

U.S. Department of Education
2016 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Ms. Kerry Johnson

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

Official School Name Alief Early College High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2811A Hayes Road

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Houston State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 77082-2642

County Harris County

Telephone (281) 988-3010 Fax (281) 496-4593

Web site/URL http://aechs.aliefisd.net/home.aspx?goto=home E-mail kerrybeth.johnson@aliefisd.net

Twitter Handle _____ Facebook Page _____ Google+ _____

YouTube/URL _____ Blog _____ Other Social Media Link _____

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*Mr. H. D. Chambers E-mail HD.Chambers@aliefisd.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Alief Independent School District Tel. (281) 498-8110

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 Ms. Ann Williams
(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, write N/A in the space.*

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. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2010 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2015-2016) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

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

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
 - Suburban
 - Small city or town in a rural area
 - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2015 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	34	70	104
10	40	65	105
11	37	75	112
12 or higher	44	61	105
Total Students	155	271	426

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 19 % Asian
 - 20 % Black or African American
 - 55 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 4 % White
 - 1 % 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 2014 – 2015 school year: 2%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	7
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	7
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	436
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.016
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 7 %
30 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Burmese, Cantonese, Chin, French, Gujurati, Hindi, Ibo, Mandarin, Mande, Napali, Portugese, Spanish, Swahili, Urdu, Vietnamese, Yoruba

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 79 %
Total number students who qualify: 336
8. Students receiving special education services: 1 %
2 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. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- 0 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 2 Other Health Impaired
- 0 Specific Learning Disability
- 0 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 5
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers	22
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	1
Paraprofessionals	3
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 19:1

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

Required Information	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	98%	98%	98%	98%	99%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	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 2015.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	96
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	79%
Enrolled in a community college	10%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	9%
Joined the military or other public service	1%
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.

AECHS will maintain an environment to ensure students reach high levels of academic achievement and college readiness through a comprehensive system of instruction and support.

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

Alief Early College High School has a weighted lottery system that favors students who are at risk or part of the targeted subpopulations such as those who are historically underrepresented in college courses (first generation college goers, students of low socio-economic status, African American, Hispanic). Information is presented at all Alief middle schools. Interested students and their families attend information nights at AECHS. Interested students apply; applications are reviewed, and students are chosen from that pool of students who meet requirements.

PART III – SUMMARY

Alief Early College High School (AECHS) believes that every young person needs a postsecondary credential to thrive in today's world. Staff is committed to the idea that the Early College System is an innovation that can provide traditionally underrepresented youth with a path to and through college through rigorous, supportive learning environments that blend high school and the first two years of college. Systems are in place that strive to remove the academic, psychological, and financial hurdles that prevent too many students from entering and succeeding in college. School data and students' accomplishments serve as proof that this vision is achievable.

AECHS works to achieve its vision in the midst of a large, urban, diverse district - Alief ISD. AECHS is one of 43 campuses in the district located in Houston, Texas. With a student population of 47,000, Alief serves the most ethnically diverse community of its size in Texas with more than 80 languages spoken.

AECHS is committed to serving students underrepresented in higher education, thus the school recruits low-income students, racial and ethnic minorities, and first-generation college goers. Admission is not based solely on prior academic performance. School demographics reflect those of the district. Attendance rates are high, drop-out rates are low, and all staff is highly qualified and English as a Second Language (ESL) certified.

AECHS opened its doors in the fall of 2009 with 11 staff members and 100 students. Currently, AECHS has 30 staff and 426 students. In May of 2016, the fourth class of seniors will graduate. The school is located on the Alief Campus of Houston Community College (HCC). AECHS staff works closely with HCC staff, including a representative on the decision making council. Support from the district, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the Texas High School Project, and Regions IV and XIII of Texas helps sustain AECHS. External and internal coaches provide sustainability of the early college curricular focus known as the Common Instructional Framework (CIF). AECHS and HCC work together to provide each student with the opportunity to graduate with an Associate's Degree of Arts or Science or to be core complete. Last year 78% of students achieved this status. All students graduate with some college hours and experience. AECHS has received distinctions from the State of Texas in Reading, Math, Science, Social Studies, Student Progress, and Closing Performance Gaps.

