

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name South Texas Preparatory Academy
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 724 S. Sugar Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Edinburg State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 78539-5221

County Hidalgo County

Telephone (956) 381-5522 Fax (956) 381-1177

Web site/URL https://preparatoryacademy.stisd.net/ E-mail ana.castro@stisd.net

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Dr. Marco Antonio Lara Jr. E-mail tony.lara@stisd.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name South Texas Independent School District Tel. (956) 565-2454

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Doug Buchanan
(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)
 - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 4 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 6 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	139	168	307
8	175	137	312
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	314	305	619

*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):
- 3.6 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 14.5 % Asian
 - 1.6 % Black or African American
 - 74.6 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 5.7 % 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:

N/A

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	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	14
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	589
(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):
Spanish, Filipino/Tagalog, Arabic, Gujarati, Korean, Punjabi, Malayalam, Japanese, Vietnamese

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 44 %
 Total number students who qualify: 274

8. Students receiving special education services: 3 %
20 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>6</u> Autism | <u>8</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>5</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>6</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>9</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</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: 13
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	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	28
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	16
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
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 15:1

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%	98%	97%	98%	98%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

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

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2015

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

Our mission statement indicates that we exist to afford our students an opportunity to experience an engaging and challenging curriculum that prepares them to be 21st century learners. Our vision is to promote successful students "by focusing on learning, working together, and being accountable for results."

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.

This year we continued to follow the A/B day block schedule rotation as per the district calendar; however, we have modified the number of minutes per class. Instead of having four 80-minute periods, we have shortened the time to 60 minutes. At the beginning of the year, all of the instruction was being done virtually and using a learning management system following the schedule below:

9:00 – 9:20 Spartan Academic Mentoring (SAM)

9:30 – 10:30 1st Period

10:40-11:40 2nd Period

11:40 – 12:40 Lunch

12:45-1:45 3rd period

1:55-2:55 4th period

3:05-3:35 Spartan Academic Mentoring (SAM)

3:45-4:45 Tutorial

Initially, the schedule was planned with a weekly asynchronous design with embedded synchronous experiences. Students are expected to: engage regularly with the LMS; synchronously when broken into smaller communities to complete activities as assigned which can include videos, instructional software, projects, etc.; make progress on their assignments/projects daily within the asynchronous time built into their schedule. An hour for one-to-one/group student support is embedded.

Presently, most of our instruction is being done virtually; however, we have approximately 150 students who attend classes in-person. At the beginning of Quarter 2, our schedule changed and both virtual and in-person students are following the schedule below:

8:00 – 9:25 Student Support

9:30 – 10:30 1st Period

10:40-11:40 2nd Period

11:40 – 12:55 Lunch

12:55-1:55 3rd period

2:05-3:05 4th period

3:15-4:05 Rotations*

*Rotations are as follows: Monday-1st period; Tuesday-2nd period; Wednesday-3rd period; Thursday-4th period; Friday-SAM

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

Preparatory Academy is a tuition-free magnet junior high campus with an open-enrollment policy, so our doors are open to students in the tri-county area of Cameron, Willacy, and Hidalgo counties. Parents apply online through our district's website in February. Slots are filled on a first-come first-serve basis.

PART III - SUMMARY

Since its inception in 2008, South Texas ISD Preparatory Academy has focused on serving the educational needs of students in a low socio-economic, tri-county area in the southern most of Rio Grande Valley (RGV) of Texas, tip affording seventh and eighth graders the experience “of engaging and challenging curriculum,” as stated in its mission statement.

One of the most important initiatives our school collaboratively manages is the enrollment process. Our tuition-free magnet school is an open-enrollment campus to students in Cameron, Willacy, and Hidalgo counties, and their parents apply through our district’s website. Because this campus serves three counties, a personalized environment must be provided to support each student’s intellectual, ethical, social, and physical development. To create a sense of community among otherwise separated students, we have the New Scholars Academy, developed for to familiarize incoming students with each other, our school’s culture, procedures, buildings, and curriculum in a pressure-free setting. Every year, teachers evaluate lessons and activities offered during the academies to match the students’ interests. Because of COVID-19, we were not able to host the academies on campus. Consequently, we hosted the academies virtually to achieve our goal of helping students emotionally and academically. Students were able to meet others safely, while being trained in the learning management system they would be using in the new school year.

