

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

---

[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Nitsch Elementary School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 4702 W. Mount Houston Road  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Houston State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 77088-3053

County Harris County

Telephone (832) 484-6400 Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Web site/URL <https://nitsch.kleinisd.net/> E-mail [cjackson5@kleinisd.net](mailto:cjackson5@kleinisd.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.

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

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. Jenny McGown E-mail [jmcgown@kleinisd.net](mailto:jmcgown@kleinisd.net)  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Klein Independent School District Tel. (832) 249-4000

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

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

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

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

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

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

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

---

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

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2023 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2018 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2022.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 or 2022.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

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

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

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

---

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

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

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

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

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

☒ Urban (city or town)  
☐ Suburban  
☐ Rural

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

Grade	# of Students
PreK	0
K	102
1	107
2	117
3	113
4	112
5	115
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	666

\*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):
- 0.2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 1.5 % Asian
  - 28 % Black or African American
  - 64.4 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0.3 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 1.4 % White
  - 4.2 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2021 - 2022 school year: 23%

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

Nitsch Elementary has four major apartment complexes from which many students derive. Many students come and go based on the lease year. Other students are in temporary housing with relatives prior to moving onward. There are also students living in temporary foster placements.

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, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	84
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	62
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	146
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	633
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.23
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	23

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

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 45 %  
300 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 82 %  
Total number students who qualify: 543

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 14 %  
Total number of students served 96

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

<u>13</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>8</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Developmental Delay	<u>28</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>4</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>29</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>12</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>1</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>12</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 1 %  
Total number of students served: 4

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 4

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

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	4
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	42
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	13
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	11
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

12. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 23:1

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

Required Information	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018
Daily student attendance	93%	94%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2022.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	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%

15. 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.

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

Every Child. Every Day. The staff is committed to improving life opportunities and pathways for future success for EVERY student we serve.

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

<https://pol.tasb.org/PolicyOnline/PolicyDetails?key=595&code=DAB#legalTabContent>

<https://www.kleinisd.net/cms/One.aspx?portalId=568125&pageId=2515944>

18. **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

---

Nitsch Elementary School is a thriving campus located north of Houston in the Klein Independent School District. As of the 2020-2021 school year, the school served 673 students in grades kindergarten through fifth. More than half the student population, 61.5% of students, were considered at risk of dropping out of school. Nearly half of the students, 44.9% of students, were served through bilingual education and English language learning programs. Starting as early as preschool, children located in this geographic region of Klein ISD are likely to attend school with other children of the same socioeconomic status, and often of the same racial and ethnic group, limiting their exposure to ideas outside of the community. To meet the needs of a diverse population of students, Nitsch Elementary has had to adopt inclusive educational practices to address the needs of students who live in poverty, experience high mobility, or who struggle to learn for various reasons. The school leaders understand the affective profiles like language, culture, and socioeconomic status that impact student achievement. Nitsch Elementary effectively exemplifies a climate that believes every student can learn with a focus centered on high student achievement.

Nitsch offers diverse learners an opportunity to grow into the Academic Pathway established by Klein ISD that best fits their Purpose. Armed with knowledge, passion, and purpose, the school community has established an accountable culture as a pathway to academic success.

The Nitsch Elementary team believes school quality is a primary indicator of academic achievement rather than the racial or economic makeup. The school's mission is simple: Every Child. Every Day. This very high-poverty, high-minority school has produced unparalleled academic achievement gains that are substantially greater than schools with similar demographics across the state through clear and explicit instruction, reflective practices, and goal setting. A spirit of continuous learning and growth among teachers has been cultivated throughout the school to drive daily targeted instruction. Within each classroom, learning standards are clearly articulated and taught in a procedural, yet authentic manner to engage students to own their learning. Instructional staff addresses the diversity of student needs with differentiated pedagogical practice without compromising on standards. They realize that ordinary students can have extraordinary talents. Through personalizing the education experience, all students can meet high standards. Moreover, teachers invest not just in their students' academic success, but also in their future well-being by developing shared instructional goals. School leaders set clear, ambitious, and achievable goals at strategic points throughout the four-quarter school terms. Standards are clear and enable teachers to craft well-designed explicit lessons. Teachers have moved on from administrative control and accountability to professional forms of work organization in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) where collaboration yields innovation. Teachers are thoughtful in the planning and presentation of lessons to improve their own performance and that of their colleagues which clearly centers on the success of student outcomes. At Nitsch Elementary, the emphasis is on making data-based decisions. Students are informally assessed daily and provided feedback immediately on their learning. Within the PLC, teacher clarity centers on standards, instructional practices, and student feedback to further enhance the development of explicit instruction.