All students are engaged in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as well as the behaviors and strategies necessary for college completion. Academics are supported through the CIF, the Rounds Process, and tutorials; college readiness skills and behaviors are supported through Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) classes.

Professional development for implementation of the CIF is provided each year for both new and returning staff. The CIF is composed of researched based strategies that encourage student-centered learning and higher level critical thinking skills. For several years now, the school motto has been "Every day, in every class, every student will think, read, write, and talk." Each semester one of the strategies is chosen as a focus for instruction. For example, focusing on Writing to Learn has resulted in great success. As the focus each year for the past four years, writing is taking place in every content class, from English Language Arts to Physical Education. Teachers are trained on strategies for both high and low stakes writing. Common rubrics are used to measure student progress. End Of Course (EOC) writing scores have improved because students are given multiple opportunities to practice clear writing. Staff reflect on their teaching through the Rounds process. Rounds is a system of teacher initiated questions on classroom practices – teachers helping teachers in a non-judgmental system of observations and feedback. With teachers focused on collaborating through Rounds, teaching practice is constantly improved along with student success. There is no complacency at AECHS.

Tutorials are provided by all teachers every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday after school. A very specific tutorial program called Tier has been created for the freshmen as the transition from a regular middle school to an early college high school is a tough one. Through Tier, all students are assigned to mandatory tutorials based on their grades at each three week progress report, and their progress is tracked.

When grades improve sufficiently, a freshman may be released from that tutorial. Most students, even when released from mandatory tutorials, continue to attend the tutorials of their choice. Specific tutorials for topics such as Texas Success Initiative (TSI), EOC standards, and PSAT/SAT are also offered.

The cultural development of students is promoted through clubs and organizations such as the Muslim Student Association, African Student Association, International Film Club, and Philosophy Club as well as school and community events like the Lunar Festival, Multicultural Celebrations, and Talent Showcase. Students' physical well being is supported through an action based Physical Education (PE)/Health Texas curriculum as well as school wide activities such as Flag Football, Dodge Ball, Basketball, and Soccer.

AECHS has created a college going culture through a nationally known and recognized college readiness program (AVID) which supports the behavioral and emotional well-being of students with college exploration lessons, team building activities, and real world exposure on college and workplace field trips. Staff agree that without AVID, student success rates would not be as high.

AECHS is proud of its students and their accomplishments and of the staff who have provided the tools, skills, and knowledge necessary to pave a smooth road to college for all students.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

All teachers follow a pacing guide created specifically by district specialists to align the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) with the content ensuring that all content is covered in the time allotted. Foundational skills are identified as supporting or readiness skills in all the pacing guides. Teachers' adherence to these guides provides students with content to acquire the necessary foundational skills. Vertical teams meet regularly to ensure that support and readiness skills are taught in order to prepare students for the next level. The CIF is used to make sure the TEKS-based content is accessible to students of all skill levels. Reading/English Language Arts (ELA) equips students with critical thinking, reading, and writing skills to meet the rigor of college level curriculum while simultaneously preparing students to pass the EOC and the TSI to gain admission to HCC by the end of their sophomore year. Students practice reading and writing skills with a variety of genres from a multi-cultural selection of texts. Students exceed the district and state EOC averages, and approximately 85% of sophomores have passed the ELA TSI. Collaborative learning, book studies, analytical, expository, and persuasive writing, and scholarly discussions arm students with the necessary skills for success. Students performing below level are either placed in a year-long reading/writing support class or are assigned to one-on-one tutorials for more strategic skills practice. All students are aware of their personal level of performance through analysis of their District Common Assessment (DCA) data. Those performing above level may still identify areas needing improvement, and can attend tutorials to enrich these skills or participate in University Interscholastic League (UIL) Writing competitions.

