

U.S. Department of Education
2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Ms. Jeffie Esparza Hickman
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name University High School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2611 East Matoian Way M/S UH134
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Fresno State CA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 93740-0001

County Fresno County

Telephone (559) 278-8263 Fax (559) 278-0447

Web site/URL https://www.uhsfresno.com/ E-mail jhickman@csufresno.edu

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* Ms. Jeffie Esparza Hickman E-mail jhickman@csufresno.edu
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name University High School Tel. (559) 278-8263

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 Dr. Nancy Akhavan
(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, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The electronic signature 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 2021 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 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
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. 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

Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

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

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not 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 as of October 1, 2020 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 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	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	63	65	128
10	48	77	125
11	52	62	114
12 or higher	43	64	107
Total Students	206	268	474

*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):
- 1.3 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 36.9 % Asian
 - 3.8 % Black or African American
 - 29.3 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0.4 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 28.3 % White
 - 0 % 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 2019 - 2020 school year: 2%

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, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	8
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	8
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	477
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.02
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

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

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %
0 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 23 %

Total number students who qualify: 107

8. Students receiving special education services: 1 %
5 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. All students receiving special education services 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>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>1</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>3</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. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1
10. 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	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	21
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.	1
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

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 24:1

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

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	98%	99%	98%	99%	98%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%

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 2020.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	116
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	89%
Enrolled in a community college	11%
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 No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2014

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

The mission of University High School is to create a rigorous and challenging experience on the Fresno State campus that maintains a small school environment while promoting a liberal arts and music education.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

University High School has been online only thus far during the 2020-21 school year. However, we plan to open with a hybrid version on Monday, April 5, 2021. We have about 30% of our student body returning to campus, with the remaining 70% staying at home and completely online. Our teachers will be teaching students via "zoom and room," simultaneously teaching students on zoom and in the room. We are thankful to have received the vaccine and are excited to welcome students back to campus!

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

University High School is an independently reporting charter school on the campus of Fresno State. UHS specializes in music education; students take four years of music theory and music performance classes while at UHS. Therefore, students must have two years of music experience in order to apply for admittance. This experience can be in the form of music lessons from elementary and middle school, church participation, and private lessons. UHS accepts 135 freshmen each year. For the past 10 years, UHS has had to conduct a public lottery due to the large number of applications received. Students not randomly chosen for the lottery are then put on a wait list. As students decline, students are taken off of the wait list in numerical order from which they were chosen.

PART III - SUMMARY

In the late 1990's, the Dean of College of Arts and Humanities at Fresno State, conceived the idea of a charter high school on the college campus, which focused on an accelerated liberal-arts college preparation program with an emphasis on music education. The intent was to create a school based upon the latest educational research, implement best practices and serve as a model of educational innovation for education in the 21st century.

University High School (UHS) serves approximately 490 college-focused students who share a common interest in music. The small high school environment enables students to receive a strong foundation in music performance, music theory, the liberal arts, and math and science, while benefiting from the opportunities available on a large public university campus. Students complete several college courses taught by Fresno State faculty beginning in their sophomore year. These courses serve the dual purpose of fulfilling high school core graduation requirements and meeting lower division general education requirements for many universities and colleges. Students not only graduate UHS prepared academically for the rigors of college, but they also have the direct experience of a college education and the credits to demonstrate that they are ready.

The small size of the student body creates an ideal learning environment for the students that choose to attend UHS. Class sizes average 27, allowing students and teachers to develop greater connections and truly create a caring and supportive educational experience. Each cohort averages between 110-130 students, all sharing a similar course schedule and, generally, the same teachers for each subject. Having this shared experience generates a sense of unity among the students. That shared common learning experience extends from the incoming freshmen to the upperclassmen. A strong sense of community is formed as older students mentor and tutor younger students and share with them their own learning experiences. An added benefit to having small class sizes beyond creating a system where only one teacher is needed for each course and grade level, is that teachers can engage professionally with one another to vertically support student learning as they matriculate through our programs.

Another benefit of the small student body is the ability to provide counseling services to students more readily. UHS has two full time counselors with approximately 250 students on each caseload. This small student to counselor ratio allows the counselors to truly know their students, to learn their goals and help them with their educational planning. Beyond the academics, counselors are also more available to detect and address the social and emotional needs of the students they serve. Counselors hold regular conferences with all their students throughout the year and have a strong sense of each student's needs and are able to connect them with the support they need. As counselors serve students of all grade levels based on student last names, they are also able to build strong relationships with parents as they work with siblings and common family members.