Teachers demonstrate commitment and optimism by developing a deeper understanding of how students receive and process their learning. Taking time to look at the work students produce provides an opportunity to calibrate and refine the level, quality, and explanation of the work is crucial to understanding learner comprehension. Teachers use a precision protocol to identify the expected outcomes of formative tasks. This is deepened even further with the use of depth of knowledge to compare the rigor of the standard. In addition, when multiple work samples are brought to the table, teachers engage in rich discussion regarding the reasons for a difference in the outcome of students.

At Nitsch Elementary, motivation is key to helping students and staff focus on a key goal or outcome. In doing so, they are unfazed by possible distractions and can maintain their attention during longer periods of time. Nitsch students are motivated and display goal-oriented behaviors. Every part of the school culture now flows through the lens of the house system. A sense of camaraderie and identity contributes to developing an intrinsic desire to achieve among students. Students earn school cash called shillings for individual achievements as well as points for House achievements. Students across all Houses are recognized weekly with our TRY.(umphant!) award, which is shared across social media with parents and



the entire school community. The House system also gives children the opportunity to become members of smaller communities within the larger community where they can make stronger bonds and connections. A sense of inclusion and engagement in a common purpose has had academic and social-emotional benefits.

Nitsch Elementary proudly stands as a contradiction to the general association between school-level poverty and low academic achievement.

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

---

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

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

At Nitsch Elementary School (NES), reading is a vital component in understanding all other concepts and subjects. Teachers strive to develop lifelong learners and readers that can make sense of not only the world around them, but also build social-emotional skills and foster their imagination.

Differentiation is the game-changing instructional reading approach. Differentiation is interwoven into how teachers teach reading. Instructional staff scaffold learning using a gradual release method. NES uses an evidence-based curriculum and resources to guide our English Language Arts program. Our program is aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and is taught during a 140-minute protected block. In the primary grades, a supplemental tool used in the curriculum is Benchmark Universe which supports the development of decoding and encoding skills. Teachers also use Heggerty, a research-based curriculum of daily phonemic and phonological awareness lesson plans to guide students to a solid literacy foundation. Targeted support is provided to groups of students who demonstrate the need for more instructional intervention within a small group setting. Students utilize literacy centers in all classrooms. Student differentiation of learning is also provided through various instructional tools such as iPads or Chromebooks that offer ways to deliver individual learning paths and targeted areas of weakness. Teachers use weekly formative assessments to assess areas of weakness and adjust their instruction accordingly without compromising high levels of expectation for student achievement.

Teachers participate in weekly professional learning opportunities embedded in the school day to further strengthen their educational growth and best practices. All K-3 teachers are currently enrolled in HB3 Reading Academy to implement the science of teaching reading. Nitsch holds K-5 vertical (English Language and Reading) ELAR team meetings to align the standards being taught. Nitsch uses multiple forms of student data to create individual learning paths for students and to close learning gaps with the goal for every student to perform at higher academic achievement levels. Early screening data is routinely used to make strategic decisions to help ensure that every child who needs early intervention receives it before they experience failure. Timely and thoughtful reflection of data helps teachers and administrators tell whether teaching practices are working.

Nitsch uses various data resources, including Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), to measure achievement and growth in reading and language usage. This norm-referenced data provides teachers with accurate, actionable evidence to help inform instructional strategies. Nitsch has a literature-rich library where students can access books of multiple genres, magazines, and newspapers that align with students' instructional levels. Students participate in reading challenges and book clubs throughout the school year to further their reading comprehension and love for reading. Teachers use a combination of guided and shared learning experiences to teach writing and grammar instruction. Teachers use a variety of texts to explore craft, grammar, and sentence structure. Individual writing conferences are held to help students expand their writing skills. All instructional practices are authentic and targeted to the needs of students' growth and development and aligned with the essential skills.

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

Nitsch Elementary provides students with various math resources to help students excel. The teachers use a consistent instructional approach across grade levels to help level all learners' playing field and teach with the appropriate rigor. As a result, Nitsch students continue to experience steady growth in math scores each year, often outperforming their peers across the district. The collective goal in math is to provide students with a deep understanding of fundamental math concepts rather than just surface-level memorization. Because of varying skill levels in each class, teachers present lessons using a wide range of instructional strategies. In a typical lesson, teachers begin with a daily warm-up that spirals currently taught skills and reviews previously taught skills that have been identified as areas of need based on data. During initial