The Mathematics Department uses TEKS-aligned pacing guides that set foundational skills to assist students with cultivating an attitude that embraces challenges coupled with the tenacity to process and overcome those challenges. Peek into any one math classroom on any day and students are actively engaged in collaborating, deliberating, and annotating. Students participate in debates about the rationality of their solutions, using persuasive skills to sway their peers that their methodology for solving a problem is sound. They are also prepared to defend their method when questioned. Students experience project based learning which is interdisciplinary, career oriented, and integrated with real world concerns and practices. A math skills class is offered to students who are identified as needing extra support so that they may excel in their regular math class. Math teachers conduct TSI reviews for sophomores to help them gain entry to HCC, opening up math and science options for their schedules. Extra-curricular activities such as The Sea Perch Robotic teams are available for those students who excel in both Math and Science.

Social Studies TEKS-driven pacing guides foster dimensional teaching where each day reading, writing, collaborating, and inquiry are embodied. AP and Pre-AP courses span the curriculum from American and World History to Human Geography and Micro-Macro Economics. Special topics in social studies elective classes include Street Law, the Holocaust, History Through Film, and Civil Rights among others. Students are taught critical thinking and analytical skills, preparing them for the future with the understanding that it is acceptable to ask questions on topics that impact them as 21st century learners, as learning from the past is necessary to make a better future. For students who struggle with foundational skills, or just need to review for a test, Social Studies is famous for their "Down and Dirty" review sessions. Through these after-school sessions, content is summarized, and areas of concern are further developed. Students performing above level are placed in AP classes and prepared for the AP exams through more in-depth research and writing practice.

Science adheres to the strict academic standards set by their pacing guides, and the TEKS and College and Career Readiness Standards are the learning foundations. Following the early college model, the rigorous science curriculum not only focuses on the acquisition of foundational skills but uses the process of scientific inquiry to solve problems with real-world applications. Meaningful learning and building conceptual understanding are the result of consistent use of the CIF. The 5-E (engage, explore, explain, elaborate, evaluate) lesson design incorporates higher-order thinking skills and ensures the development and mastery of 21st century skills. Struggling students are supported through mandatory tutorials while lesson differentiation, enrichment activities (e.g., Science, Technology, Engineering and math (STEM) challenges,

Science UIL, field trips, etc.) and effective integration of laboratory experiences in classrooms are effective in challenging even the highest level students. In addition to the TEKS, AECHS's learning standards are based on the College Readiness Standards. To achieve these performance expectations, all classes at AECHS are Pre-Advanced Placement, Advanced Placement (AP) or dual credit. AECHS' curriculum is specifically geared towards preparing all students for college entrance by the end of their sophomore year.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

All students are required to have one credit of Fine Art in order to graduate from high school. Many students have already earned Art or Theater Art credit in middle school. Those students still needing a Fine Art credit may take Art History, Art Appreciation, Music History, or Music Appreciation through dual credit partnership with HCC. Art classes are based on AP art standards which are derived from the TEKS and College Board Standards. These courses offer students a variety of field trips to area museums and performances. An Oral Interpretation class is also taught at AECHS. By following the TEKS, the cultural development of students is fostered by the study of literature and its presentation which is integral to understanding the cultural aspects of a society. Students in Oral Interpretation will select, research, analyze, adapt, interpret, and perform literary texts as a communication art. Individual or group performances of literature will be presented and evaluated. This class is the foundation for the Speech and Debate program which has 40+ members. Four students will be competing in the State Finals in Duo Interpretation, Dramatic Interpretation, and Poetry Interpretation.

