

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Ms. Acacia Ameen

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

Official School Name Brownsville Early College High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 343 Ringgold Road

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

City Brownsville    State TX    Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 78520-4938

County Cameron County

Telephone (956) 698-1476    Fax (956) 548-8364

Web site/URL http://bisd.us/bechs    E-mail acaciaameel@bisd.us

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\*Dr. Esperanza Zendejas Ph. D.    E-mail drezendejas@bisd.us

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Brownsville Independent School District    Tel. (956) 548-8000

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mr. Jose Chirinos

(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

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

1. 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

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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):
- 37 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 11 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 7 High schools
  - 3 K-12 schools
- 58 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	37	81	118
10	50	63	113
11	37	55	92
12 or higher	38	67	105
<b>Total Students</b>	162	266	428

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 0 % Asian
  - 0 % Black or African American
  - 99 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 1 % White
  - 0 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2014 – 2015 school year: 6%

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	3
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	18
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	21
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	374
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.056
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

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

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

Spanish

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 86%  
Total number students who qualify: 323

8. Students receiving special education services: 0%  
1 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
- 1 Other Health Impaired
- 1 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: 1
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers	18
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	0
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 24:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	98%	98%	98%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

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.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	48
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	92%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	8%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.  
Yes    No X

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

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

Our mission is to develop knowledgeable citizens and emerging leaders. We embrace teaching excellence, active inquiry, life-long learning and rigorous scholarship.

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

BECHS is a school of choice. Information is presented to every district middle school in the fall. Charter and private schools are also included. Students are required to submit a completed application that includes their current transcript and assessment history. A committee comprised of teachers and the principal review each application. Prospective students who show serious interest, capability and a willingness to pursue the BECHS curriculum, are accepted.

## PART III – SUMMARY

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Brownsville Early College High School (BECHS) is located in Brownsville, Texas, at the southernmost tip of Texas and the contiguous United States. BECHS, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) and Texas Southmost College (TSC) campuses are located adjacent to the United States/Mexico border. Brownsville is, based on the latest available statistics, over 93.2% Hispanic with a population approaching 200,000. The median income is under \$32,105 and only 16.3% of the population ages 25 and older has earned a four-year degree.

BECHS is in its eighth year of operation and currently serves 428 students: 99.3% Hispanic, 87.8% low socio-economic status and 26.5% At-Risk. The BECHS faculty consists of 18 high school teachers and numerous university faculty members. Other staff dedicated to the high school include one principal, one assistant principal, one counselor, one testing coordinator and four support staff members. BECHS is located on the UTRGV campus. Because BECHS is a small facility located on the college campus and designed to house only ninth and tenth grade students, all students travel to and from the university for classes and services such as a library use, tutorial sessions, and university activities. Walking between campuses and intramural sports provide much needed exercise for our students.

The mission of BECHS, with the UTRGV and TSC, is to develop knowledgeable citizens and emerging leaders engaged in the life of their community. BECHS, UTRGV and TSC faculty and staff collectively embrace teaching excellence, active inquiry, lifelong learning and rigorous scholarship in service to the common good.

BECHS reflects the community's desire to increase the percentage of the population with a four-year degree. Over the past five years, college has been an attainable goal for 100% of BECHS students. College preparation is at the core of the school's design. The courses and curriculum are aligned with the course requirements of UTRGV and TSC. The Steering Committee, composed of community leaders from the Brownsville Economic Development Council (BEDC) and leadership from the district and both higher education partners, meets to discuss methods to strengthen the curriculum and support services needed to ensure student success.

Regular communication with university staff, including the Vice-President of Student Affairs at UTRGV, and open communication between core subject teachers at BECHS and respective content professors at the university, helps maintain a strong partnership. BECHS and UTRGV faculty and staff communicate frequently in order to provide individualized support for students struggling academically or socially/emotionally. Through the UTRGV Link2Success program, students receive tutorials for all core university courses. Academic and emotional support is provided through the BECHS Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, after school tutorials, and peer mentoring. Additionally, eleventh and twelfth grade students mentor ninth and tenth grade students through group clustering and peer tutoring in order to provide social and emotional support and guidance.