instruction, teachers utilize the gradual release model. Teachers model best practices, allow opportunities for students to perfect their craft, remediate as needed, and work with students in small groups to accelerate individualized instruction. At all grade levels, learners are taught the basic foundational skills in number sense and representation, computation, geometry, measurement, data analysis, and personal financial literacy aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). In the primary grades, the majority of the mathematical instruction is centered around the use of math manipulatives that visually help learners to develop strong number sense when learning addition, subtraction, place value, shapes, and how to tell time. Examples of manipulatives include base ten blocks, ten frames, two-color counters, 120 charts, 2-D and 3-D shapes, and clocks. Visual representation of strong number sense is paramount to the success of confident and skillful learners in math. In upper grades, teachers continue to use these same manipulatives used in kindergarten through second grade for students who need additional intervention. Manipulatives are used to teach and connect with geometry, fractions, and other skill progressions aligned to grade-level standards. Teachers also use math centers where students rotate to work on targeted math skills. Students are presented with multiple strategies to solve problems and then given an opportunity to choose which strategy works best for them. This mirrors the multiple measures teachers use to assess students' mastery. Daily assignments, higher-level questioning, daily exit tickets, and technology resources are all used to assess students' math comprehension. Students are formally assessed on their math comprehension by using common weekly spiral reviews, campus common assessments administered every 3 weeks, and district quarterly assessments at the end of each quarter. Students' progress is monitored weekly by means of a data tracker. This data is analyzed during weekly Professional Learning Communities meetings. Grade-level teachers can determine which skills are areas of greatest concern for their individual classes and students. Teachers then use the data to drive their instruction. Student data informs teachers to determine how to place students for small group instruction and intervention and enrichment groups. Various digital learning resources are provided to every student with standard-specific test prep practice and building fact fluency, such as Progress Learning, FactTrack, and First in Math.

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

Nitsch Elementary strives to design science lessons with a high level of student engagement that promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers utilize Stem Scopes, a comprehensive online science curriculum program that is strictly standards-aligned. Stem Scopes have each skill apportioned using the 5E Model: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate. This curriculum tool offers 5E lesson plans to teach science concepts for grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Students throughout all grades are engaged in scientific experiments and inquiry-based lessons. Science instruction allows students to gain knowledge in matter and energy, force and motion, earth and space, and organisms and environments. Students are first introduced to the concept by means of hands-on activities, teacher demonstrations, or videos that supplement the concept and skills taught. Students in the primary grades are taught science concepts by means of teacher-led discussions, demonstrations, and hands-on activities to further connections of real-life concepts to new learning. In the upper grades, teachers can assign virtual investigations, vocabulary aids, informational videos, non-fiction reading passages, and assessments to students to comprehensively analyze learning intentions and success criteria. When new concepts are taught, students are encouraged to use visual aids and representations such as foldables and anchor charts to aid in their understanding. Students are assessed daily on their knowledge of Science concepts through comprehensive assignments, higher-level questioning, daily exit tickets, and digital resources to ensure mastery of learning. Students are formally assessed by means of weekly common spiral reviews, campus common assessments, and district end-of-quarter assessments. Students' progress is monitored weekly through a data tracker utilized by both the teacher and the student. Teachers review the data for each class and each student during the weekly Professional Learning Committee meetings. This data analysis allows teachers to adjust their instruction and provide remediation. Classroom teachers strive to bring science to life and provide meaningful lessons that transcend learning outside of the classroom.

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

Social studies instruction is also guided by the Texas Essential Skills which encourages the development of civic-mindedness in the students to assist them in understanding the world around them, becoming responsible citizens, gaining economic literacy, and being able to analyze historical events and facts.

Throughout our grade levels, our students focus on inquiry-based learning, gathering sources of information, as well as creating claims to support their reasoning. Teachers embed social studies within the English curriculum model.

Nitsch utilizes diverse reading material and interactive activities. Daily literary content exposes students to complex social, economic, ethical, and historical concepts. Understanding these concepts provides students with skills for productive problem-solving and decision-making. Rich texts open dialogue about other cultures, historical events, natural resources, geography, and non-traditional ways of living. During these readings, students evaluate fairness, and sequence of events, distinguish different points of view and construct arguments. Books provide opportunities to explain challenges people have faced and address local, regional, and world problems. To help build background knowledge, teachers use technology, virtual field trips, maps, and artifacts to bridge connections and understand the depths of geographic and historical differences worldwide.

Resource books are used occasionally, but the Nitsch team prefers to use other teaching tools to make information more accessible. Teachers use various authoritative, diverse resources and provide them to students to enhance their learning experience. Visuals are especially key for English language learners, but it appeals to all young learners. Primary sources such as photographs, drawings, maps, artwork, or film clips are used to set the scene. In addition to teaching all the content in the social studies curriculum, teachers make social studies more meaningful by helping students look at their own place in history and connect to how they can positively contribute to a thriving American community.

