

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2022 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[ ] Public or [X] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Saint Cecilia Catholic School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 11740 Joan Of Arc -  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Houston State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 77024-2602

County Harris

Telephone (713) 468-9515 Fax (713) 468-4698

Web site/URL https://saintceiliacatholicsschool.org E-mail agrobelny@saintceilia.org

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

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

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. Debra Haney E-mail dhaney@archgh.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Archdiocese of Galveston Houston Tel. (713) 741-8704

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 Mrs Stephanie Grover  
(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**

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

1. 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 2016 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 or 2021.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s nomination and/or rescind a school’s award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

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

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for current school year (2021-2022) unless otherwise stated.

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

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

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

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

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

3. Number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021 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	51	41	92
K	27	28	55
1	24	39	63
2	27	33	60
3	20	29	49
4	24	32	56
5	30	37	67
6	25	37	62
7	18	44	62
8	32	33	65
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	278	353	631

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 3 % Asian
  - 1 % Black or African American
  - 19 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 64 % White
  - 13 % 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 2020 - 2021 school year: 3%

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.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	11
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	10
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	21
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	617
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.03
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

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

Spanish, Vietnamese, Greek, Portuguese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %  
4 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 0 %

Total number students who qualify: 0

8. Students receiving special education services 13 %

With an IEP or 504: 80 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 with an IEP or 504 should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>4</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>36</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>30</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>11</u> Emotional Disturbance  | <u>27</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 5

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.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher, CTE teacher.	34
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	11
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	8
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	12

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 18:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2016	2016-2017
Daily student attendance	97%	96%	97%	98%	97%
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 2021.

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

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

Yes  No

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

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

Our mission at St Cecilia Catholic School is the ongoing Catholic formation and education of the whole child in mind, heart, and spirit in preparation for an adult life of commitment and service.

16. Provide a URL link to or text of the school’s nondiscrimination policy.

The Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, and/or national origin.

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

## **PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW**

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St. Cecilia Catholic School is a parochial school located within the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, serving 630 students in PK3 through 8th grade. Situated on the edge of affluent Hedwig Village and near the Energy Corridor, St. Cecilia serves students from 47 zip codes, representing diverse socioeconomic statuses, ethnicities, and nationalities. The school is dual-accredited by the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishop’s Education Department (TCCBED) and by Cognia.

A cornerstone of West Houston’s Catholic community since 1958, the St. Cecilia campus has grown along with the area. The original school building housed eight classrooms, the school offices, a cafeteria, and a gymnasium. In 1962, to accommodate the expanding student population, nine classrooms, a new cafeteria, library, and storage facilities were added to the school. Again in 1995, a substantial addition and remodeling project included the removal of seven temporary metal classroom buildings and the construction of a new wing housing a science lab, a computer lab, an expanded library, gymnasium and locker rooms, art room, and five additional classrooms. Today, students enjoy an additional two-story wing located on the north side of campus with 35 classrooms overall, two science labs, a choir room, and a comfortable counseling space. Over the past two years, the library and computer labs have been renovated to create the “Genesis” MakerSpace, a formal place for robotics, tinkering, and creativity that has its roots in a mobile MakerSpace (Genesis I), originally built by the student Campus Ministry Team. Adjoining, a large and contemporary learning commons has been created, tearing down walls to provide a space for collaborative learning and modular use.

This growth and expansion have only been made possible by the generous giving of time, talent, and treasure on behalf of the entire St. Cecilia community throughout the years. The service-oriented community of St. Cecilia serves and volunteers in parish ministries, and stewards the culture of the school to be the embodiment of the educational ministry of the Catholic Church, promoting faith and virtue in our children and the greater community.

St. Cecilia Catholic School is a mission-driven community. This mission is driven by a core philosophy, to create an environment of excellence by instilling a sense of Christian values, fostering an academic atmosphere of belonging and love, and by focusing on the development of the whole child. Together, the community seeks to integrate Catholic beliefs, traditions, and social teachings with a sense of community and service that prepares students for adulthood as active and contributing adults.

The initiatives over the past several years at St. Cecilia’s have been guided by the principal’s “Four Pillars” strategic plan: 1) Balanced Literacy, 2) Caring Community, 3) STREAM (Science Technology Religion Engineering Arts Math) Integration, and 4) Assessment and Grading. Each of these pillars has seen significant advancement in numerous ways. For instance, the adoption of the Fountas and Pinnell Literacy program and the Daily 5 has unified English language instruction in the elementary grades, providing a common framework for literacy teachers as they refine their differentiation techniques. The school’s Literacy and STREAM Integration pillars are well-supported by the Home and School Association (HSA), in the form of STREAM days, such as Astronomy Night and a Read-a-thon.