BECHS is academically rigorous and students are encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities through clubs that are available on campus in partnership with UTRGV and TSC. Students are allowed to participate in UIL competitive sports at their "zoned" campus. In an effort to make a small early college high school seem like a traditional high school, BECHS offers 20 different clubs and organizations outside of the normal academic program. Every teacher at BECHS oversees a club or school activity. These clubs, teams and organizations help to unify students and faculty to create an environment conducive to academic learning and enrichment. Several organizations are cognizant of real life issues that challenge young people and these issues are addressed through school campaigns and events. All clubs incorporate a community service element or a requirement for volunteer hours as part of their membership expectations. BECHS provides students with an academic education that helps them become knowledgeable citizens and emerging leaders who are engaged in the life of their community.

BECHS has a long-standing tradition of excellence in academic performance on standardized tests. The school has been recognized by US News and World Report as one of the best high schools in the nation,

ranking 8th in the state and 105th in the nation. BECHS received six distinction awards in 2015 from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for the following: Academic Achievement in Reading/ELA, Academic Achievement in Mathematics, Academic Achievement in Science, Academic Achievement in Social Studies, Top 25% Student Progress, Top 25% Closing Performance Gaps and Postsecondary Readiness. In the past four years, BECHS had five Bill Gates Millennium Scholars and numerous Dell Scholar Recipients. Beginning with the first generation of graduates, the Class of 2012, several students have not only attained a four-year degree, but are already satisfying the requirements for a graduate degree. Subsequent graduating classes continue to model and even surpass the standard set forth by the legacy class.

Lifelong learning, leadership and community involvement are the core values of Brownsville Early College High School. Through these values and activities, students contribute to the common good and may help solve tomorrow's economic and environmental challenges.

## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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### 1. Core Curriculum:

BECHS sets high expectations for all students through a challenging and rigorous curriculum that produces high performance results. The core curriculum followed by BECHS not only meets the requirements outlined by TEA Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), it is also aligned with the expectations set forth for UTRGV coursework. Utilizing a modified block schedule, students have the opportunity to earn 60+ college credits upon graduation through dual enrollment and Advanced Placement (AP) courses. All eleventh and twelfth grade students at BECHS are enrolled full-time in dual credit courses. The difference between this program and the other six early college high schools in BISD is that BECHS students attend university courses with university instructors and professors on the university campus.

All curricula at BECHS is structured around the College Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), integrating Advanced Placement (AP) strategies and coursework while accommodating the various learning styles and needs of BECHS students through differentiated instruction. Differentiation is supported through the Common Instructional Framework (CIF) strategies as developed by Jobs for the Future and supported by Educate Texas.

Students at BECHS are enrolled in English I and II Pre-AP TEKS-based courses on campus. The English department has customized the curriculum to meet the needs of students who will enroll in Comp I and Comp II English courses at the university. Through instructional scaffolding and inquiry, teachers facilitate students with preparation for the university course load. Teachers work to incorporate text from literature, both contemporary and classic, along with cross-curricular academic material in order to help students see the connection and relevance of their instruction. The use of mentor texts helps to build confidence in the student while also providing a platform for new lessons. Teachers challenge both above and below level learners through tiered reading materials based on student abilities.

The TEKS-based mathematics program at BECHS focuses on preparing underclassmen for college mathematics. The courses taught include Algebra I Pre-AP, Algebra II Pre-AP, College Algebra dual enrollment and Geometry Pre-AP. Each of these courses incorporate targeted practice and strategies supporting the CCRS and Texas Success Initiative (TSI) testing (Texas's college entrance exam). Teachers provide individualized tutorial sessions before or after school and Saturday academies to target specific weaknesses in TSI and End-of-Course (EOC) standards. Math faculty differentiate for the above level learners through flexible grouping strategies. At times, these students work independently, in high performance groups and other times in mixed ability groups based on their interests, readiness, and learning profiles. The math teachers prepare students for university coursework in Pre-calculus, Calculus I and II. The mathematics faculty work diligently to include a strong foundation of practices that will be developed in college-level courses.