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

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

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

### **2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)**

Students' lives are enriched through involvement in the intangible, invaluable world of the visual and performing arts. At Nitsch, Music instruction begins in kindergarten, where the curriculum is based on the teachings of Carl Orff and Zoltan Kodály. Students receive instruction in two 45-minute classes per week from music specialists. Students in the fifth grade may begin the study of stringed instruments held on the campus before school.

Students may also experience participation in the school choir. As students' voices develop, they experience a full range of musical styles. Emphasis is placed on developing proper vocal techniques, studying choral techniques, basic music theory, sight-singing, music history and literature, creative self-expression, and vocal performance.

Nitsch also provides enrichment instruction in visual art at all levels. Students examine both natural and man-made objects, explore art elements, and apply art principles in designing, developing, and creating original artworks. Students study the artworks of contemporary and past artists, and fellow students enhance their appreciation of art culture and develop visual evaluative skills in applying aesthetic judgments. Artwork is entered in many area contests, including the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo and the Scholastic Art Contest.

### **2b. Physical education/health/nutrition**

The physical education program provides cognitive content and instruction designed to develop motor skills, knowledge, and behaviors for physical activity and fitness. At Nitsch Elementary, our students receive 45 minutes of organized physical education class facilitated by our PE coaches three times a week. In the younger K-2 grades, students focus on locomotor, non-locomotor, and gameplay without competition. Grades 3-5 work on fundamental motor skills and are introduced to specialized sports skills and modified games. In the first nine weeks, students learn about the first three threads of lifelong health. The first thread targets physical health, hygiene, and body systems. Students will learn how the body system works when properly cared for and how to make healthy choices to support themselves, their family, and their community. Secondly, our coaches address mental health and wellness. In this thread, students are learning to recognize and manage emotions, reactions, and relationships. The final thread deals with healthy eating patterns and physical activity. This thread focuses on critical thinking and decision-making skills to make positive health choices. One of the highlights of the year for our students is Field Day, which entails organized team games and relays that energizes and helps bring the school together.

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

**2d. Technology/library/media**

The Nitsch library media program is an integral part of the curriculum. Nitsch employs a flexible schedule where students in grades K-5 have scheduled bi-weekly class time while also maintaining open circulation throughout the day. Staff creates opportunities and flexible spaces to foster student curiosity and creativity. The media specialist collaborates with teachers to provide resources and enrichment for classroom projects/assignments.

Students are introduced to enrichment programs that include Code.org and Scratch.org. to offer all students an opportunity to learn block coding and practice coding, a fundamental technology skill for many highly-skilled jobs in the future. These programs teach students 21st-century skills such as abstract thinking while fostering creativity and peer collaboration.

Nitsch also provides a comprehensive school counseling program to meet all students' academic, character, and career development needs. The PATH (Prevention and Awareness for Total Health) curriculum teaches weekly classroom guidance lessons, including self-awareness, relationship skills, coping skills, study skills, and career exploration. The media specialist works in collaborative partnerships with students, educators, parents, and community stakeholders to empower students to meet present and future challenges. Students are taught essential character skills through the Klein ISD Guiding Document, Profile of a Learner, which includes skills to enhance being a Pathway Explorer, Equipped Scholar, Values-Driven Leader, and Forever Learning.

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

Innovation is key to learning new skills. Therefore, "Nitsch Needs Notes" is an innovative program that Nitsch has embarked on an Orff instrument ensemble. This program allows students to demonstrate their literacy skills in regularly scheduled music classes. As students develop their skill, they begin playing simple melodies they read from iconic notation, simplified notation, and standard notation, including composing pieces themselves. In the extracurricular ensemble, students build on the skills from class and beyond through increased collaboration skills and exercising the creative side of their brain. Literature for performances can be derived from current resources in the music classroom library, Klein ISD curriculum, tapping into our community resources such as the neighboring secondary school, Klein Intermediate, and approaching community groups such as Young Audiences of Houston to collaborate and further this innovative learning for students. The instrumental ensemble is an ongoing ensemble from year to year that will perform for the school and its families before performing throughout the community at businesses and festivals. Ultimately, the ensemble's goal will be to represent Nitsch Elementary and Klein ISD by performing at the state music conference. This project will reach several generations through proper maintenance of the instruments and sharing of music with families and community members.