One unique program at UHS is the "48 Books Program." The school, since its founding, has seen the importance of increasing student literacy and developing an appreciation for the literary arts. In essence, the school purchases one book a month for each student to read and keep upon graduating. Students are expected to read a book each month, most of which are a part of the core literature from their English classes. These 48 books become another point of connection and common shared experience between our students. Shared experiences have the ability to create community in education and the 48 books program, through the reading, the studying, the analysis, and the reflection, creates another experience that unites our students, much like their appreciation of music led them to choose to attend UHS. While many school districts are looking for ways to increase student literacy, UHS has continued to provide a systematic program for developing student appreciation and understanding of English literature that ranges from classic texts like *The Odyssey* and Shakespeare, to novels of literary value such as *1984*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Lord of the Flies*. Our teachers also incorporate modern literature that builds awareness and appreciation of BIPOC authors such as Tommy Orange, Richard Wright, and August Wilson.

Receiving the National Blue Ribbon School award in 2014 was a tremendous accomplishment for a young public charter school at the time. The ambitious aims that formed the foundation of the school have not only

been met, but the campus, staff, students, and curriculum continue to thrive and serve as an example in the Central Valley of what is possible in a public education setting. The recognition has served to provide legitimacy to the work that has been done and validate the accomplishments of our students and the support of our community.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

All UHS students take the same core courses taught by UHS staff and professors on the California State University, Fresno campus. College readiness is a continual focus for all courses with the goal of all students meeting graduation requirements and fulfilling several general education requirements for most universities and colleges through dual enrollment. All students receive four years of English instruction, including required coursework in AP Language and AP Literature. In math, students are initially placed based upon their intermediate school coursework and a diagnostic test. By their senior year, all students will take at least one AP math course, either Calculus or Statistics, and a majority of our students will take both. Our science courses progress from physics to chemistry to biology, with the biology course comprising two semester-long college courses. Students begin social studies in their sophomore year by taking two semester-long courses in World History. The class is offered through Fresno State. This is followed by regular or AP US History in the junior year and then either AP Economics or AP Government their senior year. Unique to UHS is a foreign language requirement that all students fulfill by taking two years of Latin, where language is emphasized, along with ancient history. As juniors, all students must take two additional semesters of a foreign language at Fresno State and they may elect to continue their foreign language studies in their senior year. All students take four years of physical education that includes lifetime health and fitness. Students learn about the correlation between nutrition and health. Currently, all seniors are required to take a computer science course at Fresno State to promote readiness for a technologically rich world. Finally, all students participate in four years of both music theory instruction and in music performance groups. Music courses emphasize both theory and musical history and performing groups are available for instrumental and vocal music.

During the current pandemic, tremendous adjustments have been made to the delivery of the curriculum. As a college preparatory school with students also dual enrolled, the staff determined that minimal learning time could be lost in order to keep students on track toward their college objectives and to prepare them for subsequent courses. In March of 2020, when online learning began, the thought was to initially weather the storm and wait for things to return to normal. Work was reduced and lessons were truncated. But as the year drew to a close, the staff recognized this was going to become the new normal. In order to provide the academic curriculum that is the foundation of UHS's charter, serious adjustments needed to be made and staff would need to face a steep technological learning curve.

Through research, experimentation, and trial and error, the UHS staff adapted to online instruction. All students were provided with continual instruction during the 2020-2021 school year. Students in need of technology for home use were provided with laptops and hotspots. Class times were minimally reduced to provide teachers with the time to address their course objectives while balancing the time students need as a break between classes and to minimize screen time as much as possible. The courses needed to stay on a strict schedule in order to ensure that students could still participate synchronously and asynchronously with instruction in their Fresno State courses.