Ninth and tenth grade students are enrolled in Biology Pre-AP and Chemistry Pre-AP at the BECHS campus. These two courses cover all science TEKS and provide the skills necessary to succeed in the university science courses, especially Biology. Faculty primarily differentiate for above level students through science independent study projects and flexible grouping. Students with a strong interest in science are encouraged to complete the high school physics requirement through university Physics. The science department at BECHS focuses on providing students authentic learning experiences through regularly scheduled labs to help students identify real world applications of science. Along with computer-based lessons and tutorials, the science faculty provide after school tutorials for students struggling to understand the concepts necessary for Biology EOC and university success.

The social studies faculty have designed the curriculum to cover the TEKS and encourage more participation in the college AP program by scheduling all ninth graders in AP Human Geography and all tenth graders in AP World History. The history teachers work to incorporate curriculum that helps the students synthesize and analyze data through primary documents in order to understand the bigger picture. In addition, students get opportunities to research and are given extra time for self-directed learning to move

beyond the coursework. The faculty provide conferencing and after school tutorials to help struggling students prepare for state US History EOC, AP exams, and university courses. High school upperclassmen are enrolled at UTRGV in US History, Macroeconomics, and Government.

All BECHS content faculty simultaneously address the content and skills specific to the College Career Readiness Standards along with TSI diagnostic results to provide a targeted instructional framework that prepares students for the rigor of university coursework. Supplemental tutorials are provided after school and on Saturdays for individualized instruction that meet the college readiness needs of the student and EOC preparation. BECHS students follow modified block schedules to facilitate preparing for and taking college courses at UTRGV. Students are encouraged to enroll in additional dual enrollment courses during their junior and senior years. These course choices increase their credit attainment, giving them additional college credit hours towards attainment of a four-year degree.

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

### Fine Arts:

BECHS tenth grade students take a two semester TEKS-based Art I course to satisfy the high school fine arts requirement. All classes meet on a modified (A-B-C) block schedule with 90 minute periods twice a week and 45 minute periods every Friday all year long. Students study a wide range of art techniques including studio art, aesthetic perception, historical and cultural heritage, critical judgment and evaluation. Students learn to express themselves through a variety of approaches including the traditional drawing, painting, sculpture, computer graphics and photography. Any student can participate in local, state and national competitions. The goal is to create individuals who can produce and appreciate the fine arts.

### Physical Education/Health:

Physical Education is essential in the school's physical fitness program. This one semester course uses the TEKS to teach sports to ninth grade students following the modified block schedule. The course covers physical fitness, good sportsmanship/teamwork to develop an understanding of the importance of lifetime physical fitness. The one semester TEKS-based Health course promotes a positive attitude about physical, mental, emotional and social well-being. Ninth grade students learn skills to make healthy choices throughout their lifetime including stress management and how to avoid drug and alcohol abuse. Most students find time during lunch and after school to create teams to play soccer, football and volleyball. Playing sports helps students relieve stress.

### Foreign Language:

Spanish I and II Pre-AP (both year-long courses on the modified block) adhere to the TEKS and provide ninth and tenth grade students with an understanding of the correct usage of the Spanish language. Integration is evident with other subjects such as Geography and World History. Students learn to analyze and synthesize world issues and global challenges to become well-prepared to master the AP Spanish Language and Culture Exam. Spanish AP scores have consistently exceeded both state and national averages. Ninth and tenth grade students who have passed the Spanish AP exam may take the year-long Spanish Cultural Topics I and II (TEKS-based) classes in which students receive an extensive study of Spanish-speaking countries. Students emerge well-versed in the history, language and culture of the Americas. Eleventh and twelfth grade students may continue their foreign language studies at UTRGV.