### **3. Academic Supports**

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

Nitsch Elementary strives to continually refine our response to intervention (RTI) process to address the needs of students who perform below grade level. A three-tier RTI model is used to support students' academic needs. Students are provided personalized, rigorous, and relevant Tier 2 and 3 intervention support when their learning outcomes indicate the need. If students require support beyond the high-quality Tier 1 instruction, they are referred to a committee of an interventionist, classroom teachers, and an administrator. This committee determines if a student needs additional academic support. Students receive support through Tier 2 or 3 intervention groups with a small number of students to target deficit learning outcomes. The committee routinely analyzes and evaluates each students' progress using multiple data points each quarter. Teachers are provided with timely, targeted, research-based intervention strategies and support for students who are struggling academically. During Tier 2 and 3 instructions, the teacher focuses on closing achievement gaps for each student. Teachers utilize research-based programs and differentiated instructional strategies to aid in this process. These instructional and curricular supports include STARS, E-Star, and Bridges. Teachers approach the process by scaffolding their instruction for struggling learners. They begin with revisiting or reteaching the prerequisite skills from the previous grade level and then build to the current grade level skill to ensure students have access and can learn on grade-level standards. Students are given assignments that will allow them to demonstrate their mastery of the skills. Teachers monitor the progress of each student and make adjustments as needed. Students can monitor their own progression using a data tracker in their individual folders, which is motivational for students to own their learning and continue to achieve milestones in their learning journey. Students who are not responding to the intervention or making adequate progress may need more intensive support that includes additional instructional resources, tutoring, and smaller group settings.

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

Nitsch is committed to addressing the educational needs of its students and the identification of its gifted learners. Gifted learners are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude, competence, and task commitment. Giftedness is demonstrated through different disciplines, cultures, and in all socioeconomic levels. The instructional staff believes in the philosophy of gifted education and recognizes that students' unique and exceptional abilities are to be nurtured in order to ensure they reach their potential.

Teachers utilize small group instruction to tailor to the needs of all learners. Teachers create guided reading groups to engage students at their instructional level. It is not uncommon to see multiple reading groups within one classroom, teachers use diagnostic materials such as Core Phonics and Diagnostic Reading Assessments (DRA) to precisely know each child's reading level. Similarly, in math, Nitsch teachers use assessments to determine if a student needs additional small group instruction. Teachers administer quarterly assessments three times annually to determine student growth over time. The Measures of Academic Progress provides a blueprint for each student so that the classroom teacher can analyze a child's strengths and weaknesses based on grade-level standards. Using the data from this report, teachers and students alike can create appropriate goals for the school year, check the progress, and adjust along the way.

Through a research-based curriculum, gifted students are provided with advanced academic experiences that are challenging, engaging, hands-on, and relevant to real-world problems, and encourage students to develop projects that are innovative and express critical thinking skills to defend their learning outcomes. Students often research and defend their learning through Passion Projects, which begins with a rubric that guides the success criteria of learning new material. Students are challenged through higher-level thinking processes, critical research, problem-solving, and communication skills and through utilizing technology that enhances creativity in English Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, and Science.

#### **3c. Students with disabilities:**

Nitsch Elementary strives to meet all the academic needs of students through research-based tiered instruction where teachers utilize various strategies to meet learner needs based on their instructional

deficits. Data from routinely performed formal and informal assessments help drive personalized learning and measure student growth. Additionally, students are assessed with campus assessments, district benchmarks, and state assessments. Small group, tiered instruction is utilized daily to address specific deficits. Remediation is monitored, and progress monitoring is completed on a weekly basis to guide instruction. Communication between all stakeholders and classroom teachers is carried out consistently during planning sessions or our Professional Learning Community (PLC) weekly meetings. Students start in a Tier Process that helps mediate the support given to students. All students start in Tier I and are moved up to Tier III according to their needs. Students identified with continuing academic difficulties by our Response to Instruction (RTI) teams are referred to special education. Once a referral is accepted, the student is evaluated using comprehensive assessments in the suspected area of disability. Assessment data is analyzed, and if a student is determined eligible, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is developed, and specialized instructional strategies are determined. Students with an Individualized Education Plan receive resource room or inclusion services based on their individual learning needs in their least restrictive environment. Other modifications to classwork and assessments may be made as an IEP team decision. The students with orthopedic, visual, or sensory problems share the same experiences as their non-disabled peers with minimal accommodations, each according to their individual needs. Those not eligible for special education services but needing additional support are provided in-class support services through interventionists and classroom support from paraprofessionals. Students receiving in-class support in the classroom are under the direction of a certified teacher.

