in the last two weeks before the holidays, which at times is difficult to do. Moreover, the Spanish Honor Society organizes pep-rallies and competitions, such as the 16 de septiembre best salsa, Mexican traditional dish, and regional attire contest. Although the school does not offer UIL athletics, there are opportunities for students to engage in physical activities and demonstrate good sportsmanship in intramural sports. There is a wide turnout at the intramural events because not only do the athletes participate, but also a great number of student spectators cheer for their teams. To prepare for intramural competitions, our physical education teacher closely collaborates with TAMIU staff during Friday lock-ins.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Equally important for a student's overall success is parental and community involvement. The last few years, our school has created a strong communication channel with parents using the BAND app. This has helped to share vital information with parents regarding academic announcements, school alerts, and upcoming events. Parents can also use the private chat feature to send questions to individual faculty and staff. Moreover, with the support of our school's parent liaison and the Communities in Schools (CIS) coordinator, valuable and informative events, activities, and presentations are hosted throughout the school year. Parents and family members are welcome to engage with their children. For example, our campus hosted a Grandparent's Day event where grandparents enjoyed visiting their grandchildren's school and listened to musical performances by students. They enjoyed refreshments and participated in a loteria game, a traditional Mexican bingo. The last few years, GECHS has worked closely with CIS. The program's mission is to encourage students to stay in school, graduate, and prepare for post-secondary life by providing services and resources through community partnerships to ensure a comprehensive case-management approach to meet students' and their families' needs. This program helps students whose struggles might affect them academically, socially, physically, and/or emotionally. The CIS coordinator provides resources to help students improve in academics, attendance, and/or behavior. Some community partnerships that help both students and their families are: the City of Laredo Health Department, the Women's City Club, and a state supermarket chain. Other partnerships include: City of Laredo Community Development (CLCD), South Texas Regional Food Bank, Laredo Housing Authority, and Community Action Agency. For instance, GECHS students and their families who struggle financially are given referrals to work with the Community Action Agency who provide guidance and utility assistance during financial hardships. Another example of

a community partnership that our students and their families benefit from is the CLCD; they refer parents to outside agencies that help with food assistance, employment, health care, and housing.

Besides our students and their families being assisted through CIS resources, our partnership with TAMIU extends assistance to parents in the community. To pinpoint, TAMIU personnel hold an annual in-person financial aid workshop in the GECHS computer lab, where they help students and their parents complete the Free Application Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). GECHS strives to surround students and their families with a community of support and empower them to stay in school and graduate.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Our campus prides itself in making teachers feel valued and supported by acknowledging their concerns. An administration with an open-door policy creates a welcoming and supportive environment establishing dialogue, not only related to the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) but also any other concerns. The collaboration between teacher and administration is exemplified during T-TESS pre-conference, goal setting, classroom observations, and discussion of reinforcement and refinement during the post conference. Moreover, it is vital that teachers engage in professional development (PD) that focuses on topics ranging from best instructional practices to technology offered at school, district, state, and national trainings and conferences. GECHS administration asks teachers to submit topics based on their interests and needs for PD. Professional development is available virtually and in-person, giving teachers more opportunities to participate.

Throughout the school year, GECHS teachers participate in campus-based PD. These sessions are developed and provided by consultants, district personnel, and GECHS teachers. Teachers feel valued when PD is targeted to meet their needs; for example, GECHS teachers have presented to their colleagues on topics like technology (e.g., Nearpod, Canva, and Excel) and how they successfully implement it in their instruction. In addition, the capacity of teachers and administrators is positively affected by the new teacher mentorship program in several ways. This program allows administrators to provide a close-knit guidance to new teachers by assigning them a mentor teacher. By the same token, experienced teachers have the opportunity to enrich their craft and continue learning.

Furthermore, recognized program consultants, like MIT alumnus Dave Dobos from Next Level Prep, was brought in to present on how teachers could embed SAT content strategies and assessments into their daily classroom instruction. Teachers also have opportunities to attend conferences to network with other educators. Teachers attended a conference hosted by Texas Computer Education Association (TCEA) where they learned about the latest technology tools for education. Also, each summer, teachers can participate in the AP Summer Institutes, sponsored by College Board, to review AP exam structures, and expand on their teaching skills and strategies to best help students. At these conferences, teachers are free to select sessions of interest to them.

Additionally, the district provides PD to better prepare and safeguard teachers and students. These PD sessions include: safety protocols and procedures; Stop the Bleed, CPR, and first-aid; and active shooter response. Overall, the professional culture at GECHS is that of a respectful, welcoming, and cooperative learning environment.

4. School Leadership:

All must work towards a common goal, which works best with open communication among peers and colleagues. This helps create an environment that welcomes different perspectives, where stakeholders in education can freely share thoughts and ideas. Embracing personnel's strengths and personalities, as well as respecting the different teaching styles contributes to teacher development. Understanding teachers' skills and strengths, allows administration to assign the "right" person/people to complete a specific task. The conscious effort to think before reacting builds rapport with employees. This is a catalyst to mindful conversations.

Being the only administrator at GECHS, the principal plays many roles. These roles include but are not

limited to being an instructional leader, a safety administrator, disciplinarian, counselor, master schedule developer, and liaison between LISD and TAMU. One of the principal's major roles is to evaluate personnel. The evaluation process offers opportunities to recognize efforts and accomplishments as well as to discuss areas for improvement and reinforcement. The principal also networks and acts as the school's spokesperson, models expected behavior, and sets the tone for community involvement and school culture.