The Health and PE department at AECHS plans lessons that will support the TEKS. These standards are taught using the Common Instructional Framework and AVID strategies to not only ensure college readiness, but to include life lessons that support health and success in all aspects of life. All students must earn credit in Health and PE in order to receive a high school diploma. At AECHS, the PE/Health teacher employs action based learning strategies which follow the TEKS so students will exhibit a physically active lifestyle and understand the relationship between physical activity and health throughout their lifespan. The workout room is open before and after school for students who want to increase their fitness and health levels or who need to complete assignments. Fitness challenges are offered throughout the year for students and staff alike in order to promote wellness.

AECHS follows the TEKS-based pacing guides for the teaching of foreign languages. The foreign language program consists of French and Spanish languages. Classes range from the novice level to Pre-AP Level III to AP level classes for all students grades 9-12. All students must graduate with a minimum of two credits of foreign language. Students are encouraged to earn additional credits of foreign language to be eligible to receive an endorsement in Humanities on their diploma. Native speakers are able to take Credit by Exam in Spanish during the Summer Bridge Program before their freshman year.

All students, grades 9-12, must earn a technology credit in order to receive their high school diploma. Business Information Management is the course taught at AECHS to fulfill this requirement. All students are expected to meet the TEKS as well as earn the following certifications: Microsoft Office Specialist Certification in Word 2010, Excel 2010, PowerPoint 2010, Excel Expert 2010, Word Expert 2010, and Access 2010. Students who pass all exams will receive the Microsoft Office Specialist Master Certification. Technology is used to enhance lesson plans in all content areas through the use of laptops, ebooks, podcasts, and classroom communication software to name a few. The technology program is further boosted through student participation in the STEM Club, Robotics Club and Sea Perch Competition. This past year, AECHS was designated as a STEM Academy member by the Texas Education Agency. As a result, students and staff have many opportunities to participate in STEM related activities involving NASA, Texas A&M Galveston, and Women in Engineering. Further, students may take dual credit courses in Computer Science and Engineering and may join the HCC STEM Club.

3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Instructionally, the most important method employed is the Common Instructional Framework (CIF), a collection of six strategies to not only ensure success for struggling students, but to enrich the learning of above level students. Through the CIF students of all skill levels can be moved to a state of college

readiness. In Collaborative Group Work, students are brought together in small groups for the common purpose of strategic learning. Writing to Learn allows all students to develop ideas, critical thinking, and writing skills. Questioning challenges students and teachers to use good questions as a way to open conversations and further intellectual inquiry. Scaffolding helps students connect prior knowledge and experience with new information and ideas. Classroom Talk creates the space for students to articulate their thinking and strengthen their voice. Finally, Literacy Groups provide students with a role-based structure to understand a variety of texts. These strategies work well, especially for English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education students.

Here is one example of how the CIF can work to facilitate student discovery and learning. It was observed by the English department that students wrote far too many run-on sentences and sentence fragments. They were not clear on the composition of a sentence, yet surely they had heard this basic information before. Enter the CIF. Using Collaborative Group Work with the strategic goal of discovering the definition of a sentence, a plan was established whereby each student in a group wrote down two sentences of any kind. Using Classroom Talk and Questioning strategies, students threw out any examples that were doubtful. The remaining sentences were posted around the room. The teacher asked the guiding question: What things are common to all these written lines? A gallery walk was performed with students taking notes and coming back together for discussion and consensus. Each group was asked to limit their list to the three most important things. After short presentations by each group, the students had created their own definition for a sentence: it has a subject and a verb, and it makes sense. One student remarked, "Why didn't you just tell us that? It took us 45 minutes to figure it out." The teacher responded, "Someone has been telling you that since the first grade, but it didn't sink in. Now that you've discovered this for yourself, you will never forget it." Writing improved across all content areas, and if it did slip, there was a ready rubric in each student's mind that a gentle reminder could loosen, so a student could check and correct their own work.

As a STEM designated school, project based learning is also utilized across content areas, but far and away the most important front line instructional method is the CIF, ever ready to facilitate student learning through discovery via the practice of college readiness skills.