### Technology:

Ninth grade students are enrolled in one semester each of Computer Programming and Money Matters. The Career and Technical Education (CTE) Computer Programming class covers TEKS that examine the changing role of business processes adapted to utilize new technologies and business models through computer-based tools. The course provides knowledge of structured programming techniques and concepts. Students analyze the social responsibility of business and industry in regards to ethics, safety and diversity in society and the workplace as it relates to computer programming. The CTE TEKS-based Money Matters course helps students investigate global economics with an emphasis on the free-enterprise system and its impact on consumers and businesses. Students apply critical-thinking skills to analyze financial options based on current and projected economic factors.

The Robotics course is offered to ninth and tenth grade students. This CTE TEKS-based course offers an introduction to engineering. Students learn about history of robotics, career information and certifications related to this field. Students work together to build their own robots and compete with peers. Students are encouraged to be members of the CTE sponsored Technology Student Association. All students can compete at regional, state and national competitions. Interested students can continue their study of Engineering through the Engineering Design and Presentation class that covers sketch, design and create 2 and 3-Dimensional models. All technology high school classes follow the modified block schedule.

#### Professional Communication:

The one semester TEKS-based Professional Communications Course (Speech) gives tenth grade students opportunities to address controversial issues in personal, social and professional life. The course develops sound critical thinking and sharpens communication skills using current topics of interest with an emphasis on public speaking. In the Debate I course, tenth grade students develop skills in argumentation. This one semester TEKS-based course helps students acquire life-long skills for intelligently and confidently approaching conflict and professional communication. Both classes follow the modified block schedule.

#### Other Curriculum programs offered to the general student population:

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) I, II, III and IV are innovative elective courses meeting during the modified block schedule. AVID is designed to close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college. The AVID classes, ninth through twelfth grade, provide guidance, academic monitoring and tutoring. The curriculum incorporates writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization and reading. Students learn Cornell note-taking skills and begin working together in peer tutorials and study groups. AVID prepares students for the academic rigor and other challenges they will encounter as college students. Students in AVID IV begin the process of applying for scholarships and universities.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

BECHS sets high expectations for all students. The close partnership with TSC and UTRGV promotes rigorous coursework for all high school classes. The first two years of high school are taught with Advanced Placement strategies and content to prepare students for the rigor they will experience when they enroll as full-time students at the university.

Through the support of Educate Texas, all teachers have been trained in the Common Instructional Framework (CIF) strategies: scaffolding, questioning, collaborative group work, writing to learn, literacy groups and classroom talk. These are the strategies, based on Jobs for the Future research, that are critical to providing rigorous college ready instruction. In addition, all core teachers are trained through AVID Path Training to foster the rigor necessary to achieve college readiness and close the achievement gap. The AVID class, taken each year by all students at BECHS, provides additional support in writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization and reading (WICOR) to all core areas. Essential components of the program include monitoring assignments, grades and peer tutoring. The ultimate goal of AVID is to prepare students to be successful for the academic rigor and challenges they will encounter when they enroll at UTRGV.

Texas Literacy Initiative (TLI) protocols are incorporated throughout the curriculum at BECHS to promote literacy across the curriculum. Some of the cognitive protocols address making connections, creating mental images, making inferences and predictions, asking questions, summarizing and clarifying. Other instructional strategies used in the classroom include the 5E Model, literacy circles, Socratic Seminars, Vlog Literary Projects, Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SIOP) and project-based learning.

As an intervention for struggling underclassmen students, both the Spanish Honor Society and the National Honor Society have initiated mentorship programs that provide tutorial assistance and stress relief activities. These would include weekly campaigns such as “World Kindness Week” and campaigns that promote self-esteem and self-worth.

The UTRGV Link2Success tutorials offer academic support in a group setting or on a one-to-one basis. Additionally, a district-wide intervention computer software is available for students in all high school tested content areas. A certified teacher facilitates instruction through the computer-based program to ensure

preparation for advanced level course work. Interventions for the accelerated student are also available. Examples of these opportunities include PSAT and SAT preparation, the preparation to challenge an AP exam, take additional college-level courses towards a four-year degree and/or participate in academic competitions.