### **3d. English Language Learners:**

Nitsch Elementary provides an asset-based linguistic and academic program that focuses on honoring an Emergent Bilingual student's home language and culture while developing their English through Content-Based Language Instruction to achieve advanced-high levels in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The bilingual staff excels in differentiating and personalizing education to linguistically empower all students by utilizing evidence-based practices that support language acquisition and literacy development. It is the goal to ensure fairness, achievement, and opportunity by personalizing language acquisition for every emergent bilingual student by name, strength, and need. Students identified as English Language Learners are also closely monitored using progress monitoring data, weekly formal or informal evaluations, campus assessments, and benchmark data. Teachers use this information to plan for small group instruction and how they can best assist classroom teachers in closing any gaps the student may have. At Nitsch, the use of Proficiency Level Descriptors (PLDs) better evaluates the language acquisition of students and tailors instruction accordingly. Teachers can differentiate instruction to meet the needs of ELL students by activating students' background knowledge, presenting material using visuals and graphic organizers, and using simple language. Classroom strategies like think-pair-share, quick-writes, and previewing text are used in order to activate knowledge and close achievement gaps. Students have approved accommodations within an Individual English Language Plan (I-ELP) for further language support. Teachers are also able to explain this information to parents and provide them with resources to use at home that support the instruction taught during the school day

At the time of enrollment, all students are given a Home Language Survey to determine their primary home language and to identify potential EL students. Students indicating a primary home language other than English are assessed for English proficiency within the four domains of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. To ensure program effectiveness, our campus and district participate in an annual district ESL program evaluation.

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

Nitsch Elementary supports students with high academic ability or the potential of performing at high levels academically through specialized classroom services, which may include depth and complexity, enrichment, differentiation through content, process, and product, investigative research pathways, and academic acceleration. These components turn rigorous learning into action to address the cognitive, social, and emotional needs of gifted and advanced learners. Students are taught crucial skills such as keeping their workspace organized, completing tasks on schedule, making a plan for learning, monitoring their learning path, and recognizing when it might be useful to change course.

Led by the dean of instruction, teachers guide students on how to wield one of the most powerful thinking tools, metacognition, or thinking about your thinking with the aim of improving learning. Students learn cognitive and metacognitive strategies that offer them tools to give purpose and process to their thinking. Therefore, metacognition is learned through explicit teaching and practice across content and social contexts.

Teachers also employ various differentiated instructional strategies to enhance the learning experience of advanced students. Developed by multi-classroom teachers, tiered assignments allow learners to complete assignments at different levels of difficulty. By varying the level of difficulty, each student can demonstrate their understanding. Within the tiered assignments, there are open-ended tasks in which students can apply their unique skills and ideas. In addition, an open-ended activity can stimulate higher-order thinking. Learners are responsible for their development by giving them a voice in their learning. While differentiating, lessons are often compacted. Only essential problems that demonstrate mastery are included in the lesson. Once mastery is demonstrated, students can move on to an extension activity.

The program is crafted not just to build up content knowledge and skills but to engender excitement and motivation for learning through activities that are discovery-based, problem-oriented, and creativity-generating.



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

---

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

Nitsch Elementary School has six school-wide initiatives that are designed to keep our students engaged and motivated and provide them with a positive learning environment. These initiatives are all centered on one thing: Growth Mindset. Our staff encourages students to be resilient and to continue to persevere even when things seem too difficult for them. In Klein Independent School District, we have a shared vision that Every Student Enters With a Promise and Exits With a Purpose. Specifically, Nitsch focuses on ensuring the reachable goal of every student exiting Nitsch with a purpose, leading into middle school successfully. Klein ISD is rich with a variety of pathways for every student to find their purpose and it is the responsibility of the elementary level to ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to successfully enter and achieve mastery in the various secondary pathways.

Teachers use a variety of instructional methods to engage students in all subject areas. Students are encouraged to ask questions and demonstrate their thinking throughout the learning process. Nitsch uses various motivation systems as a tool for student engagement. Students achieving academic goals can earn shillings (school bucks) to spend at the school store. These goals are personalized for each student to ensure that all students can be acknowledged for their individual accomplishments. At the beginning of each school year, the various grade levels are divided into separate “Houses” and compete yearly to earn a grand prize. Points are awarded to each house based on the students' academic achievement.

Students are supported socially and emotionally through encouragement to demonstrate the Nitsch Core Values, also known as F.A.C.E. of a Knight (Fierce Leadership, Attitude of Gratitude, Collaborative Community, Educational Excellence.) These core values in combination with the collaborative nature of the Houses build the skills necessary for College and Career readiness. The School Counselor furthers this endeavor via character lessons with classes and individual students needing further guidance in collaboration. Teachers also nominate students who have demonstrated a triumphant attitude or work ethic. The students are celebrated during the school-wide morning announcements each Friday. It is a delight to see students react to being acknowledged for their efforts and hard work each week.

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

The staff at Nitsch Elementary understands the importance of positive community relationships. Nitsch carefully cultivates and fosters highly successful home-school partnerships with families that are paramount to the success of student achievement. Nitsch families, school representatives, and community stakeholders work in partnership to best improve student achievement and lifelong success.