Many of our teachers have become quite adept at utilizing Google Classroom and Zoom to provide nearly seamless instruction. While there are limits in the effectiveness of checking for understanding, teachers utilize break out rooms, online white boards, and online assessments to monitor student progress and overall learning. Online resources are readily available to both staff and students to provide a full educational experience, albeit remotely. Assignments are submitted digitally on platforms such as Turn-it In, where work can be authenticated for each student and minimize student impropriety. Assessments that were once paper/pencil based have been adapted and formatted to online assessment platforms such as Edulastic and Desmos. These choices served our teaching needs and student learning needs best, as they were quickly integrated into our Google platforms and accounts and students were able to learn how to navigate between sites and platforms to demonstrate their learning. To further support students, lessons are recorded and saved at least one period each day, providing ongoing access to the content. Teachers hold virtual office hours throughout the day to be available to students. In some courses, such as math, economics, and some English and history courses, the teachers have utilized a flipped classroom approach by recording lessons that students watch prior to coming into the online classroom environment. By incorporating this strategy,

teachers are able to spend the online time directly engaging with their students and addressing questions and concerns.

1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):

Through the collaborative relationship established by UHS with Fresno State, students from 10th through 12th grade have access to multiple college courses through dual enrollment. Students, as part of their required four-year plan, take two semesters each of World History, Biology, a foreign language and one semester of computer science, thereby earning 28 credits transferable to most colleges and universities. Students have the opportunity to take additional courses their senior year in math or science, in the continuation of a foreign language or other courses offered by CSU Fresno. These required courses, coupled with the AP Language, AP Literature, one AP math course and either AP Government or AP Economics, with options to take AP Music Theory and AP US History, provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate college readiness. Because these are required courses, it is the expectation that all students will not only complete these courses, but also gain tremendous benefits through the experience. The opportunities that UHS provides are not limited to a select few students. Instead, every student has access to a challenging curriculum and learning opportunities often reserved for institutions of higher learning.

Students are required to participate in community service during their four years at UHS. Community service is an opportunity for students to broaden their appreciation for the community in which they live and learn how to become servant leaders. A total of 80 hours of community service is required over the course of four years. Students log their volunteer hours each semester as they work to benefit the larger community outside of their normal family and friend relationships, without any material or grade compensation received in return. UHS students regularly find involvement with organizations that represent their career ambitions, providing them with rewarding experiences as they formulate their plans for the future.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Music is a cornerstone subject in the academic curriculum for University High School students. A comprehensive music pathway curriculum focusing on both the performing and academic aspects of a music education has been developed and incorporated into the four-year plan for all students. This comprehensive approach to music differs from most high schools as it includes the academic portion of music in combination with the performance aspect. All students take both a performance class and a musicianship class all four years at UHS.

Performance classes focus on various ensembles like the school symphony, wind ensemble, jazz band, mixed and chamber choirs. The musicianship class is a music history, theory, composition and aural skills course that is singularly unique to UHS, with each academic year focused on a specific historical period.

Beyond the music courses and performing groups, UHS also provides opportunities for students to participate in the theater. As a culminating experience each year, the school performs a final musical that includes not only the acting skills of the theater students, but also the musical talents of the school. A pit orchestra composed entirely of students performs the music that accompanies the theatrical performance with a quality often unheard of at the high school level.

Another curriculum area unique to UHS is the two-year Latin language requirement. Latin was selected as a language that would benefit students in both the studies of humanities and sciences. Students learn to apply their knowledge of Latin roots to unknown words and word origins to enhance their academic vocabulary. The courses also teach about elements of classical history, critical to the understanding of Western civilization.

This past year, the guidelines and protocols issued by the CDC have placed tremendous restraints on the performing arts. Musicianship courses have maintained their rigor and depth through online instruction. However, performing groups and the approaches to instruction have seen major changes. To follow safety guidelines, instruction has become more individualized for students. Vocalists and instrumentalists work virtually one on one or in small groups online with music staff. Teachers have incorporated technology into the curriculum to both engage students and to actively monitor their progress. Through the use of Smart Music, students learn to play select pieces of music and are evaluated based on their submitted electronic recordings. Teachers can analyze the notation, quality, rhythms and the overall musical understanding of the musicians as they listen through submitted music samples. As a school with an emphasis on music education, it was imperative that teachers found a way to continue music education.

One additional adaptation that the performing arts department implemented this year was in relation to the school play. Using of green screen technology and the video editing skills of our staff and students, the drama program was able to perform and record a theatrical production of “Peter/Wendy.” The production virtually layered all the actors and actresses onto one video image to provide a recorded performance unlike anything that the school had done before.