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

Student data disaggregation plays an integral role in the planning of curriculum and instruction at BECHS. Once the school year begins, freshman and sophomore students' progress is monitored through district and local benchmarks, EOC exams and TSI testing. Individualized student data disaggregation takes place through district databases. Teachers use the results from these exams to help plan interventions in areas needing growth, as well as to monitor success of the students. Testing and benchmark assessment results determine the content and skills to address and improve academic performance. For example, math faculty use assessment results to address the lowest performing objectives to create remediation materials to be reviewed in individual and group settings with the goal of mastering the objectives. Lesson plans and intervention plans are revised based on current assessments throughout the year. Discussions at faculty meetings keep all stakeholders up-to-date on student needs.

In addition, all juniors attempt the PSAT exam at the beginning of October. These results are used to help teachers and students determine which areas need improvement. PSAT test booklets are returned to students with scores in order to help them identify strengths and weaknesses. Through the AVID courses, students are taught how to interpret the results of exams and are helped to access various online practice courses for EOC, TSI and SAT/ACT testing.

Communication with students and parents begins with an initial meeting prior to starting their freshman year. Students are provided information regarding their grade 8 TSI testing (college entrance exams) performance, course sequences and overall expectations at BECHS. Parental involvement meetings are held monthly in order to update parents on upcoming assessments, activities, projects, expectations and to address general needs of the students. These parent meetings also provide data on assessment results and give information on resources that the students may access from home to help improve their scores. In addition, teachers follow up with parent-student conferences to monitor the progress of each individual student. Parents can also access and monitor student grades and attendance through the district's online gradebook system.

Leadership at BECHS fosters effective communication and relationships with family and community members regarding successes, needs and progress throughout the school year through announcements via school messenger, student call-outs, the campus website and through the community section of the hometown newspaper. BECHS has no significant performance gaps between its "all" students and any subgroup. The BECHS Steering Committee meets with all stakeholders to discuss data analysis results in order to make informed decisions for monitoring and improving student performance and to maintain the campus's high level of achievement.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

The small school culture creates an environment that feels more like a family than a school. Both the students and faculty at BECHS are vested in what happens on the campus. Faculty, staff, students and parents work together to ensure that all successes are celebrated and all struggles are addressed. Students have a secure sense of belonging due to the many activities and clubs promoted on campus and at the university. Throughout the year, students work to design activities during the school lunch hour and school day that are relevant to students. Awareness activities and events take on a new meaning at BECHS because they focus on student selected or community important issues. Students are encouraged to find passion in pursuing creative interests and then share that passion with others. This culture strongly supports the development of perseverance and persistence that research shows to be an important component of academic success.

Campaigns such as “I Matter” would not be successful without the dedication and contributions of the students and the direction of their sponsors. It is awareness campaigns like this that give students a sense of individuality and self, speaking up for what they believe is true or right, while also incorporating group thoughts and opinions. BECHS clubs and organizations all encourage community involvement. This gives students the opportunity to share experiences outside of the classroom with others in the community. Helping others can be a powerful bonding tool. Students who witness the strength of numbers stop seeing each other as acquaintances and begin treating each other as family. This sense of belonging follows students through their four years at BECHS and beyond. Friendships formed now may become life-long relationships.