4. Assessment for Instruction and Learning and Sharing Assessment Results:

As a high performing school, careful monitoring of student performance is used to maintain high levels of achievement. This process starts before the school year begins. The district brings high school campuses together in August to look at school data. EOC and demographic data are studied using various protocols to produce a Needs Assessment, along with an improvement plan and a way to implement and monitor that plan. This school year did not reveal any one sub-population for which mandatory steps had to be taken. However, EOC data revealed that ELL students had a 76% passing rate for reading versus the whole population with a 95% passing rate. This was seen as an issue to be addressed. It was incorporated as part of the Needs Assessment attached to the Campus Action Plan (CAP). A strategy to address this need was included in the CAP and is being monitored. To help this population, AECHS established a Reading Support class, identified the ELL students needing that support, and is monitoring their progress through District Common Assessments (DCA) data, grades, classroom assessments, and teacher observations. Freshmen and sophomores take this support class in addition to their English class which affords them twice the class time to learn, discover, and practice reading skills. The class is small, so the teacher can give ample one-on-one conferencing time.

In addition to EOC data, DCAs - which are usually released EOC exams - and the data they generate in the data management system are crucial to identifying students who need help. With this data, any teacher can pull up a tutorial list by objective with student names. Quintile reports can give a quick visual showing who needs help. Students can view their own data and make plans to attend a tutorial that gives practice where they need it. This gives students a chance to take some responsibility for their own learning, a skill they will definitely need in the college setting.

Every Friday teachers meet as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to examine data and student work to determine the direction of instruction by grade level, content, or across content areas. These meetings result in either changes in instructional focus or behavioral interventions, peer mentoring, or parent conferences.

Assessment data is not only shared among teachers and students but with parents. Parents are part of the Site-based Decision-making Council (SDC) process, and all parents are invited to events where everything from the School Report Card, to the latest achievements, and the many individual student successes seen each year is shared.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

At AECHS, engaging and motivating students starts before they even begin their freshman year by offering a mandatory three week Knights Training Camp in the summer. During this time, students are introduced to AVID and begin learning the AVID academic strategies, meet AECHS teachers and counselors through various instructional activities, and most importantly, begin team building and fellowship activities with their fellow students. Attending Knights Training Camp lessens the apprehension of transitioning from middle school into high school. Students hear from older students who talk of their own struggles and successes, and motivate and educate incoming freshmen to seek help and support when they need it. They are reassured that success is possible in this rigorous environment.

The school's small size allows staff to develop meaningful relationships with students. These positive relationships create an environment in which the academic, social, and emotional needs of students can be met. These relationships help staff to identify potential problems, and provide support such as counseling, or participation in the peer mentoring program. Counselors help students see the big picture by working with them on their high school and college plans. The district's College Liaison Counselor also provides college transition advice on a weekly basis. In every classroom, AVID and CIF strategies, along with action based learning and project based learning, keep students engaged academically, and provide a student-centered learning environment. A variety of clubs and organizations enrich the students' environment with opportunities for learning, competition, service, and fun.

AECHS faculty is provided weekly opportunities and time to meet, collaborate, and work closely together across content areas to help all students achieve success. Every teacher understands that working at AECHS is more than an obligation; the desire to serve students must be with their entire heart and soul. Teachers are supported with professional development and frequent celebrations, both personal and professional. Many take a leadership role in campus decision making processes. In fact, in a recent survey cited in the Houston Chronicle, AECHS teachers were ranked Number 3 in the Top Ten Best Teachers in the Houston area. Whether engaging in professional development inside or outside the district, school wide book studies, sponsoring clubs/organizations, or implementing AVID/CIF strategies in their classroom with fidelity, the devotion of this teaching staff to one another and to the students is a major reason for their success.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

As an Early College High School, the importance of communication among all stakeholders is understood. AECHS takes pride in playing a fundamental role in supporting the success of students through creating an effective line of communication for parents both inside and outside of the school. Even on the application to attend AECHS, parents are asked to outline their expectations of their child's learning experience so the school can aid students as much as possible.

