

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 [] Choice

Name of Principal Mrs. Tiffany Laine Weiss

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

Official School Name Leon Heights Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1501 North Main Street

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

City Belton State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 76513-1955

County Bell County

Telephone (254) 215-3200 Fax (254) 215-3201

Web site/URL http://www.bisd.net/leonheights E-mail tiffany.weiss@bisd.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*Dr. Susan Kincannon E-mail susan.kincannon@bisd.net

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

District Name Belton ISD Tel. (254) 215-2000

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. Randy Pittenger

(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):
- 9 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 14 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	24	19	43
1	20	20	40
2	22	22	44
3	25	18	43
4	27	16	43
5	28	21	49
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	146	116	262

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 2 % Asian
 - 3 % Black or African American
 - 35 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 56 % White
 - 4 % 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: 1%

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	0
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	3
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	268
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.011
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2 %
4 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 50 %
Total number students who qualify: 130

8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %
17 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.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>1</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>3</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>10</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Mental Retardation | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities | <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 2
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	17
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	3
Paraprofessionals	5
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 22:1

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

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

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2015.

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

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

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

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

The mission of Leon Heights Elementary is to prepare every student to excel in tomorrow's world.

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

PART III – SUMMARY

Leon Heights Elementary, located in Belton, Texas, in Bell County, opened its doors for the first time in 1956. The school was designed, according to historical records, to be large enough to serve the entire community, and first opened with just seven classrooms to serve students in first through sixth grade. Today, the school continues to provide a quality education to students in kindergarten through fifth grade in one of the oldest neighborhoods in the Belton Independent School District (BISD). The Leon Heights Elementary neighborhood encompasses an area where students are able to ride a bike and/or walk to school. The school community consists of a regeneration of older homes by young families who primarily work in service, healthcare and technology related jobs in the Temple-Belton-Killeen Metropolitan area. Most families in the area are first time homeowners who have relocated to the community for the school.

Leon Heights Elementary serves 262 students. Of these students, 49.8% are economically disadvantaged, 56.5% are White, 34.7% are Hispanic, 2.7% are African American, 2.3% are Asian, and 3.8% report two or more races. In addition, 1.5% of the students at the school are limited English proficient (LEP) and 6.8% are served in special education. The school is located just twenty minutes from Fort Hood, the largest military installation in the world and 4.9% of the students at Leon Heights Elementary are military connected.

Leon Heights Elementary has been consistently recognized for high achievement among schools with similar demographics in Texas. The school has earned the highest academic accountability ranking by the State of Texas for the last seven years, and for the past two years, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) awarded the campus with additional distinctions in reading/ELA, math, science, closing performance gaps, and postsecondary readiness for high achievement. When compared to a group of matched schools with similar demographics, Leon Heights Elementary performed in the top quartile of comparison schools. The campus was also one of a select group recognized by TEA as a Title I High-Performing campus in 2015 and a High-Progress campus in 2012. These prestigious awards recognize Title I schools for high academic success and progress while serving a high percentage of economically disadvantaged children. Furthermore, the school was recently notified that it was selected as a Texas Honor Roll School for 2015 by Educational Results Partnership and the Institute for Productivity in Education for high academic achievement. When multiple academic criteria were analyzed, Leon Heights Elementary rose to the top of all Texas schools.

The educational philosophy, while continually evolving over time, is based on a consistent set of values that have guided the school to a long history of success. At the core of the philosophy is a mindset that all students are capable of academic growth and development and will be successful. For this to happen, a consistent educational system must be implemented. The system includes the delivery of a tightly aligned curriculum in all core content areas, the use of research-based instructional practices, ongoing professional development to ensure a highly trained teaching staff, systematic use of formative assessments to guide instruction, focused interventions for below-level students, and enrichment activities that foster students talents and skills. The entire system is focused on the academic, emotional, physical, social and cultural development of the child.

A vertically aligned positive character trait program, designed by BISD's elementary school counselors, is systematically taught by the school's guidance counselor and reinforced daily by teachers and staff. The program reinforces a culture of acceptance, personal safety, respect, care, responsibility, fairness, trustworthiness and citizenship. Students are taught to value cultural differences and not make value judgements of others based on their ethnicity or personal beliefs. Special events and activities, such as those occurring during Black History month and Cinco de Mayo, highlight cultural differences and are celebrated to ensure an understanding and appreciation of cultural differences. In addition, a focus on each student's personal acceptance of good behavior is emphasized through the implementation of a positive behavior intervention and support model. Because consistent and clear expectations are consistently emphasized, a safe and supportive environment exists for all.