BECHS fosters a family environment not only among students but with faculty as well. They share in each other’s milestones and support each other in addressing personal and professional obstacles. Breakfast meetings are held once a month and holidays are celebrated together as well as birthdays and other personal life events. The level of commitment of the faculty and their feelings of support by leadership is evident in the very low turnover rate. Almost all of the original faculty is still teaching at the campus eight years later. The foundation provided by the freshman and sophomore teachers, along with the university professors, helps prepare BECHS students to succeed in their post-secondary education, the workforce and life.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

BECHS is a school of choice. At orientation, students are informed of the rigorous curriculum and climate of this high-performing campus before the final commitment is made to attend. BECHS communicates successes, needs and progress throughout the year through meetings and presentations to support the school's goals. Parents are notified in both Spanish and English about upcoming assessments (district, state & national), activities, projects, and expectations via automated phone messaging, flyers, and calendars on the website. BECHS faculty and staff foster effective communication and relationships with students and their families. In turn, parents are encouraged to communicate with teachers so that student studies continue at home, ensuring student success.

Monthly parental involvement meetings are held to reinforce communication. Through these meetings, parents are informed about safety procedures, the campus report card, and current graduation requirements for Texas. Furthermore, content area strategies are presented by teachers to enhance college readiness, introduce homework and study skills, and support second language learners. Parents are informed of their rights and the availability of district resources for family and students. Local community organization speakers are invited to present and discuss areas of interest. Meetings are aligned to meet Federal Title I-Part A Parental Involvement standards. Time is provided at the end of meetings to allow parents to ask questions, discuss general areas of interest, and to promote collegiality.

Community service is a fundamental part of the school's mission. Through engagement with UTRGV and TSC, students participate in Resaca Rangers, a grant-based program that monitors hydrologic issues in the lower Rio Grande Valley and water quality sampling of Brownsville area resacas (ox-bow lakes). In addition, students at BECHS actively volunteer at many local shelters including, La Posada Providencia (an emergency shelter for people seeking political asylum), Ozanam Center (a shelter for the homeless), Friendship of Women (a domestic abuse shelter) and Spanish Meadows (a nursing home) where students engage with residents through conversation and activities. Students also volunteer with the City of Brownsville events such as Earth Fest and street cleanups. Students assist Healthy Communities of Brownsville, a local non-profit organization, with various wellness activities. Students also serve their community through fundraising and awareness events. The opportunities provided by assisting the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, and the March of Dimes help to further enrich the educational and personal awareness of BECHS students. These encounters prepare them for successful college experiences and lifelong community involvement.

### 3. Professional Development:

In order to be a successful early college high school, BECHS must provide a specific and structured set of professional development sessions for all faculty and staff. This professional development includes the district-wide strategies addressing classroom management, discipline policies, emergency management procedures, comprehension of employee standards of conduct, conflict resolution, technology, campus-based software and Response to Intervention (RtI) as well as content specific and college readiness trainings.

Professional development geared to individual teachers' specialties is primarily Advanced Placement training in their subject matter area. Advanced Placement courses are college level and the training helps teachers address the academic rigor expected of an early college high school. AP training prepares teachers to help students earn university credits while still in their ninth and tenth grade years, stand out in the admissions process, earn academic scholarships and awards and prepare them for college level coursework. Both ninth and tenth grade teachers participate in this training. Student mastery of AP exams and student success in college courses indicated that this has been effective.

The Common Instructional Framework (CIF) is the Jobs for the Future research-based classroom strategies. Educate Texas (collaborators with TEA in supporting early college high schools) consultants and district staff train faculty in these high impact instructional strategies. The implementation of these highly successful teaching strategies and protocols has even been adopted by BISD campuses to help increase classroom rigor and achievement. All content faculty receive AVID training. Ongoing training in the CIF strategies and AVID program provides support for the delivery of rigorous academic coursework with quality interventions and differentiation designed to support student success.

BECHS teachers participate in district supported professional development such as the Texas Literacy Initiative (TLI) workshops that provide cross-curricular reading and writing strategies. Teachers work across the disciplines to identify areas of improvement where additional trainings may be needed. District content area specialists visit with faculty to help plan and present quality lessons based on the TEKS, observe classrooms and offer valuable feedback. Department chairs attend monthly district meetings to stay abreast of district curriculum initiatives, share successful techniques and analyze TEKS related assessment information.