St. Cecilia is dedicated to educating the whole child, and the Caring Community pillar guides leaders to maintain a safe, caring, and nurturing environment where every student has the opportunity to learn and grow intellectually, socially, and spiritually. The community believes that children are inherently good and want to contribute to their community, that every student is capable, willing, and eager to learn when learning experiences are relevant and meaningful. To encourage meaningful relationships and relevant shared experiences, students engage in developmentally appropriate grade-level service, called GO Projects (Giving of Ourselves). As well, different groups and ministries perform service in additional ways. For example, 5th-grade students plan and host an annual First Communion and Reconciliation Retreat for the 2nd graders, 7th graders volunteer several hours with Catholic Charities each year on their multi-day “Texas Tour” field trip, and families and staff come together on annual Days of Service to perform beautification around the campus and to complete service tasks given by area nonprofits.



Administration builds additional time into morning homeroom on three days: Fridays for Mass, Mondays for schoolwide guidance activities, and Wednesdays for a live-streamed morning assembly. Prior to the pandemic, the entire school gathered together in the gym to learn about the Virtue of the Month, to see student-created videos highlighting what the virtues mean and how actual students around campus are living those virtues, and to celebrate students nominated by their peers for living the monthly virtue in daily life. The St. Cecilia community believes that when students are ensconced in an atmosphere of shared expectations and meaningful learning experiences, then they will develop a shared responsibility to one another and will thrive in becoming their authentic selves.

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

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

#### **1a. Overall approach, which may include overarching philosophy or approaches common across subject areas:**

St. Cecilia Catholic School employs a core curriculum in each grade level that includes religion, mathematics, reading/English language arts, science, social studies, foreign language, physical education, and fine arts classes. The school relies on a framework of national standards and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) in designating appropriate grade-level learning content. St. Cecilia strives to provide students with a well-rounded course of instruction, so expectations in the core are supplemented by a variety of ancillary and elective options. The learning outcomes for St. Cecilia students are commensurate with the expectations of the area Catholic high schools and are intended to prepare students to not only excel academically, but for “a lifetime of commitment and service.”

St. Cecilia desires to be the embodiment of the Catholic faith, promoting excellence and virtue in its students and the greater community, and integrating Catholic identity with the various curricular disciplines and content areas. Student self-responsibility, collaboration, and resilience are philosophical hallmarks of the school’s mission and permeate academic policies and methods. Instructional strategies are varied, data-informed, and developmentally appropriate. The staff and faculty of St. Cecilia Catholic School are committed to the mission statement and work collaboratively to meet the needs of their students.

The strategic plan’s Assessment and Grading Pillar has seen the rollout of programs and policies meant to foster better measures of student learning. Grades should reflect actual learning and mastery, and students are given the opportunity to try again without penalty to show better understanding, with their personal habits and effort being assessed alongside conduct. This presents teachers with academic grades that show true achievement, unobscured by poor personal habits and lack of effort such as insufficient preparation or late work. Alongside this, the school has adopted the NWEA MAP (Northwest Evaluation Association Measure of Academic Progress) test, given at set windows throughout the year, allowing ongoing longitudinal assessment.

#### **1b. Reading/English language arts curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

The reading and English language arts (R/ELA) program at St. Cecilia is guided by the strategic plan’s Balanced Literacy pillar, where students are met with differentiated and individualized instruction. The instructional methods promulgated within this strategic initiative are meant to provide personalized learning experiences aimed at producing highly competent, independent learners that will establish lifelong reading and writing habits. The TEKS serve as standards guidance for course content and scope.

In the elementary grades, the Daily 5 and CAFE menu format is used to ensure that students have a variety of opportunities to practice reading and writing for comprehension, accuracy, fluency, and vocabulary expansion. Students will read to themselves or someone else, practice writing or word work, or listen to reading. Alongside this, the school employs the Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) framework for recording and assessing student reading development through the F&P Benchmark Assessment Program (BAS) and longitudinal running records. Students are given access to intentionally selected reading material both challenging and at level, with teachers meeting with students individually to ensure the application of responsive teaching decisions.

Early elementary (K-2nd) R/ELA instruction focuses on phonics and decoding, using guided reading to provide students with varying modalities of acquiring and refining reading skills. Assessment data from the NWEA MAP is correlated with individualized assessment data from the F&P BAS running records to effectively evaluate student reading levels, assign guided reading groups, and to select material that is accessible but challenging.

Beginning in 3rd grade, R/ELA teachers are able to utilize the IXL ELA program for individualizing student assignments and formative assessments to supplement their Daily 5 and CAFE menu framework. The use of F&P running records again gives teachers personalized insight into the level of reading material that each student requires to continue a consistent acquisition of language abilities. Throughout the elementary grades, small groups are utilized for mini-lessons, guided reading, reading circles, and vocabulary development.

As students transition to middle school, the use of F&P assessment and decoding frameworks continue, as well as the use of IXL ELA. Teachers use novel studies and Membean for acute vocabulary growth and to enhance long-term retrieval, using the program to accentuate formative assessments and to further contextualize unfamiliar words and concepts. Throughout the grade levels, students intentionally study an author's craft and then work to emulate the writing styles and figurative tools that they observe in their reading. Teachers act as writing mentors, working with students to develop writing throughout the year, utilizing peer review, checkpoints, and rubrics to help students improve their writing achievement.