In an effort to empower all staff and to effectively serve students, the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model was adopted to guide our collaborative efforts in management and instruction. Over the years, our school has progressed to the final PLC stages, resulting in a collaborative school culture that has yielded increased student performance. We have bonded as faculty unifying our curriculum which allows for better academic support in the different areas. Teacher planning is purposeful, moving from discussing the targeted objectives and skills to sharing strategies and researched-based practices with one another. These collaborative efforts have led to highly effective teaching and successful student learning, evidenced not only by our high-ranking test results but also by the achievements of our Spartans in and out of the classroom. Students’ numerous triumphs in the various categories at the Texas state-level Technology Student Association (TSA) and Texas Math and Science Coaches Association (TMSCA), for example, testify to our overall success. Winning multiple sweepstakes for University Interscholastic League (UIL) academic competitions further reflects our school’s effectiveness. Additionally, the number of students enrolled in advanced coursework demonstrates our efforts to prepare our students for the rigor of high school and college.

Not only do our Spartans excel academically, but we also have made our mark athletically under the Texas Charter School Academic and Athletic League. Our Lady Spartans volleyball teams have received Conference Champs, Regional Champs, and they won the Volleyball State Championship two years in a row. Our Lady Spartan soccer team won Regional Champs in 2019. In Cross Country, we also have a State Champion at the Cross Country State Competition.

One element that is unique to our school is its intentionality of creating a spirit of camaraderie. In addition to meeting to discuss and implement various plans and policies in our school, our Spartans celebrate with an Academic Spartan Pep rally to de-stress, reward student performance, and join in collaborative festivities at the culmination of every grading period. Additionally, departments and PSTO rotate the hosting of monthly luncheons for teachers and staff, building social bonds. Preparatory Academy has always had a diverse community, bringing together people of different cultures, abilities, and viewpoints. To foster respect for people different from ourselves, we have our Spartan Olympic Day organized and supported by our PSTO. This annual event began as a fundraiser for a local charity but has grown into an all-day event that includes a 5K run. It encourages community service and healthy lifestyle choices in a community where diabetes and heart disease are prevalent. As a result, our school community positively impacts a local service organization while strengthening school bonds. This event, like the overall school culture, fosters a climate of acceptance and deference, encouraging solidarity.

Preparatory Academy’s success locally, statewide, and nationally has not been by accident. The success of our school has been because of to dedicated teachers, supportive administration, and maintaining a clear

vision founded on strong educational principles. This mentality has earned us various accolades—certification as a Texas School to Watch, recognition by the Educational Results Partnership, the Texas Business Leadership Council for the Texas Honor Roll, and as a Texas STEM Honor Roll School. We have also received favorable Niche Rankings for the past several years for different categories. Under the Best Public Middle School in the State/Nation, we ranked #2/#30 in 2019-2020; we ranked #1/#47 in 2020-2021. Under the Best Public Middle School Teachers in the State/Nation, we ranked #3/#116 in 2019-2020; we ranked #2/#53 in 2020-2021.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

The COVID-19 impact on our school and community changed by the minute; therefore, action plans and response needed to evolve rapidly. Our school had to restructure how we delivered instruction. Administrators implemented a school-wide learning management system (LMS). With only one day of training, our teachers successfully execute this new learning platform with minimum interruptions to learning. Students were able to access and to submit work via this system and were able meet with teachers virtually. Because of the unified LMS, students expressed relief in not having to use different platforms for different teachers. This reduced the stress students experienced due to the shutdown. We were the only school in our district that implemented a school wide LMS. As a result, we had to begin this new school year virtually our incoming eighth-grade students and teachers were already familiar with this system. We also provided virtual summer camps to incoming 7th graders to familiarize them with this LMS.