Nitsch teachers initiate fluid lines of communication with parents before the school year starts. Nitsch hosts a Meet the Teacher event before school starts every year. During this event, teachers can explain to parents the class structure, conference times, grading procedures, and how to access lunch accounts, bus schedules, and grades online. At this time, parents also enroll in the app that will notify a parent of upcoming state, local or school assessments. With this mobile messaging system, teachers and other staff members can send out instant reminders and notifications, and parents can reply with questions if they have any. Having this open communication ensures parents and students are involved and are up-to-date on current news.

The school hosts an Open House and parent-teacher conferences each fall and spring. Nitsch teachers and staff are available for in-person or phone appointments throughout the school year.

Community involvement is clear through active partnerships with Nitsch parent-teacher organization (PTO). Community stakeholders volunteer their time on the NES campus. The Nitsch counselor, PTO and Parent Liaisons focus on family and community engagement. This collaborative partnership empowers families to express their needs with services provided within Klein ISD. This highly engaged team, along with others, helps coordinate partnerships with local organizations to encourage student character and academic growth. Through our school partnership with the Houston Food Bank, students have received weekend snack packs

that provide food to students. These snack packs provide students with the security of knowing their basic needs are being met every day of the week so they can come to school prepared to learn. Additionally, the Parent Liaison and School Counselor partner with faith-based groups to offer in-school mentors for students and often connect families with additional resources needed that various churches offer within the Nitsch community.

Nitsch has incentive and reward programs for students with perfect attendance, honor roll qualifications and has met and/or mastered their reading and math goals for each quarter throughout the school year. The impact of school-wide incentives and rewards has contributed greatly to the increase in student growth and academic achievement.

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

A strong professional culture in school influences both teacher development and student growth. Through the use of instructional coaching cycles, crucial conversations are conducted following campus common assessments. Teachers hold each other accountable for the deficits and celebrate the growth experienced throughout the year. The process starts with our classroom teachers. Our classroom teachers meet weekly to reflect and plan for the upcoming weeks. Teachers use assessment data and a backward design from state assessment to help guide instruction. Every week, Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) help align curriculum planning and pacing, instructional implementation, and campus vision. We began our PLCs by diving into data. We analyze student performance and reflect on how effective instruction was. An action plan is developed to reteach struggling skills. Teachers are encouraged to model lessons to help see skill implementation and give cool and warm feedback to modify lessons if necessary. When teachers model lessons it helps new and veteran teachers view possible new ways of teaching a skill. The feedback session helps unify the team by exposing their vulnerable side and pushes collaboration based on instructional needs. Specialists help facilitate conversations, help clarify instructional points and roll out scope and sequence for upcoming weeks. Administrators are part of the Professional Learning Communities and facilitate discussions based on campus directives and help take note of teachers' instructional action steps. Throughout the week, administrators ensure that PLC instructional modifications or action steps are implemented through walkthroughs. If there is a concern, we meet with teachers to assist or remind them what the team had agreed. Another way that the school helps develop professional culture is through Professional Learning Wednesdays. This is a 45-minute after-school session that focuses on highlighting the positive and effective instruction around the school. Administration, along with specialists, help facilitate these sessions. The sessions start with modeling a skill or strategy discussed in Professional Learning Communities as a struggling skill. We end the session with a campus teacher who has taught the skill effectively and open the floor for questions and/or reflections. It is critical for teachers to have ongoing and regular opportunities to learn from each other. Ongoing professional development keeps teachers current on new research on how children learn, emerging technology tools, and new curriculum resources. At Nitsch professional development is ongoing, collaborative, and connected to and derived from working with students.

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

At Nitsch, the principal's planned direction, children first, is made explicit to all stakeholders. Hope, optimism, and energy are fueled every single school day into the culture of the school environment. The leadership philosophy facilitates defining the school's mission and vision, a commitment practice, and establishing a data-based decision-making culture. The team works collaboratively to select the right work, identify the order of magnitude implied by the selected work, and match the instructional support to the change initiative.

The Principal holds extremely high expectations for all faculty and staff, who in turn, hold very high expectations for themselves and the students. The Leadership Team consists of the principal, three assistant principals, a literacy specialist, and a lead math multi-classroom teacher. As the resource provider, the coach, and the vision caster, the principal assists teachers with materials, tools, information, and clear communication that support high-quality classroom instruction. The assistant principals are the liaisons between research and practice, helping teachers learn to improve their practices in a reflective, supportive

setting. They organize and analyze the school's data, facilitating conversations among the faculty centered around what is best for students and their achievement. The administration supports teachers and all staff in using data to improve instruction on all levels. This culture of excellence is also modeled, taught, and shared amongst all elementary principals, and often secondary principals within Klein ISD, as colleagues have noticed a transformational change in student achievement performance at Nitsch Elementary in the past three years. A once historically low-performing school is now one of the highest-performing schools across the district and state, notably acknowledged by the Texas Education Association Commissioner of Education. The change in leadership, rehiring of a high-quality leadership team, and targeted hiring of dedicated teachers has changed the trajectory of student achievement at Nitsch. A culture of collaboration, high expectations, and high support has created a sense of urgency and commitment amongst the entire staff.