3. Academic Supports:

UHS has historically been a high performing school with academics, exceeding both State and local standards. Our students have consistently outperformed neighboring school districts in both math and English Language arts. School assessment data rarely indicates achievement gaps based upon race, English language acquisition levels, socio-economic limitations or special needs. With all State assessments canceled at the end of the 2020 year, there is limited summative data available on the current student population. However, this year the teachers, counselors and administrators recognized that learning was going to be a challenge to all students as education shifted from in-person to online instruction.

As a result, formative assessments and student grades have become the greatest indicators of student achievement this year. Student grades are actively monitored by both counselors and administrators and reports are shared with both teachers and parents. In the online learning environment, it is critical to include parents in the academic discussions around student progress. Without direct, face to face daily contact with students or access to parents, the team was determined to be proactive in communicating with parents. Concerns regarding student grades and attendance are regularly shared with parents and online zoom conferences are scheduled between parents, students and the counselors for areas of concern. Teachers regularly communicate with both students and parents to discuss academic progress and to relay effective strategies for keeping students engaged and accountable in the learning process.

Students that are performing below course expectations have been invited to come onto the campus for a more structured learning environment when the risk factor related to COVID-19 has made that acceptable. By providing learning spaces on campus, students are able to stay connected with the online instruction and have a sense of normalcy to their day as they get ready and come to school each day.

Students in need of additional support are able to attend our online academic tutoring center. Junior and Senior students are hired to work as tutors. Students can sign up for times after school and support is readily available. Students are also able to connect with teachers after school and on asynchronous Fridays through open Zoom office hours. In looking at current student progress, the staff is developing a summer support program to mitigate learning loss from distance learning. While a majority of our students have done well, our teachers recognize that there are students who will benefit from additional summer instruction to bridge their learning into subsequent courses of study.

Students with disabilities are given the support that they need, whether it be additional and personalized tutoring, extended time, therapy, counseling or anything that is needed to help them be successful. UHS currently does not have any English Learners (EL), but we do have many former EL students that have since been deemed as RFEP (Reclassified Fluent English Proficient) and IFEP (Initially Fluent English Proficient) students. The academic progress of EL students that have been reclassified within the past three years are monitored throughout the year by their counselor.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

University High School uses various strategies to engage students and keep the morale high. Students have benefited from motivational speakers through all-school webinars. Events like drive-through giveaways, school-wide virtual escape rooms, and zooming together for a gingerbread house making event, have provided unique ways to keep students connected to the school. To provide student to student interaction and the opportunity for students to physically connect with each other, UHS paid for students to attend the Fresno Chaffee Zoo as a school-wide field trip. Other strategies have focused on appreciation, like sending Valentine grams to one another, and taking opportunities to express gratitude and appreciation through chat groups and social media. UHS student-led clubs have met throughout the school year to plan events like class game nights, movie nights, and to discuss current issues.

During the week of Thanksgiving, the UHS staff delivered succulent plants and cards to every student, as a way of connecting with them and paying a personal visit to each home. UHS students come from over 40 different zip codes! Visiting students from the Sierra mountains to the rural farms in the outlying counties, the UHS staff demonstrated that they truly care for each one of our students and are willing to literally go the extra mile to engage and support them.

On a weekly basis, the principal emails students, parents, and staff to keep all stakeholders informed of the activities, everchanging information, and upcoming events at the school. We feel that when our stakeholders are informed, they feel more connected and supportive of our school.

Our counselors meet with students via zoom daily for individual appointments, make home visits to check on students, have created Mental Health Care Boxes for students, and continue with their grade level meetings with students and parents. They teach emotional and mental health lessons embedded in the PE curriculum and launched a Virtual Calming Room for students, with music, meditation, coloring pages, and many more activities to provide soothing and tranquil activities to help students.

Teachers have adjusted their schedules to meet with students through online office hours. These times have been critical points of connection for our students, where they are able to have access to their teachers and ask for support and clarification. Through these open office hours, teachers can have individualized conversations and connections that support the students academically, socially, and emotionally.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Because University High School is a relatively small school, we are able to communicate with our students and families on a regular basis and get to know them quite well. Beginning sophomore year, our counselors meet individually with each student on their caseload. Parents are invited and encouraged to attend these meetings, as high school classes, college applications, and career planning are discussed. Counselors hold conferences with each grade level in small groups to discuss ongoing needs and concerns.