In spite of the many disruptions due to COVID, PLC meetings have been prioritized, with teachers holding collaborative meetings virtually. Departments have designated meeting times to plan and to develop lessons according to students, formative assessment results. With the use of campus purchased software, results are analyzed and the data is uploaded to LMS after each assessment by a selected member of the department.

Pre-COVID, Preparatory Academy added a full-time instructional technician (IT) who assists our campus with purposeful technology integration. The IT maintains and set up instructional and managerial tools used by different departments and staff, designs and creates multimedia for various school occasions, evaluates and implements new instructional technologies, assigns and creates plans for testing, supports the implementation of new campus initiatives, and provides on-site professional development. Our IT also provides training and assistance to our students and parents. Since we had a full-time IT, we were able to fully and effectively integrate technology to enhance students' 21st-century skills.

Due to the rigorous curriculum in seventh grade ELA courses, our enrollment numbers in English I have remained steady for the past three years. We continue to have 100% English I students meet the Approaches and Meets level on the English I End of Course exam. We have also seen an increase in the Masters level in the past two years. Additionally, in ELA 8, more than 95% of our students have been meeting the Approaches Level and have been increasing in both the Meets and Masters level. Department-wide, our ELA curriculum has been modified to better prepare our students for high school courses and to better support our struggling readers with explicit instruction, research-based practices, and strategies.

In the Math department, we have been offering opportunities for more advanced courses. All of our students take Math 8 in 7th grade and Algebra I in 8th grade. During the 2019-2020 school year, our campus offered a Geometry course. This past summer, many students were also able to take Geometry so they can take Algebra II during this current school year. Instruction-wise, pre-COVID, our teachers were integrating the flipped classroom by making a video of the concepts students will be learning to allow them to process the concepts before the next class.

Our Science department has transitioned our 7th-grade students from taking the eighth-grade science course to taking Integrated Physics and Chemistry (IPC). The establishment of IPC courses at the 7th-grade level has positively impacted the preparedness for the Biology I course in 8th grade. All eighth-grade students are taking Biology I and we have had a 100% passing rate in the Biology EOC exam since this transition. We have also had over 70% performance at the Masters level in the past two years.

In 2017 we piloted a class of World Geography Pre-AP. These students took US History class during the 2017 summer in order to take World Geography during the 2017-2018 school year. Not only did they take the Human Geography AP test in May of 2018, but they also took the US History STAAR that same month excelling in both areas. We now offer incoming 7th graders the opportunity to take Texas History during the summer. This allows them to take US History during the school year as 7th graders so that they can take the World Geography course during their 8th-grade year. During the 2019-2020 school year, we saw an increase in enrollment; we had 42 students taking World Geography last year, but like many other schools, the

program experienced disruption due to COVID-19. Because of the pandemic, students were given the option to take the AP exam whereas in other years it was mandatory. Although our percentages dropped in some areas, we still outperformed state and global results in 2020 and maintained a 100% passing score.

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

In our Career and Technology Education (CATE) department, new courses were added in Principles of Health Science and Robotics and Automation in response to student interest. To offer the course, we hired a new teacher certified in Principles of Health Science, while our current teachers received training to teach the Robotics course. All of these new classes are offered for high school credits.

In addition to the elective courses, Preparatory Academy also offers programs focused on student success and promoting ongoing college readiness and exposure to campus culture. A continued partnership has been with our local university and a university in College Station, TX, which hosts week-long residential STEM camps intended for students to experience college life away from home, as well as STEM careers. Because of COVID and all the uncertainties, we were not able to partner with them the summer of 2020; however, we did partner with the university in Kingsville to offer a virtual week-long engineering camp.

We provide career and college planning opportunities for all students during our enrichment days. What began as a regular career day has transformed into a mini career conference that is more engaging and personalized; not only are parents invited to speak, but we have included community members as presenters as well. We were able to have more than twenty speakers which allowed for more student choice in career options. Students were given the opportunity to choose which presentation to attend, thus making the event more personalized. All of our eighth-grade students attend high school recruitment events where they receive classroom advisement on course selection and endorsements. Furthermore, we have increased equity for all students in the area of college readiness by having all eighth-grade students take the PSAT, so they can already identify and target individualized areas of need.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Our Fine Arts department courses offered in our school count as high school credits. Since the 2017-2018 school year, all eighth-graders have the opportunity to gain high school credits in the Art I and Theater Arts courses. The following year, we opened this opportunity to all 7th graders. In 2018-2019 we added the Music courses which include Music Instrumental Ensemble, Music Strings, and Choir. Our goal is to instill passion for the arts by providing students with an opportunity to develop their talents so that they can become well-rounded students.