The leadership team also acts as mentors and serves as critical friends in supporting all teachers. The team focuses on teacher strengths, collaboration and issues of concern in a timely and authentic environment. The team facilitates discussions resulting in collaborative, reflective, accountable, self-evaluative, and participative practices that support the educational processes of all students and teachers. Passion, persistence, and commitment are traits shared in Nitsch Leadership to provide direction, opportunity, and enlightenment to improve the long-term prospects of the students under their care.

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

For the Nitsch staff, connecting to students as people is vital to culturally responsive instruction. Teachers learn about students' interests, likes, dislikes, family members, and aspirations to build effective relationships. The demographic makeup of Nitsch Elementary requires culturally responsive, multi-faceted teaching. Culturally responsive teaching at Nitsch depends on a learning environment that affirms students and helps them feel included, validated, valued, and safe. Instruction is not focused solely on curriculum materials or on one instructional approach. Instead, it centers on three fundamental beliefs: the ability of all students to learn with motivation, a wide range of curricular content, and dynamic instruction.

The Nitsch faculty and staff utilize a model of culturally responsive teaching based on theories of intrinsic motivation. Within this framework, pedagogical alignment and the coordination of approaches to teaching that ensure the maximum consistent effect is critical. The more aligned the teaching elements are, the more likely they are to evoke, encourage, and sustain intrinsic motivation.

The staff has established an inclusive environment that creates a learning atmosphere for students and teachers to feel connected to one another. Meaning is enhanced through challenging, thoughtful learning experiences that include student perspectives and values. All students are encouraged to talk in pairs or small groups before sharing their own experiences with the whole class. Building confidence and competence in completing all tasks assist in creating an understanding that students are effective in learning something they value. These conditions are essential to developing intrinsic motivation.

The teaching staff also has high expectations for every student, accompanied by a set of positive attitudes. Curriculum resource material decisions are based on the teaching audience. Literature provides mirrors and windows for all children. Students have access to characters that look like them and settings that look like their communities. In other disciplines, they read texts or consult resources that help them learn about their cultures and others' worlds. Students learn in many ways, so teaching strategies are dynamic and diverse. Students have whole-group instruction, paired activities, and small-group activities that require them to share, discuss, disagree, and think individually and collectively.

Through the practice of culturally responsive education, teachers often see an increase in students' effort and a rise in participation and authentic engagement. Most importantly, teachers see students grow as confident learners. The goal is to create cultural democracies in the classrooms where students continually interact with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE**

---

The most instrumental strategy to the success of Nitsch Elementary is the practice of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). At the heart of every professional learning community is the focus on student learning. PLCs incorporate job-embedded professional development with a clear connection to the classroom. An important element of learning communities is the sharing of knowledge and expertise among classroom teachers. The key is the shared knowledge tied back to student improvement through professional development or lessons learned. The Nitsch PLCs strive to focus on evidence-based decisions backed by actual student data. The members of the PLC use student achievement data to guide their work and enable teachers to make changes quickly based on the needs of a particular class or group.

With the collective knowledge derived from professional learning communities, Nitsch has established a schoolwide culture that develops teacher leadership explicitly focused on building and sustaining school improvement efforts. Generally, PLCs are comprised of teachers, although administrators and support staff routinely participate. Through participation in PLCs, teachers enhance their leadership capacity while they work as members of ongoing, high-performing, collaborative teams that focus on improving student learning. In PLCs, teachers share knowledge of different instructional methods and techniques to benefit all students. Members understand that learner outcomes are the responsibility of the whole community.

Through consistent and focused examination of multiple sources of student and systems data, the professional learning community tracks the performance of its students. When data indicate that students are not learning to expectations, the members examine all factors that could contribute to these results and identify the challenges. Their next step is to create new outcome statements for their students that address their low performance. The learning community members determine what students need to learn to ensure their teaching addresses the learning intention. Students are the prime benefactors of the PLCs robust data study and targeted professional learning.

The PLC members have been given shared power, authority, and decision-making to conduct the work of their PLC. This shared leadership role allows teachers to make valid and significant decisions regarding teaching and learning. While the instructional specialists initially led the group, the members developed leadership skills through discussion, modeling, practicing, and receiving feedback. The instructional specialist remains a regular member of the group, primarily asking questions or bringing research and other information to them for their consideration.