### **1c. Mathematics curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

St. Cecilia Catholic School has adopted a mathematical pedagogy presupposing that early conceptual understanding will enhance student achievement as arithmetic and computation become increasingly complex. As a general practice, teachers employ small or whole group instruction and modeling, with individual or small group guided practice. Emphasis is placed on multisensory modes of learning, mental math, and activities that foster deeper understanding and application of the content. Homework is used to support in-class learning through practice and repetition, and a compressed middle school curriculum allows for students to complete Pre-Algebra and Algebra courses by 8th grade. At the end of each year, all teachers have an opportunity to review and discuss summative assessment data for their rising students to determine what if any foundational concepts need additional instruction in the next year.

For elementary PK4-2nd, self-contained teachers utilize the Bridges in Mathematics program to accompany the TEKS-based curriculum that is in place. The Bridges in Mathematics program framework provides a recursive approach to learning mathematical fundamentals and concepts, providing a comprehensive grading and assessment protocol across these early grades, thereby promoting cohesiveness in the overall vertical alignment of learning standards. Several checkpoint assessments are built into the program, providing a depth of analytical data and reporting that informs student grouping, differentiated instruction, and instructional decision-making. Self-contained grade-level teachers work alongside instructional Math Coaches to ensure that the necessary curriculum is being taught and that students are abreast of curricular expectations.

Mathematics is departmentalized in 3rd-8th grade, and the enVision Math resource published by Savvas provides Google Classroom integration and serves as both a resource text and online guide for students. Teachers use IXL to provide additional practice opportunities and to differentiate instruction for students performing above or below grade-level standards. Beginning in 5th grade, students are offered math classes based on a data-driven performance and confidence rubric. One of the math sections in each grade moves at an accelerated rate with a larger class size of around 24 students who rank at the top of the rubric based on standardized scores. The other two sections have smaller class sizes and proceed through the curriculum more slowly, with students ultimately graduating with Algebra I credit, allowing an opportunity to test directly into Geometry for high school.

### **1d. Science curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

The Science curriculum at St. Cecilia Catholic School is inquiry-based and full of experiential activities that illuminate the wonders of the world. The TEKS cover nutrition and health, life science, physical science, and earth science in spiraling strands, and so the alignment of learning expectations throughout the grade levels is centered on intergrade discussions of summative assessment data.

In the early elementary grades, students focus on understanding the world around them, understanding fact and opinion, verifying hypotheses, and observing and analyzing developmentally appropriate representations of force, motion, and energy, and the practices that lend to good scientific method. As the

grades progress through elementary, scientific and engineering practices become more sophisticated, allowing for more implicit examinations of the observable world. Software such as Gale, Brainpop, and Discovery Streaming supplement resources like STEMScopes to provide an enriching set of resources for science teachers.

The science curriculum becomes more advanced in fifth grade, as students begin applying their learning on a greater scale. Studies of matter and energy translate into summative projects like the Egg Drop, where students design a vehicle that will cradle an egg for a two-story fall. Another culminating project is the collaborative Roller Coaster project, where student teams plan, design, and build a marble roller coaster using foam tubes and project boards. The capstone of 5th grade Science education is a 3-night trip to a local camp, where students engage in learning activities such as pond study, botany, and other natural science.

Middle school students have the opportunity to build upon their previous foundations with laboratories, dissections, and experiments. The 6th and 7th-grade science teacher employs “practicals” in addition to written exams to ensure that students are able to apply what they have learned. This year, these students have dissected a frog, a heart, and owl pellets. Eighth-grade science students take Introduction to Physical Science, which gives them additional preparation for advanced physics and chemistry courses once they complete 9th-grade Biology.

#### **1e. Social studies/history/civic learning curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

The social studies core curriculum at St. Cecilia’s follows the TEKS, which aligns with national standards with the exception of standards relating to Texas History in both 4th and 7th grade. The curriculum is intended to provide students with the historical and social frameworks for becoming active and contributing citizens of an interdependent world, and composes elements of American and world history, geography, culture, economics, and civics. With increasing complexity, students are expected to develop and apply critical thinking skills to organize and use information from a variety of sources. The elementary curriculum is iterative in its elements, focusing on the foundations of critical thinking and details important to understanding our historical place in the world, while middle school social studies focuses on world geography, Texas history, and early American history.

While there is a large degree of informational acquisition expected in the social studies curriculum, teachers regularly employ project-based learning, multimodal learning opportunities, and experiential activities that enliven these experiences. Recent field trips satisfying social studies standards include the Houston Holocaust Museum, Houston Museum of Science, Johnson Space Center, the 7th Grade Texas Tour (3 days and 2 nights), and the 8th grade Washington DC Trip (4 days and 3 nights).