Additionally, the number of students enrolled in Art courses has increased to 150 students this school year. In our Foreign language department, in addition to the Spanish I course that has been previously offered, a new Chinese Language course was implemented in 2019 to offer additional high school credit options.

In conjunction with our Parent Student Teacher Organization (PSTO), Preparatory Academy has been able to offer our annual Spartan Olympics, an all-day event which includes a 5K run, encouraging community service, and healthy lifestyle choices, over the past several years. In addition, we listened to our students and parents when they began advocating for more sports. Initially, we only offered girls volleyball and basketball and boy's basketball, joining the Texas Charter School Academic and Athletic League. Since then, our athletic program has grown to include boys' and girls' soccer, cross country, and golf. Expansion to other sports has provided more student choices, helped strengthen interpersonal skills and relationships, developed well-rounded students, and fostered school unity. Both our Spartan and Lady Spartans basketball teams have won Conference Champs, Regional Champs, and the State Championship two years running, while our Lady Spartans soccer team won Regional Champs in 2019. In Cross Country, we also have a State Champion at the Cross Country Competition. School spirit was generated through the many championships

and state/national awards.

The library is another integral part of our program. This year the library staff has helped students become better researchers through online class presentations, video tutorials, and student/librarian meetings in Zoom Breakout Rooms. The librarians participated in administrative and departmental meetings to better understand the curricular and campus needs, tailoring library support and services to those needs. Students have the option to use the “Ask A Librarian” link to receive online library support with the databases, citations, or even curbside delivery of books.

We have enhanced our Spartan Academic Mentoring advisory period by using the Restorative Discipline Circles (RD Circles) curriculum. Teachers are assigned to a small group of students who are mentor for two years. As a result, our curriculum has become more unified school-wide since the incorporation of RD Circles which have created stronger bonds between students and mentor teacher. The topics discussed during SAM address character development, safety, environmental awareness, relational and academic skills, and career planning. This RD circle element allows every student’s voice to be heard, illustrating that they matter and are an important member of our community.

3. Academic Supports:

Several systems are in place to help struggling students. For special needs’ students, we have transitioned from support-center to in-class support. Academic support staff co-teach in classes and work with content teachers to individualize assignments for special populations. For students who need it, daily instruction is offered in Math. Those who don’t need the extra support can take math every other day. Students needing extra help in ELA Honors classes are also placed in a Reading class which supports the skills they are addressing in their core classes.

Teachers work collaboratively to identify students who would benefit from receiving instruction using varied approaches and different resources. During the second semester when Support Enrichment Time ends, our school transitions to class rotations specifically to provide preparation for the upcoming state assessments for all students. Teachers use this time to target specific content and test-taking strategies. These rotations have allowed for growth in the percentages of students reaching the Meets and Masters level on state assessments. If at the end of a grading period a student has not been successful, a teacher can offer an academic contract which allows another opportunity for the student to improve. The contract must be signed by the student, parent, and teacher and stipulates the requirements to complete the contract. Teachers have flexibility in issuing contracts. They may be given at any time throughout the grading period. Even though COVID has disrupted our schedule, we have incorporated tutoring at the end of the day during our new virtual schedule to assist students who are struggling with online learning. During the last hour of school, any student can attend a teacher’s tutoring class so they can get immediate assistance.

During our shut down, we were able to provide calculators, Wi-Fi routers, and devices for our students in need, leading to 100% student participation in online learning.