Other campus leaders collaborate with the principal. The GECHS' dean of instruction collaborates with the principal to build a campus-level curriculum team that examines research-based instructional strategies and approaches that lead to engaged learning, critical thinking, and creative problem solving. This leader analyzes data, develops PD, coordinates interventions and tutorials, and organizes local, state, and national testing administrations. Administration, teachers, and other school personnel meet to identify campus needs assessment and use this information to develop the Campus Improvement Plan. Faculty members have a delineated role within the Campus Educational Improvement Council (CEIC), which is composed of parents, a community member, teachers, and the principal.

To address socioemotional and academic needs, leaders like counselors plan and meet with students to discuss degree plans and courses needed to fulfill core requirements. This ensures that students are on track with their academics and successfully transition to college. Furthermore, the last few years have shown the importance of having administrative and leadership flexibility. The pandemic pushed administration to accommodate and modify ways of leading teachers and students to successfully navigate remote learning and a return to in-person learning. Social upheavals and national tragedies, like the Uvalde, Texas school mass shooting in a school district approximately 100 miles away, continue to influence how the district and school administration implements policies and protocols to safeguard students, teachers, and staff.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

A student's culture and lived experiences has an impact on how they learn and navigate life. Their culture (languages, values, and beliefs) helps define who they are as a person. With that in mind, culturally responsive teaching and learning drives GECHS teachers, faculty, and staff to create equitable learning opportunities for all students. Our partnership with TAMU benefits our students because the university invites them to participate in culturally diverse learning opportunities such as: the Holi festival, Holocaust Remembrance event, Dia de Los Muertos gathering, American Sign Language activities, and Laredo Indigenous Peoples celebration.

Besides the social aspect of cultural activities, instruction at the university also encourages students to be culturally open and understanding; for instance, the students who are dual-enrolled in English 1301 and 1302 have essay assignments that ask them to research the power of communities and how they communicate. In a similar manner, our campus ensures equity and cultural awareness among our students, staff, and families. Teachers and staff model behaviors that show students how to be respectful and accepting of differences. Teachers guide lesson planning with the proficiency level descriptors (PLDs) to choose appropriate linguistic accommodations; thus, providing a level learning field for all students. Another way teachers promote community cohesiveness and collaboration is through small group purposeful discussions and activities. Teachers strategically arrange students in groups. In some instances, students may want to be placed with their friends; however, teachers prepare them for the workforce where they will work with people from different backgrounds and varying perspectives. These practices give students the opportunity to learn how to listen to others' opinions and to respectfully debate controversial topics. Students dual-enrolled in History 1301 are assigned controversial historical topics that address values and beliefs, learning how to use rhetorical devices in a respectful way to argue their stance on a topic.

Equity and cultural awareness does not end in the classroom with the students. GECHS schedules parent information sessions throughout the school year offering the presentations and any documents in English and Spanish. The parent liaison works to inform our students' parents about district and campus-based strategies being used in content areas, technology training and digital literacy, social-emotional learning opportunities, and substance abuse awareness. Understanding our students' parents' cultural backgrounds helps our parent liaison create information sessions and provide references for resources that would best benefit them and their children.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE

The most instrumental practice at GECHS is creating, implementing, and consistently practicing schoolwide systems. System building creates sustainable and effective school practices that guide and support students, parents, teachers, and staff on different levels. Through data analysis, needs assessment, and observations, administration and teachers work diligently to identify and create systems. This successful practice is evident through several systems in place at GECHS.

Foremost, a well-established communication system enables stakeholders to stay informed and have open-lines of communication. In addition to parent-teacher call logs and in-person meetings, the practices that have also proven effective are the consistent use of social/local media, email, and the communication app (BAND). As an example, the majority of our students are transported to campus and occasionally there are bus scheduling issues that need to be communicated to parents and students. Through BAND, the school provides immediate updates in English, which can be translated into another language through the app's multi-language feature. Parents and students have shared that they feel more at ease having that real-time communication channel.

Moreover, it is paramount to establish an intentional scheduling system that sets the tone for a successful academic year. This system is effective because administration works closely with teachers to develop an effective academic schedule based on data analysis. For instance, underclassmen are purposefully assigned to state testing area subjects in the fall to provide intervention and retesting opportunities if needed in the spring semester. By implementing purposeful scheduling between GECHS and TAMIU, our dual-enrollment program provides gradual release of support by the time our students are high school seniors.

Furthermore, implementing effective systems for students begins prior to their 9th grade year. Because incoming 9th graders begin dual-enrolled courses their 9th grade year, the school facilitates their transition by offering TSIA and orientation summer camps.

Another system, equally important, is that of safety. Our district follows the national initiative of "See Something, Say Something." With that in mind, GECHS strives to be vigilant of everyone's safety on- and off-campus. Our campus conducts monthly emergency drills, and our safety officer attends district safety meetings. Additionally, this safety system includes weekly door audit reports and daily school announcements reminding everyone about safety practices. Our school's safety motto is "It's not a chore; shut the door!"

Overall, these systems are created, implemented, evaluated, and modified as needed for effectiveness and sustainability making this practice instrumental to the school's success.