Throughout the grade levels, teachers collaborate cross-curricularly with the social studies curriculum, and project-based learning is enmeshed throughout the teacher’s lesson planning. For example, this year 6th grade students in World Geography studied the pyramids, wrote a research essay in their language arts class, and built a model pyramid in science. Third grade students work on a “Famous Americans Wax Museum” performance project that satisfies elements in language arts, reading, and social studies.

#### **1f. For secondary schools:**

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

The St. Cecilia PK3 and PK4 programs are self-contained programs designed to develop the whole child, with multimodal lessons and activities that support academic, motor, and socio-emotional development. Students will cooperatively play, use their imagination and artistic creativity, develop language skills and verbalization, and improve their listening skills.

The early childhood program follows requirements set by our accrediting agency, with apportionment for daily religion instruction and uninterrupted free play. Forty percent of the instructional day is reserved for

literacy and 20% of the day for mathematics, with science, social studies, and arts thematically integrated into the core curriculum. Academic readiness skill sets are vertically aligned with the core curriculum's academic strands for grades K-3. For instance, PK3 studies life science with sensory experiences and nutrition, earth science with weather and life cycles, and physical science with buoyancy and magnetism. As in older grades, early childhood students have daily recesses, PE, attend Spanish twice a week, and while the fine arts are integrated into daily learning experiences, students also attend weekly drama, music, and art. Early childhood teachers make use of many of the same strategies, programs, and software that early elementary teachers utilize, such as the F&P running records, Daily 5, Bridges in Mathematics, and STEMScopes.

Early childhood assessment is developmentally appropriate and standards-based, with students graded in 48 categories as exceeding, meeting, developing, or beginning. Formative and summative assessments are ongoing and criterion-referenced, and teachers meet with students in small groups and individually for literacy and math assessments. Activities and rigor are more complex throughout the year and students must show incremental growth to continue meeting developmental expectations. Students entering the program have early literacy and numeracy assessments gauged against norm-referenced benchmarks and referenced against local rankings to determine potential for success within the program.

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

St. Cecilia offers a broad range of ancillary classes that enrich student learning and support the acquisition of essential skills. All students from PK3-8th grade have physical education, foreign language, and fine arts classes. In PK3-5th grade, students have Spanish instruction on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with art, music, and drama on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. This rotation is flipped for middle school, where students enjoy three days of Spanish instruction and two days of fine art instruction each week. Spanish classes in kindergarten through 8th grade are arranged to support one native or advanced section for each grade level, to ensure that students are challenged with appropriate growth opportunities. Middle school art classes are offered on a quarterly rotation, with students taking a technology integration class in addition to art, music, and drama. All students have a minimum of 30 minutes of religion instruction daily, with a developed set of curricula throughout the grade levels that focus on the foundational catechisms of the Catholic faith.

As with core classes, fine arts classes use the TEKS for guidance and in the application of lesson standards. In art class, students will learn the basic elements and history of art, learning technical information and applying those techniques within different media. In music, students will acquire and apply basic elements of voice, music theory and history, and have the opportunity to learn and play instruments. In drama, students will practice movement, memorization, and collaboration. In the middle school technology course, students have varied opportunities: students have produced stop motion films, used block chain coding, created mazes and challenges for one another using coding robots, and produced content for the daily announcements broadcast. Overall, these classes support fine and gross motor development, collaborative and communication competencies, and in addition to PE and recess, generally provide students a good set of brain breaks built into the day.

Middle school students have PE three times a week and are also given elective opportunities twice a week. Middle school PE focuses on fitness and team sports, while elective courses vary each quarter and generally gravitate around the STREAM, fine arts, and core courses. Eighth grade students have the option of signing up for the 3-quarter musical elective, producing an amazing performance each year for the past several decades. Robotics, Tinkercad, Lego Design, Rock Band, Choir, Digital Comic Books, Sculpture, Digital Book Creation, Microbiology, Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Stagecraft, and the Christmas Program are some examples of electives offered in recent years. In the 1st quarter of 6th grade, students take an executive functioning elective, focused on organizational and planning strategies, and thereafter students have the option of requesting a personal study hall as their elective each quarter. The consistently largest elective for the past several years has been 7th grade Campus Ministry. This elective prepares students to be service-minded followers of Christ's teachings, and prepares them to join the after-school 8th grade Campus Ministry Team, providing student retreats, community service, and producing content for the school's daily announcements broadcast.

### **3. Academic Supports**

#### **3a. Students performing below grade level:**

When a student is observed to be having academic trouble, the subject teacher will meet with the family to ensure the home and school partnership is working in tandem to support the child. Teachers will either host study halls before school or during lunch to help reteach material and give students an opportunity to improve submitted assignments and assessments, or they will employ a method for reteaching and retesting within their pedagogy.