Teachers at BECHS also participate in individualized professional development in the form of collaboration within the campus, with university faculty and through online web resources. Informal and formal observations and evaluations are conducted and shared with teachers in order to ensure best practices are implemented with consistency and fidelity. The consistent high level of achievement of the BECHS students attests to the success of this professional development approach.

#### 4. School Leadership:

Effective schools have effective leaders. It is the philosophy of the principal to demand respect and honesty from themselves, the staff, and the students. The campus leadership transmits a well-defined set of goals to staff, students, parents, and the community and is always working to improve the school. BECHS and university faculty and staff, in close collaboration with the campus leadership, work to address all aspects related to the success of the school.

The principal is student-centered. It is this focus that drives all decision-making. The principal is the chair of the BECHS Steering Committee, where matters pertaining to course offerings, support systems for students and the acquisition of university books, among other challenges, are addressed. It is critical that the principal serves as the prime advocate for BECHS and its students.

The assistant principal organizes the parental involvement component, Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC), Section 504 and campus safety. The assistant principal works with dyslexia and special education decisions as they pertain to those subpopulations. The assistant principal oversees student attendance and prepares campus reports.

The counselor provides support to the students and teachers of BECHS. The counselor monitors student academic progress, high school graduation requirements, university grades and credits. The counselor is responsible for creating the master schedule for the BECHS campus and enrolls university students. Through continuous communication with the admissions office and academic advising staff of UTRGV, the counselor ensures BECHS students receive the assistance necessary to earn their high school credits while following a declared degree plan. The counselor holds parent-student conferences addressing academic concerns.

The testing coordinator organizes all state and locally mandated testing, including benchmarks, Advanced Placement, Texas Success Initiative (college entrance exams), credit by exam, and PSAT/SAT. In addition, the coordinator helps compile information for the Campus Improvement Plan (CIP), conduct the needs assessment, recommend activities and interventions for the plan and assist in monitoring the implementation of those activities and interventions.

Because of the small size of BECHS, teachers fill many roles. In addition to teaching their assigned subjects, most teachers tutor the upperclassmen in courses that present a challenge as well as sponsor a club or activity. Teachers at BECHS invest significant time beyond the contracted school day to foster student leadership skills and so they can later take on the leadership roles within the organization and the community. Students receive the support necessary to succeed. The teachers at BECHS model the dedication necessary for success.

## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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One practice determined to be critical to the success of BECHS is collaboration. As an early college high school campus sited on a college campus, the school cannot function without true collaboration among all of the partnering organizations. This was recognized from the early beginnings of the campus and was included in the grant application, memorandums of understanding with the higher education entities, as well as in practice. The faculty and staff, students and curriculum were all selected and organized through collaboration among the stakeholders.

The campus has shared facilities and staff with other district and university programs since its inception and doing so has actually supported the collaborative approach to the development and success of BECHS. This collaboration and stakeholder investment has continued to be the primary support structure for the achievements experienced by BECHS. The leadership structure for the BECHS Steering Committee includes representation from the community, university, campus faculty, staff, students, parents and district administration. This promotes and nurtures collaborative supports for the campus and the high achievement levels of its students.

Since its beginning, faculty and staff have not only collaborated on the support structures but also for the development and implementation of the curriculum and instructional program. Teachers continuously work together planning lessons that help build upon the others' concepts and collaborate to ensure that students are succeeding in all areas. In addition, teachers communicate with the faculty at the university to align content and skills for smooth transitions for students into actual university courses during students' last two years of high school.

Students are provided multiple opportunities to collaborate with one another. Support groups are formed as early as summer orientation when upperclassmen offer seminars connected to the learning environment and the importance of camaraderie. Beginning in the freshman year with the AVID class, students gain an understanding of the importance of working and learning together. Staff and students alike learn to contribute equally, but also understand that this does not mean contributing in exact the same way. Individual and collaborative contributions to others' success do not go unrecognized at BECHS.

It is the practice of collaboration that empowers all stakeholders, especially the faculty and students, to take pride in BECHS and continue its academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular accomplishments.