This year, all parent and student contacts were organized into a single platform for mass communication. Through the messaging application Remind, parents and students are regularly updated with events and activities by the office staff, administration, counselors and teachers. Student and parent emails have also been compiled into a single access point for teachers to easily communicate with all stakeholders. Teachers are encouraged to be proactive in reaching out to parents when they notice a decline in student participation, attendance, and achievement. By making contact with parents early, the staff has been able to keep students on track and our attendance numbers have been strong throughout the school year.

The Principal emails the students, parents, and staff a separate update each week. This weekly communication helps to keep stakeholders informed and engaged. With changes happening daily within the community, the parents want to know the plans that the school has in place and what the school will be doing moving forward. Keeping a regular line of communication open with the parents and stakeholders has

increased the level of trust in the administrative decisions and appreciation for the work our staff is doing to support student learning. Additionally, our parent booster group, Phoenix Alliance, has continued to meet virtually via zoom each month. This group has been active in providing anything our staff needs and is a constant source of support and encouragement through small gifts and treats to the staff.

As part of the ongoing relationship between UHS and Fresno State, the counselors coordinated with the Fresno State faculty to host a virtual Career Exploration Day. Students learned about the different departments and majors at Fresno State and the potential job opportunities available with the degrees offered. This partnership continues to provide a unique educational opportunity for our students and the webinar helps the Fresno State professors learn about our students' needs as high schoolers navigating an online dual-enrollment college education.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

University High School administrative staff frequently provides updates and information on the constantly changing situation of the pandemic to all staff. The Principal/Superintendent and the Vice Principal have an open door policy and welcome staff input. Surveys have been used to allow staff to voice their opinions and share their thoughts, as well as any ideas they have. This has been especially important and helpful during this year when personal philosophies can be emotionally charged and heated. Moreover, since our teaching staff is small, we can have a meeting and everyone has the opportunity to be heard. At the most recent meeting regarding reopening for in-person instruction, the Principal provided the guidelines and turned the meeting over to the teachers to discuss the schedule they wanted to teach. At the end of this meeting, staff thanked administrators for the opportunity to discuss and implement their ideas, rather than asking the teachers what they wanted, but already having a preconceived plan.

Teachers were given the opportunity to learn and experiment with new technology platforms over the summer. Teachers were provided with all the technology and supplies needed in order to run their classrooms efficiently and effectively (e.g., additional monitors, webcams, software programs, etc.). Teachers have shared their expertise with each other at staff meetings and professional learning days, whether it be about technology, student engagement, or specific software programs.

A major resource that teachers have been given is time. UHS made the switch to asynchronous Fridays in mid-September of 2020. After a few weeks of online learning, the administration recognized that the staff and students could not continue with virtual instruction all five days of the week. So the adjustment was made to make every Friday an asynchronous instructional day for students. Teachers schedule two hours of office hours on Fridays for students that need to meet with them for extra help and/or makeup assignments. Additional days in the year have been set aside for professional development where teachers meet as a department and grade level teams. This has allowed for conversations to develop the vertical and horizontal articulation of curriculum. Teachers are able to work on their curriculum and develop innovative ways to incorporate technology into their lessons.

4. School Leadership:

There is a new administrative team at University High School for the 2020-21 school year. The governing board appointed the former Vice Principal as the Superintendent/Principal. A new Vice Principal was hired from outside of the organization. The Superintendent/Principal has a close and familial relationship with all the teachers and diligently promotes camaraderie and the improvement of staff morale. She sends a weekly email to all staff that includes updates on COVID/pandemic, school activities, staff birthdays, and other events that promote school spirit and knowledge. It is her thought that if the staff is informed, they have "buy in" and engagement to their school, and thus, work hard and feel part of the team.

The Superintendent/Principal has also functioned as the primary point of contact with the County Health Office to have current and accurate information to make the critical decisions for instruction and school safety. By being knowledgeable, she has had the ability to keep staff and the governing board informed of both current needs and provide a vision for how the school can effectively navigate the uncertainties ahead. By fully immersing herself in the information provided by the CDC, the County and State Offices of

Education, she has been able to guide the decision making and purchasing processes to ensure campus safety and preparedness for the return of students and staff.