Additionally, we offer summer school extension classes in the areas of Algebra I and Reading. Unsuccessful students on the Algebra I EOC, a three-week focus course is offered in targeted skills preparing students for summer retesting. In the area of Reading, we assist rising 7th and 8th graders with the summer reading assignment by providing a two-week summer course to guide students who struggle with reading. Both classes strengthen essential skills.

Our English Learner (EL) and 504 populations have increased in the last few years. In response to our increased EL population, our staff has received training in the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) and TELPAS from our local education service center. Additionally, we evaluate the resources used for these students. We continue to seek additional resources to facilitate

achievement for these students. Additional staff members were hired to provide in-class support in classes with EL students, and all teachers were encouraged to obtain ESL certification. More than half of our teachers in other content areas rose to the challenge and received the ESL certification, thereby assuring that our EL student population receives linguistic support across ELA and content classes positively impacting their academic success.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Although we are experiencing a physical separation from our students and faculty, we have been able to keep our Spartan family connected. During the mid-Spring semester school closures, we hosted Kahoot competitions among the different SAM (Spartan Academic Mentoring) classes, had Spartan Chronicle drawings, and created a school-wide Remind account to keep our Spartans informed with school activities. In addition, using Preparatory Academy's various social media platforms we announced birthdays, special recognitions and offered words of encouragement. We hosted a virtual awards ceremony for 7th and 8th grade, promotion ceremony for our eighth-graders, NJHS induction ceremony and a virtual Pep-rally. We have continued all these activities this new school year despite the challenges because we believe that these virtual activities unify our school.

During the 2020 summer, we virtually held various summer academies: the New Scholars Academy for our incoming 7th graders and new 8th graders, the TAMUK Engineering Camp, a virtual Parent Academy, summer courses for advancement, and an IPC summer course for new 8th grade students. Before the beginning of the school year, we hosted our first ever virtual Meet the Teacher event which was a success.

This new school year, we added time to our schedule to be able to meet with our SAM students twice a day. At the beginning of the day, we meet with them to help with any login concerns, device issues, or questions so that they may have a positive experience for the rest of the school day. At the end of the day, we meet with SAM yet again to conduct Restorative Discipline (RD) Circles. SAMs serve to promote the school's values while providing support for students new to our school and struggling with the challenges that a high-performing school brings. We have intentionally selected unified lessons for the daily RD circles we facilitate in our SAM class to create a sense of community and to instill our Spartan motto's values: to create honest, responsible, respectful leaders for our community. Additionally, SAMs serve to discuss important issues relevant to society today, concerns raised from school and social life, and to form bonds of respect that last throughout middle school and beyond.

Additionally, we have continued to hold our PSTO monthly meetings virtually. Officer elections were held virtually at the beginning of the year, and PSTO members have remained actively engaged throughout the year. In an effort to increase team spirit, virtual pep-rallies have been organized by administration and team event coordinators every nine-weeks.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Preparatory Academy has been partnered with our PSTO to offer our annual Spartan Olympics. This annual event began as a fundraiser for a local charity and has grown into an all-day event which includes a 5K run. It encourages community service and healthy lifestyle choices. The target charities for the Spartan Olympics/5K have been selected in response to concerns within the student population and include juvenile diabetes, autism, cancer, and orphans. With student and community support, we have been able to donate \$5,000 per year to various organizations for the past several years.

For the last 8 years, in conjunction with our local university community outreach office, the school has actively supported another social intervention strategy called the Mother-Daughter Program. In 2016-2017, Preparatory Academy added another component to the initiative, the Father-Son Project. The purpose of both programs is to train and to build relationships between young women and their mothers and young men and their fathers, as well as to educate them about academic opportunities and leadership in STEM careers. Students in both programs who meet particular criteria qualified for free residential summer camps, Girls Adventuring in Math, Engineering, and Science (GAMES) and Boys Learning Advanced Science and Technology (BLAST) Camp at the local university. Due to COVID, both camps were completed virtually starting March 2020.