Alief Early College values their family and community partnerships as they work collaboratively to ensure student success. Parents, business partners, and all other stakeholders are encouraged to participate in the Site-based Decision-making Council (SDC). Therefore, parents and stakeholders share their opinions on many important issues before decisions are made. The FAME (Families Actively and Meaningfully Engaged) committee works with the VIPS (Volunteers in Public Schools) coordinator to help plan and coordinate parent events throughout the school year such as Open House, New Student Orientations, 8th Grade Parent Night, Honor Roll Celebrations, Talent Shows, FAFSA Night, College Visits, Signing Day for incoming ninth graders, community service events, and Family University for parents, students, and volunteers.

In order to work together, it is very important to use the tools and resources to keep communication open and effective. First of all, the Family Engagement Policy and Parent/School Compact are distributed at the Ninth Grade Signing Day, Open House, and through materials sent home on the first day of school.

Whether correspondence from the school is sent through mail, by phone, e-mail, parent access portals for grades and college application status, or the school's web page, AECHS does whatever is necessary to communicate and collaborate with all of stakeholders. From the moment staff meets with parents for the first time at New Student Orientation to the embraced at graduation, the importance of working together as a family is highly valued.

Another area where AECHS excels is in the area of community involvement. Student volunteers have been cited by the City of Houston for their outreach efforts in the Alief community. Examples include participation in the Alief International Parade, the Partnerships for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees (PAIR) program which serves recent immigrants, the Community Outreach Missions Education Team (COMET) program which serves elementary age students after school in area apartments, and the Galveston Bay Clean Up event. AECHS is rated exemplary in its number of volunteers and hours.

3. Professional Development:

AECHS holds to the belief that "Students should be reading, writing, thinking, and talking in every class, every day." For students to be successful in any subject, they must fully understand the learning process. To implement this with students, teachers must have a deep and engaging instructional tool kit from which to put this into practice. Thus, ongoing professional development is essential to success. The district generously provides Content Coordinators for all core subject areas whose job is to ensure that the TEKS are implemented in all classrooms. Content coordinators conduct workshops throughout the year to familiarize teachers with the pacing guides and the TEKS for that content.

Early College High Schools promote the use of the Common Instructional Framework which focuses on six learning strategies: Collaborative Group Work, Writing to Learn, Questioning, Scaffolding, Classroom Talk, and Literacy Groups. AECHS is an all AVID School: every student in every grade is enrolled in AVID which promotes the WICOR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, Reading) strategies. In addition, this year AECHS joined two middle schools as a TEA designated STEM Academy which promotes Project Based Learning (PBL). PBL guides students in inquiry that encourages them to solve a problem or meet a challenge by focusing on products or tasks that require research, writing, discussion, and oral presentation. The similarities of the AVID, CIF, and PBL instructional strategies serve teachers well when seeking to meet the goal of "reading, writing, thinking, and talking in every class, every day." Therefore, teachers consistently attend professional development that aids in their knowledge of these systems and how to best put them into effect in their classrooms.

Also, all 9th and 10th grade core subjects are Pre AP or AP. The school Instructional Leadership Team (ILT consisting of Principal, Counselors, Instructional Coaches, Department Chairs) determines the instructional focus for the year by reviewing the annual data at the district Data Days training held each summer. For example, this year it was determined that based on data, the focus should be on Writing to Learn. Then, Instructional Coaches (who are also full time teachers) provide ongoing curriculum and instructional support by highlighting best practices in that area at all staff PLC meetings. Through cycles, all teachers will participate in AVID, AP, CIF, and PBL training provided by district and/or out of district trainings and area, state, and national conferences. Further, AECHS is part of the Greater Houston Early College High School (ECHS) Consortium which provides ongoing training opportunities unique to Early College High Schools. AECHS teachers serve as role models to their students by pursuing worthwhile professional growth and development valuing continuous learning.