The Student Services Team (SST), consisting of the Principal, Counselors, Learning Specialist, and Assistant Principal, and the Academic Support Team (AST), consisting of the Principal, Director of Learning and Innovation, and the Instructional Specialist, meet weekly on a rotating basis with grade-level teams. The SST is able to work with teachers to formulate individual plans of action for each student whether the concerns are socio-emotional, academic, or behavioral. When needed, the members of the SST observe the classroom and meet with parents to discuss further interventions, such as referral for tutoring or psychoeducational testing. The AST meets with teachers to discuss strategies within the overall academic program for analyzing data, grouping students, and using tools within defined assessment regimens to better differentiate and personalize student instruction. Specifically, F&P running records and NWEA MAP testing results provide the data needed to create groups within the classroom for reteaching in the language arts, and NWEA MAP testing is used alongside the Bridges Math program assessments to do the same for math instruction.

Additionally, the administration regularly runs progress reports and identifies students not performing to expectations. Teachers are asked to assess “Non-Academic Factors” such as effort and personal habits alongside conduct, so that penalties for late work are not part of the overall academic grade. This allows for an academic grade that shows pure academic achievement on assignments and assessments performed at school, and alongside the non-academic factors, administration is able to support classroom teachers and leadership teams like the AST and SST in addressing low academic achievement for specific students. The triangulation of data analysis, non-academic factor assessment, and student-specific planning has created an environment where students are capable of meeting academic expectations.

#### **3b. Students performing above grade level:**

Especially since the pandemic, technology has played an increasingly valuable role in differentiating instruction to students performing above grade level. St. Cecilia has increased frequency of standardized assessment and encouraged use of ongoing assessments embedded within the school’s curricular programs. These running records and subject-specific assessment data allow teachers to increasingly use actively managed and adaptive programs such as IXL, Renaissance, Membean, EdPuzzle, SeeSaw, Starfall, RazKids, and Duolingo to work within their instructional frameworks, such as Daily 5, to ensure students are being presented with relevant and challenging formative assessments through group and personalized assignment. Accompanying these strategies, the school’s assessment of non-academic factors in each content area provides students an opportunity to not only show their mastery of the subject, but also challenges students to earn an “exceeding” in personal habits and effort in each class.

Middle school electives are also designed to provide enrichment opportunities commensurate with student ability and effort. Whether it is performance, creation, or design, students are able to push their own limits with the resources available to them through the Genesis MakerSpace and adjoining learning commons. These areas house five 3D printers, several types of robots, and breakout areas with interactive panels that accommodate collaboration and visible thinking. An abundance of project-based learning will often cause students to be spread throughout the hallways or learning commons, working in groups or individually.

As well, St. Cecilia encourages students performing above grade level via extracurricular opportunities. Each year, students in 1st grade and up compete in academic competitions sponsored by the Private School Interscholastic Association (PSIA). Middle school students compete in several local and national academic competitions and tournaments, and participate in the summer Duke Talent Identification Program. Students

strive to meet the high marks for Principal's or Teacher's Honor Roll, and are also encouraged to participate in National Junior Honor Society, whose members are often relied upon as ambassadors and guides during events and functions.

### **3c. Special education:**

The special education population at St. Cecilia consists of students with accommodations that may be handled within the general classroom environment. All applying students are eligible for acceptance to the school regardless of special education status if they meet admission requirements, which includes criterion-referenced benchmarks. During the admissions process, families are given the opportunity to inform the school of any diagnosed learning difficulties and may use their accommodations on admissions testing.

Students with diagnosed learning disabilities are supported by their teaching team and the Student Services Team (SST). Advocacy for students with documented or suspected learning impairments is the direct responsibility of the Learning Specialist. The Learning Specialist partners with families to ensure guidance and communication of the learning needs of these students, leads roundtable discussions throughout the year with families and teachers, and works with diagnosticians and local school districts to coordinate services that may be rendered on campus, such as speech and occupational therapy, Neuhaus tutoring, or student observation and evaluation. Students with accommodation plans are not considered a distinct subgroup of our student population, and so are not coded differently within our assessment data, although notation is made for students with accommodations such as extended time, small group administration, or oral assessment. Ongoing benchmark assessments, the support of the SST and academic support staff, and other previously elaborated instructional strategies for students falling below grade level provide a foundational framework for students and families that desire the formative educational experiences provided by St. Cecilia.

### **3d. English Language Learners, if a special program or intervention is offered:**

St. Cecilia serves emergent English language learners through a consistent approach. The use of instructional grouping based on assessment data ensures that students exhibiting needs characteristic of English language learners have their needs met within the general classroom. When greater intervention is needed, such as when English is not a student's primary language or English language exposure has been limited, the Learning Specialist and SST work directly with the teacher and family to establish a personalized plan of success that will generally include differentiated pacing and oftentimes the use of outside resources to support student language acquisition. Examples of intervention in the past have been individualized learning plans, content tutoring, and referral for speech therapy.

### **3e. Other populations (e.g., migrant, homeless), if a special program or intervention is offered:**

## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

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### **1. Engaging Students:**

St. Cecilia Catholic School provides a positive environment that supports academic, social, and emotional growth by engaging children with rigorous learning and relevant experiences. These experiences prepare students for success in high school and beyond. The school sees social-emotional learning to be just as important as academic rigor to childhood development, and “Caring Community” has served as one of the four foundational pillars of the strategic plan for the past 5 years.