Our local university also hosts a residential STEM Camp. This week-long residential camp is intended for

seventh-grade students to experience college life and STEM careers, and it has shown increased and participation since 2019. Another college-readiness outreach, the Texas A&M/STPA STEM summer camp, started in 2013, was designed for the eighth-grade students to participate in college life away from home. The Texas A&M/STPA BET summer camp, originated in summer 2014, focused on research skills and career options within the business, education, and technology fields. The two Texas A&M camps were merged in summer of 2017 to increase student participation and became The Texas A&M/STPA Exploration Camp, a week-long residential camp where students learned about college life, campus traditions, and various college courses. Initially, our school would pay for the camp fees, but through grants offered by the university, we were able to send our students for free. Because of COVID and all the uncertainties, we were not able to partner with them the summer of 2020; however, we did partner with university in Kingsville to offer a virtual week-long Texas A&M/STISD Engineering Camp.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Professional development is framed on campus, district needs, and best practices in order to have vertical and horizontal coherence when students transition from middle schools to high school. We began the 2019-2020 school year with a training named Purposeful Instruction by a representative from a contracted professional learning center and continued it throughout the school year. The purpose of the training was to provide a framework that aligns high-quality instruction with learning intentions by identifying teacher practices that are both intentional and targeted. This PD asked the teacher to begin with the end in mind, to communicate content and language objectives, to provide explicit instruction, and to use student performance data to readjust lessons. Although this training was a district mandate, our campus had already been purposefully planning instruction as a SMART goal.

Since the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC), our school has progressed within its stages. Initially, we were in the early stages of PLC implementation, but in these past few years, our school has grown to the final stages, resulting in increased collaboration, trust accountability among faculty. We have bonded as faculty unifying our curriculum, and this allows for better academic support in the different areas. Our teachers were able to successfully transition to online learning because of the motivation and support they gave one another not just within their departments but in their grade level teams as well. During PLC meetings, teachers plan common assessments, analyze data, plan for intervention or enrichment, and reflect purposefully on instruction. Our campus IT provides individualized PD of the different distance learning platforms, empowering teachers to take ownership.

As a result of COVID-19, we had to change the way we delivered our instruction and modify our lessons and activities to be better suited for online learning. The first professional development session all district teachers completed was a two-day online training on Blended Learning, the combination of online learning and teacher-led face-to-face instruction, to transition teachers and students from a crisis-response remote instruction to an accountability-driven one. The trainings taught teachers the definition of blended learning, and the two different modes of learning: synchronous and asynchronous.

These trainings have introduced ways to attain a more integrative approach to learning with more technology integrations into the learning process. Additionally, we received a one-day training on strategies over the best practices for the integration of technology where we experienced various tools useful tools in supporting remote learning. We have continued to further our knowledge and incorporation of these resources and tools.

4. School Leadership:

At all levels, Preparatory Academy Leadership is both transformational and facilitative. Using the PLC model, our leadership aims to empower all staff, stoking an ongoing collaborative effort, which will lead to school improvement. The administrative team, along with the assistance of various advisory/collaborative teams, guide school operations and monitor improvements, with the principal serving as the ultimate authority in any action regarding school management and development. Preparatory Academy's administrative team consists of the principal, two assistant principals, a social worker, and two counselors. Additionally, team and department leaders and the Site-Based Decision-Making Committee (SBDM) act as

advisory groups and oversee Preparatory Academy's operation and ongoing development. Recurring meetings of these groups collect, analyze, and use student data to revise curriculum and instruction, to develop intervention strategies, and to discuss common concerns. This collaborative approach maintains high interest, engagement, and rigor. The principal and/or support staff attend these reoccurring meetings and collect data. Furthermore, the principal meets every nine weeks with the Student Ambassadors— student representatives from each academic team--to discuss concerns brought forth from the student body.

Preparatory Academy administration acts proactively to update the campus improvement plan and review policies and procedures that address a variety of matters, updating regulatory documents through monthly collaboration with SBDM and department and academic teams. With the assistance of all advisory groups, the administrative team is responsible for all curricular and instructional matters, master schedule, staff development, and school operation. In addition, the principal, with the support of the assistant principals, is responsible for staff evaluation, financial matters, plant maintenance, discipline, school programs, and activities. The administrative team works in collaboration with an office staff, reviewing and revising policies and procedures concerning PEIMS, budget, and resource allocations. Through the collaborative efforts of all levels of leadership, we have a highly functioning system in place for our students.