4. School Leadership:

As a result of having a small staff, all members are expected to contribute to school leadership. Thus, every member is on one or more leadership teams: Site-based Decision-making Council (SDC), Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), Above and Beyond Committee (ABC), and Grade Level Teams. The SDC is made up of teachers, parents, community members, and the principal. The goal of the SDC is to review school/student data to conduct a Needs Assessment and develop a relevant Campus Action Plan. The ILT includes the department chairs, counselors, instructional coaches, and the principal. Its role is to review and discuss district initiatives as they relate to campus instructional decisions. A counselor,

teachers, and the Principal are included in the ABC membership. Its purpose is to review discipline and school climate data to determine areas in the school in need of improvement. The Grade Level Teams are made up of all the teachers in a particular grade level. The teams meet every three weeks to review progress and report card grades and to discern trends from the data in order to initiate appropriate interventions (academic, social, emotional) for struggling students. Although each level of leadership has a different focus, the goal of each is the same: student success at AECHS. By all groups working together, student state test scores have been outstanding the last seven years.

With more than 40 years in public education, the principal has experienced the gamut of leadership theories, but she most values those with a foundation in trust, collaboration, respect, credibility, and effective communication. She believes these characteristics must be in place in order to lead successful change, to develop collective new thinking, and build consensus that supports the school goals. Above all, she follows the basic premise of “If you can’t love, you can’t lead.” She fully understands the critical importance of communication with all stakeholders at AECHS in building meaningful relationships, thus her door is always open to hear and discuss the thoughts and concerns of her students, parents, and staff. As the only administrator at AECHS, she is responsible for all administrative duties required by the district and state. She works closely with HCC and the college liaison to ensure a smooth transition for her college students. Her goal is for AECHS to provide students with a rich academic environment that yields deeper learning and curiosity, and inspires students to understand they have the ability to pursue any field of study and career to which they aspire.

Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

When developing the mission and values of Alief Early College High School, and considering how to best support student academic and emotional well-being, it was clear that the AVID program was the solution. Not only did AVID become an integral component for the campus, seven years later it remains the secret weapon for student success. While the Common Instructional Framework provides teachers with the necessary tools for successful lessons, projects, and learning opportunities, the AVID program provides students with the academic and emotional support needed for success. AECHS has recently been designated as an AVID Site of Distinction based on student participation and student success measures.

Choosing to make AECHS an all AVID campus was a decision that came easily. AVID provides the academic support needed for the rigorous learning environment and high expectations demanded of and early college student. Within the AVID classroom, students learn valuable academic skills including Cornell note taking, critical reading strategies, critical questioning strategies, and higher level thinking. The AVID classroom uses activities like Socratic Seminars and Philosophical Chairs to strengthen students' higher level thinking and questioning skills. These skills are easily transferrable to their core curriculum high school and college classes, strengthening overall academic performance.

Freshman and sophomore AVID students build a strong foundation by focusing on study skills, note taking skills, and organizational skills needed to better prepare them for their junior year, when their HCC course load increases. As juniors and seniors, the AVID class offers the necessary guidance to steer students towards their four year college or university choice. During junior year, SAT preparation and exploring college options are the focus. As seniors, the AVID class becomes headquarters for college applications, scholarship searches, and FAFSA preparation.

AVID offers additional support to students with the tutorial component within its curriculum. AVID tutorials require the students to identify their area of need, gather known information, and formulate an essential question to address the missing piece(s) of knowledge. Students work with their peers to find solutions to their queries. At no point is anyone given an answer; students follow a Socratic method of questioning to discover the solution to their essential question(s).

AVID classes are often referred to as an “AVID family,” with the AVID teacher like the head of the household. Students support each other, both academically and socially, and oftentimes in ways that their own families cannot. AECHS students come from a variety of backgrounds, but the majority have being a first generation college student in common. Their families do not always understand the academic struggles encountered or the social impact of choosing academics over socializing, but the AVID family is there and understands. The AVID program gives AECHS students a comprehensive support system as they complete the rigorous academic path to college and beyond.