The Caring Community initiative builds upon a community fabric blessed with opportunities for curiosity, service, and leadership. The social-emotional learning program is inspired by the Love & Logic framework, with teachers having additional opportunities built into the schedule to develop relationships with students and foster community within their classroom. This additional time each week is used to have class meetings based on developmentally appropriate guidance lessons, provided via the Counseling Department's Google Classroom: classes circle up, discuss thematic virtues and practices, build self-esteem, and discuss their personal journeys and needs. This time is complemented on Wednesdays with a schoolwide assembly, echoing these lessons and recognizing student achievement in all aspects of school life: academically, athletically, personally, and virtuously.

Student life at St. Cecilia is enriched by extracurricular activities that meet the special interests of the students. All middle school students have quarterly electives that take place twice a week, ranging from Campus Ministry, the 8th-grade musical, sculpture, or working in the livestream studio for daily announcements. Having used an assignment book since 1st grade, 6th grade students take an organization and executive functioning class as an elective to prepare them for the rigor of middle school. National Junior Honor Society notwithstanding, Campus Ministry is the largest student organization on campus, leading retreats, providing content for livestream announcements, waging campaigns to bring attention to social justice and works of mercy, and providing an outlet of leadership for students not called to Student Council. The school's athletic teams have enjoyed great success across all sports in the past several years, winning multiple championships and striving to be their best. Athletic Banquets celebrate the conclusion of the fall and spring seasons, spotlighting leadership, grit, and endurance through team awards and special recognitions.

St. Cecilia maintained this blueprint throughout the entirety of distance education, including last school year when some students learned remotely while others were in the classroom. Weekly guidance, assembly, graduation, auction, and other community events were amended and implemented. The pandemic saw St. Cecilia teachers leaning in: conducting guidance, virtual field trips, science experiments, and even a virtual Field Day, where families and staff posted FlipGrids of themselves trying the challenges. This sense of community inspired students to lean in as well, with standardized data showing achievement beyond expectations across departments and grade levels.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

St. Cecilia Catholic School promotes engagement and partnerships with families and the greater parent, parish, civic, and interfaith communities for student success and school improvement. Within the greater civic community, the school has given tours to local police to acquaint them better with our campus and annually provides lunch and breakfast to the first responder departments to show our appreciation for their service. In the greater religious community, the school's Campus Ministry program has developed interfaith relationships with the Jerusalem Peacebuilders and local Jewish and Islamic schools, co-hosting interfaith activities where students from the schools visit each other's place of worship, collaborate on service projects, and pray together for many different intentions. This partnership has evolved over 4 years and was conducted remotely during the pandemic. It has had a tremendous impact on the worldview of all participants.

Parent organizations include the Booster Club, which provides spirited support for school athletics, and the



Home and School Association (HSA). The HSA room parents collaborate with the smaller parent communities within the school to communicate classroom needs, provide copy room support, organize teacher appreciation, and host the used uniform sale. The HSA also works directly with parents and school staff to collaborate on events such as the 1st & 8th grade Prayer Buddy socials, the Read-a-Thon, Astronomy Night, and Cultural Enrichment Day. The school community enjoys so many cherished traditions and experiences that could not happen without tremendous parent involvement.

Parents also volunteer in parish ministries that benefit student achievement, most notably the parish Fall Fest. Funds from this event cover budgetary overhead, allowing school fundraising to focus on strategic endeavors. In 2021, with students just acclimating to in-person learning, a winter storm caused widespread power outages and resulted in major HVAC issues on the roof, with the school regretfully having to revert to distance learning. Within an hour of the announcement, several parents representing the HVAC and construction fields were on the roof with administrators and parish facility staff, diagnosing and troubleshooting workarounds, helping get the children back in the classroom within days.

Leadership and faculty maintain many professional learning communities both locally and through social media. Guidance, technology, and instructional staff regularly attend meetings and workshops with other schools for shared planning, as well as with staff from the zoned school district. Strong partnerships are shared with local high schools, with teachers and SST members attending hosted luncheons, focused on supporting high school and middle school academic alignment. These relationships are critical to planning and implementing professional development and in advancing services to meet individual student needs.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

Teachers are the single most important factor in improving student learning, and the school endeavors to provide professional support and development that complement relationship building, collaborative learning, and individual teacher needs. Support staff thoughtfully plan professional development that contributes to student learning and school culture, guided by the “Bone Deep Belief” that teachers cannot grow in isolation, but flourish in a caring community built on trust and respect. New teacher onboarding begins with team building for new staff with additional time to acclimate to school culture and expectations. Each year, time is set aside for a faculty retreat to focus on self-care and reflection, as well as a staff-wide service project. This set of shared experiences always helps invigorate the tone for the year.