At the beginning of the school year, the staff worked on site specifically to promote a team atmosphere and to ensure all technology was accessible and working. This allowed teachers to confer with one another about student progress and academic concerns quickly. Support for students could be addressed because the staff, including counselors and the Vice Principal, could meet on site and evaluate the needs of students who were struggling to adapt to distance learning or had other social or emotional needs. Academic progress is regularly reported from the Vice Principal to all teachers and counselors, so that concerns and trends can be evaluated. Student progress and attendance are regularly monitored, and findings are shared amongst all staff members to better support students holistically. At the beginning of December, when the COVID-19 numbers began to rise, the administration allowed teachers to work from home in order to remain safe and help to stop the spread of the disease. However, the process of collaborating as a team to support students that was developed in person continued through online meetings, promoting ongoing student success.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

With a small yet diverse student population, UHS is able to develop close relationships with its students to promote equity and build cultural awareness on campus. Clubs have been formed by students to strengthen common bonds and to also educate others about the unique strengths that each culture contributes to our community. Teachers actively foster a culture of respect and inclusion by recognizing the diversity of the student body and creating curriculum that is accessible to all students. This inclusivity and accessibility ensure equity as teachers develop relationships with students to foster the success of all students regardless of race or socio-economic background.

UHS has specifically made efforts to raise awareness and improve outreach to the Black and African American community. The Principal regularly communicates with the African American Outreach Coordinator at Fresno State, who then sends out emails and bulletins to all of the churches in the community. UHS recently began its first BSU (Black Student Union) Club, and also participates in the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools Ujima Student Leadership group and annual conference. UHS also celebrates its Black seniors with a full page advertisement in *The Advocate*, a local newspaper. Additionally, UHS utilizes social media to increase appreciation and awareness of Black and African American people and their accomplishments during Black History Month.

More recently, both as part of an assessed need and as a response to a social movement, the UHS administration and teachers have begun to research BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) authors to increase the presence of minority voices within our English curriculum. While we are a liberal arts charter school with a focus on music, we understand that students need to have role models to follow and stories to read about that they can identify with on a cultural and social level. By providing greater diversity in the literature selections our students are required to read, we see an opportunity for building cultural awareness and having productive conversations around BIPOC experiences. Through the ongoing work of our teachers and administration, UHS students read at least eight novels written by BIPOC authors during their time at UHS, increasing their understanding and appreciation of other cultures and historical events.

One of the things that sets UHS apart from other schools is the voice and level of input that is given to students. All students are provided surveys regarding the school climate, instruction, and are able to provide feedback and recommendations for improvement. Students know that their opinions are important to the ongoing work of the school and a strong culture of respect and appreciation is evident between students and faculty.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Early this school year, a major change was implemented upon determining students had difficulty with online learning and extensive screen time. The staff, with the full support of the governing board, elected to create an asynchronous day every Friday, with additional office hours for students. This solution, while not a normal intervention, has provided time for additional counseling and support for students. Students can complete assignments on Fridays without the demands of screen time.

Students have the ability to use Fridays to connect with their teachers and stay on top of their assignments. Teachers regularly schedule individual conferences with students who are struggling academically, socially and emotionally. Teachers can provide direct feedback to students and parents as needed, since all parties can quickly be connected over Zoom. Teachers have developed reteaching lessons for students on Fridays, which have become one more resource to help students navigate the challenges of online learning.

Having an asynchronous day allows students to make personal appointments, such as those made with the “All 4 Youth” therapist provided through a partnership with the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools. This leads to increased attendance rates on our synchronous instruction days.

In the fall, recognizing that in order to maintain the rigor of the UHS courses, students also needed opportunities to adjust to distance learning and have breaks from the intense focus required to be successful in an online environment. The governing board fully supported an asynchronous week at the end of October that served as a time for students to get caught up on assignments, meet with teachers one on one, and have an opportunity to recharge for the remainder of the semester. This proved invaluable for our teachers and students as we saw an increase in student productivity and increase in student morale.

Also in the fall semester, UHS paid for all students to attend the “UHS at the Fresno Chaffee Zoo” day and a virtual “Escape Room” activity. In the spring, all juniors attended a Career Exploratory Day at Fresno State, where they heard from professors from seven different colleges.

The challenges of this year have required schools to make changes that would normally not be considered. But for this year, asynchronous Friday instruction has served as a tremendous intervention for the students, such as less screen time, opportunities for extra support, and additional time with teachers. Our students, parents, and staff are appreciative for this unique opportunity.