When COVID shutdowns reached Preparatory Academy, the leadership teams worked in unison to keep our school functioning and safe. Administrators provided training for teachers who in turn trained our students on the LMS to be used. When the district decided to bring all teachers and selected groups of students for in-person instruction in September, administration ensured all furniture was set-up to comply with the spacing requirements. Teacher and student desks were equipped with shield guards; signage was placed across campus promoting social distancing and one-way walk ways the halls. PPE supplies were also provided to all teachers.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Preparatory Academy has always been a diverse community, bringing together people of different cultures, abilities, and perspectives. To provide equal opportunity for success for all students, our school provides individualized counseling sessions in the areas of crisis management, student and parent concerns, team concerns, yielding possible student referrals to an on-campus wellness counselor and/or social worker. Moreover, because we have set these support structures in place, we better serve many of our ELs who exit the program by their 8th grade year, and this results in fewer students enrolled in the eighth-grade Reading classes. Our scores from 2017-2019 illustrate how well our ELs have been effectively prepared to pass state assessments. In the past, we have used various programs to monitor our special populations. The challenge was that teachers had to use different programs for different special needs populations. This year, we have begun using one electronic data management program which uniformly tracks compliance and services for all students in special education, Section 504, RTI, and EL students. The EL population receives linguistic support across content classes which positively impacts these students' academic success. In response to our increased EL population, we reached out to our local education service center to request training in the ELPS and TELPAS. Our school continually evaluates the effectiveness of the resources and programs used for our EL population.

We are also able provide early intervention when a special education student is failing. Using a nine-week grading period requires we have a progress check each three weeks. If a student is showing signs of struggle during the early part of the nine weeks in any course, teachers may offer these students an academic contract. By intervening early, our students are usually able to experience success by the end of the grading period. Another support measure put in place is offering daily instruction in math, while those who don't need the extra support can take their math course every other day. Students who may need extra help in ELA Honors classes have also been placed in a Reading class which supports the skills required to master material in their core classes. Because of the intervention measures we have put in place, we have had no student

retention for several years. Our special education students not only show success with their teacher assignments and assessments, but they also show success on the state's end of year assessments.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Particularly amid the current pandemic challenges, the most instrumental practice for our school's continued success in the education and support of students is that we have embraced the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model. Because we have followed this model over the last decade, we have learned to hold one another accountable, to work collaboratively as smaller and larger teams and to focus on our students' learning achievements and challenges. Consequently, our teachers and staff are able to quickly adapt to modified instructional and operational systems as needed. Clearly, this past year's health crisis has created a great need for these forms of cooperative problem-solving to shape the pedagogy necessary for successful American schools.

In order to prepare our incoming students prior to initiating our hybrid instruction, we have had to modify our New Scholars' Academy. This introduction to Preparatory Academy is needed to familiarize new students with each other, our school's culture, procedures, layouts, and curriculum in a pressure-free setting. Because of COVID-19, we were not able to host the academies on campus; nevertheless, the importance of these academies was not discounted. We decided to host the academies virtually. Our goal with the virtual camp was to help the students emotionally and academically. The students were able to meet other students safely, and they were trained in the learning management system all students would be expected to use in all classes during the upcoming school year.

We were also able to give them virtual tours of our school, while introducing the faculty and staff. Students completed engaging lessons they might expect to see at our school. Afterwards, students expressed how happy they were that we still had camps (albeit virtually) because they allowed them to relieve some stress relative to attending a new school. This adaptation occurred because our teachers have a close-working relationship established by the PLC.

During the school year, most teachers felt fully supported throughout the online transition because they knew they could turn to a colleague for help. The ability to come together and work as a PLC has enabled us to cope with the current challenges. Because we are a united and collaborative body of educators and learners, the new delivery system for instruction was quickly understood and accepted, allowing for almost seamless continuity in the edification of our students. Adversity has helped us to demonstrate the high-performing community that we strive to be every day.