This intentionality of valuing teachers was best exemplified during the transition into remote learning. Knowing the effort spent by administrators and staff in preparing frameworks for remote learning, leadership knew that teachers were going to need time to learn new platforms and redesign their lessons if they were to maintain scholastic momentum. Communications channels and templates were streamlined, administrative and clerical tasks were taken on by support staff, and grade level teams were given autonomy to their scheduling and were able to delegate tasks upwards for office staff. Technology staff exhausted substantial time and effort into crafting purposeful professional development, utilizing Catlin Tucker’s Playlist Model, to meet teachers where they were and to allow self pacing. The school leadership believes that the transition to remote learning, while not seamless, was done prudently, with empathy and grace for all involved. The faculty and staff believe that throughout the pandemic, the school met its leadership goal of being “hard on student learning, soft on people.”

Aside from leadership, staff collaborate with the HSA to provide broad teacher support and appreciation. The HSA organizes meals for teachers throughout the year, provides classroom stipends, a Christmas and end of year monetary gift, and not least copy support in the workroom. Parents even had a catered meal delivered to all teachers during the pandemic, keeping with their tradition of graciousness. Faculty volunteers serve on the Caring Community Committee which organizes prayer and meal trains if a school family or faculty member experiences crisis or tragedy, and the faculty Sunshine Committee coordinates birthday and shower celebrations. These associations form an integral scaffold in helping teachers feel valued and members of a community called together for a greater purpose.

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

St. Cecilia leadership pursues its mission as a ministry of St. Cecilia Catholic Parish, under direction of the Pastor and the Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Office. The principal and pastor are advised by the School Board, whose membership is composed of parish and parent volunteers. The school board provides counsel and expertise over several domains of school function, supporting the mission through stakeholder surveys, strategic planning, and budget approval.

The principal is the spiritual and academic leader of the school. Under the principal's supervision, school policies, programs, and resources are directed and guided by the school's Executive Leadership Team (ELT). The ELT is a collaborative team of lifelong learners who believe that administration's driving role is to support teachers in improving student learning. They are composed of the Principal, Assistant Principal, Lead Guidance Counselor, Director of Learning and Innovation, Director of Community Engagement, Instructional Specialist, Business Manager, and School Secretary. Each of these roles bring unique viewpoints and diverse backgrounds in pursuit of leading stakeholders to nurture student learning, formation, and welfare.

Other leadership roles are developed in the School Leadership Team (SLT), which is a faculty group that represents each teaching team within the school. The SLT's purpose is to collaborate with the ELT on the policies and programs that form the strategic vision of the school. An Academic Leadership Team and Student Services Team composed of the Principal and different ELT and staff members meet with teaching teams on rotating weeks to discuss student data and academics or student needs within the grade level.

Site-based leadership during the pandemic was challenging. School leaders worked tirelessly to keep the crucial components of the school community intact so that teachers could focus on teaching and learning: weekly assemblies continued, albeit virtually; each Friday before classes commenced, the school attended Mass together via livestream; an adaptive and focused learning management and communication structure was quickly put in place and supported via weekly meetings with whole faculty, grade level, and teams. This framework ensured togetherness as a faculty and allowed teachers time and energy in the momentous and humbling task of maintaining classroom community during remote learning.

The ELT strives to be role models for their peers. As servant-leaders, the team is inspired by St. Cecilia, who was martyred for providing burial for the politically persecuted. We remember the person St. Cecilia today because she lived her faith through corporal works of mercy and this legacy is symbolic of the lasting impression we hope to leave as teachers.

## **5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

St. Cecilia Catholic School endeavors to be culturally responsive and addresses the diverse needs and backgrounds of students, families, and staff. As a majority of the school's families come from the parish community, the school population reflects a diversity of backgrounds and educational needs. Additionally, the school is located adjacent to Houston's Energy Corridor and serves many families employed by global companies, so St. Cecilia's is also responsive to the needs of families that often move for employment. Current social and cultural events that have greatly impacted society are discussed and reflected upon in light of Catholic Social Justice teachings and an overall sense of dignity and respect for life. A litany of service projects has been performed by St. Cecilia students and families over the years for diverse organizations that serve the underprivileged in Houston and beyond.

The anticipation of a new school or new teacher can often cause stress and anxiety, so each school year begins with a "Sneak a Peek" where families are able to come to the classroom and meet the teacher one-on-one and see the classroom before the frenzy of the first day. The family will have a "Hopes and Fears" conference with the homeroom teacher, giving a special opportunity for the teacher to meet each child and parent and for the family to explore the classroom and articulate their specific needs and concerns. Once school has begun, the SST schedules a New Student Lunch for each grade level so new students may become acquainted and meet the leadership teams. Families of students with exceptional learning needs are scheduled for roundtable meetings to establish their accommodation plans and have an ongoing advocate in the Learning Specialist.

The diverse backgrounds of the staff and families in the St. Cecilia community provide unique opportunities for inclusion, equity, and cultural awareness. Intentional efforts are made to welcome families into the community during admissions and enrollment, with personalized tours, Open Houses, and community events that bring families together. Ambassador families help guide new families through their first year, providing a familiar face at the annual outdoor Back to School Bash or at the Dad's Softball Tournament. Information opportunities are abundant and layered, with Meet the Teacher nights, quarterly coffees with the principal, the weekly Insider newsletter, and frequent communication from HSA grade level representatives. The HSA Caring Committee stays connected to the needs of the family community going through illness, death, or crisis and has provided an umbrella of support in numerous instances. In all endeavors, the greater school community seeks to "[foster] an academic atmosphere of belonging and love."

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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The most influential practice in the ongoing success of the school is mission-driven planning: every action that St. Cecilia Catholic School considers is viewed first through the lens of the mission statement. The school's mission inspires the community to draw closer, encouraging a sense of cooperation and belonging, partnership and trust. Inspired by calls from faculty, the mission underwent a revision process during the 2014-2015 school year. Over several weeks, representatives from all constituencies of the school community collaborated to redefine and consolidate the mission statement in order to better reflect the school's goals and identity. The mission provides direction for the school community by highlighting a shared faith, social justice teachings, and high expectations for graduates. These ideas are embraced and provide direction for the different ministries, committees, and teams within the school.

Primary to St. Cecilia's mission is that students are in formation: students will make mistakes and they each have individual needs. St. Cecilia's Caring Community is predicated on good relationships between students and teachers, mitigating many discipline issues from the start. Responses and interventions are based on student self-awareness and self-responsibility for choices and consequences.

Since students are in formation, they flourish when offered myriad opportunities and experiences to learn, grow, and mature, and St. Cecilia's efforts and resources are aimed at ensuring the school provides an opportunity for students to become reliable and intrepid members of their community. Student activities and electives are meant to provide authentic experiences and inspire confidence in their personal efforts. The school expects graduates to have a "life of commitment and service," and so provides numerous opportunities for students to serve others, whether it be the planned GO Projects (Giving of Ourselves), or impromptu service such as the recent efforts to support schools in need due to Hurricane Ida.

The commitment of faculty and staff to "commitment and service" and lifelong learning had put the school on the crest of several multi-year initiatives that allowed the community to nimbly transition to remote learning over a few days in March of 2020. That January, leadership began to anticipate the ripple effects the pandemic was to have, and over the course of February and early March, the school prepared for the potential widescale deployment of a remote learning environment. Staff and faculty were able to send devices and materials home with students as they departed for spring break. As a community, St. Cecilia Catholic School is humbled that upon their return the next school year, students' testing scores reflected a robust learning environment where they flourished academically, while so many students across the world experienced a year of stagnant learning.

## PART VII - NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL INFORMATION

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1. Non-public school association(s): Catholic

Identify the religious or independent associations, if any, to which the school belongs. Select the primary association first.

2. Does the school have nonprofit, tax-exempt (501(c)(3)) status?      Yes X      No
3. What is the educational cost per student?      \$11251  
(School budget divided by enrollment)
4. What is the average financial aid per student?      \$1300
5. What percentage of the annual budget is devoted to scholarship assistance and/or tuition reduction?      24%
6. What percentage of the student body receives scholarship assistance, including tuition reduction?      79%

## PART VIII – NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL ASSESSMENT RESULTS

### FOR NORM-REFERENCED TESTS

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*Non-public schools must report norm-referenced test (NRT) results in reading and mathematics for students tested in grades 3 and higher in the most recent administration of the test within the most recently completed school year (2019-2020)<sup>1</sup>. Each school must obtain grade level summary reports from the test publisher for students tested in reading and mathematics for each of these grades.*

These reports must include:

1. the number of students tested;
2. the average student scale score or the national percentile equivalent of the average scale score in reading and mathematics **for all students in each tested grade; and**
3. the average student scale score or the national percentile equivalent of the average scale score in reading and mathematics **for each sufficiently large subgroup<sup>2</sup> in each tested grade.**

Please make notations on these reports to explain results that represent fewer than 95 percent of the students enrolled at the time of testing (e.g., the number of students who took alternative assessments<sup>3</sup>).

A copy of these reports (in a PDF file) must be uploaded through the National Blue Ribbons Schools Portal.

Also, one hard copy of these reports must be submitted by mail to CAPE with two hard copies of this application.

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<sup>1</sup> Because of school closings due to COVID-19, schools may use test results obtained in the fall or spring of 2019 or the fall of 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Possible subgroups are those identified in Items 4, 6, 7, and 8 in Part II of this application (racial/ethnic groups, ELL students, students eligible for free or reduced meals, and students receiving special education services). A sufficiently large subgroup is one that represents at least 10 percent of the school enrollment as reported in these items.

<sup>3</sup> Alternate assessments are used to evaluate the performance of students who are unable to participate in a school's norm-referenced test (NRT) even with accommodations. These assessments are based on the grade-level content covered by the NRT, but at reduced depth, breadth, and complexity. (adapted from National Center on Educational Outcomes)