A strong partnership between the school, parents, and the community is vital to the success of the students at Leon Heights Elementary. For that reason, the staff actively seeks partnerships with parents and the community to continually make the school better. For example, the school provides many opportunities for parents to volunteer and attend activities and special events through monthly Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and has partnered with local community organizations such as Kiwanis, Rotary, and the American Legion to provide awards, student clubs, and special community events focused on children such as the annual Turtle Fest. Local non-profit organizations, such as Helping Hands Ministry, partner with the school to serve low-income families by providing school supplies, meals, and other assistance for families in need. Finally, parents and community members are asked for input annually through climate and satisfaction surveys. Parents and community members, year after year, are contributing to the success of the students at Leon Heights Elementary.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Leon Heights Elementary is committed to providing effective instruction in core content. The school follows BISD's scope and sequence documents, which are based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and have embedded resources and formative assessments for each unit of instruction. Units are developed collaboratively with teachers from other schools while lesson development happens on campus with collaborative grade level teams designing student-centered activities.

Teachers are active participants in the curriculum and instructional process and understand their role in the system. They follow the curriculum to ensure no gaps exist and to allow students to developmentally build knowledge and understanding of key concepts. By following a tightly aligned system in all four core content areas, teachers are able to guarantee an academic foundation that ensures students are successful at the next level of instruction.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Balanced literacy, a research-based instructional approach, is used to deliver the scope and sequence for English language arts instruction. Instruction is divided into three main blocks: Language/Word Study, Reading Workshop and Writing Workshop. A balance of phonics and the use of literature with whole group and small group instruction are used. Teachers continually assess students, analyze data to inform instruction, and use a continuum of strategies to achieve learning goals. Above-level students interact with challenging literature at the appropriate independent reading level, and are provided enrichment through individual projects. Below-level students are also afforded the opportunity to interact with appropriate materials, and are given additional assistance by an interventionist who works with small groups. Retired and other non-employed, certified teachers are paid to tutor individual and small groups of students.

MATHEMATICS

Teachers develop students' conceptual understanding of mathematical skills through active participation in hypothesizing, inventing and problem solving. The instructional model, systematically implemented from kindergarten through fifth grade, promotes numeracy with mental math while ensuring that the BISD scope and sequence documents are implemented. The model uses cyclical review, whole group instruction, small group instruction, guided math, and workshops focused on identified concepts. The teacher is able to observe each student's ability to use math reasoning and computation skills and is able to provide support or enrichment to address below-level and above-level students. The model was selected because it provides flexibility in instructional delivery so that adjustments can be made immediately. Concepts are connected to everyday life to help students internalize mathematical concepts.

SCIENCE

The science curriculum is vertically aligned to include instruction in the nature of science, physical science, earth science and life science in kindergarten through fifth grade. The instructional approach is research-based and uses the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) model for science education. The scope and sequence framework is based on the TEKS and includes the Next Generation science standards. Using a hands-on, inquiry based approach, students acquire foundational skills through interactive lessons designed to engage, explore, explain, elaborate and evaluate learning. Instruction at all grade levels provides support to meet the individual progress of students. Above-level students are afforded the opportunity to extend knowledge using a project-based learning approach. Below-level students are provided support individually and in small group settings.

Two schoolwide enrichment activities showcase the science program. An annual Science Fair is held for students in grades three, four and five. Students work closely with teachers to research and demonstrate understanding of a science concept. A project is completed and shared at a schoolwide event. In addition, the campus has created an outdoor learning center whereby students maintain a school garden.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Social studies instruction develops students as well-informed citizens, with knowledge of community, the State of Texas, and the United States of America. The integration of social studies concepts into reading and writing blocks helps students make connections between content areas and allows more time to explore historical topics in depth while building literacy. The framework supports students in learning citizenship, history and geography. Students are expected to recognize, apply and use their knowledge to form opinions about current and historical events. The BISD scope and sequence outlines units of instruction for each grade level. Below-level and above-level students are provided differentiated activities, including tutoring, to ensure maximum learning.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

While instruction in core contents areas is the foundation of academic development, Leon Heights Elementary is equally committed to ensuring that other curricular objectives are systematically implemented. TEKS-based instruction is provided in Fine arts, physical education, and technology. In addition, the school focuses on increasing students' library knowledge and provides character education to fully develop students as individuals.

FINE ARTS

Fine arts education is provided in the areas of music, theater arts and art. Every student participates in music classes. Students learn rhythm, melody and how to read music. Students have fun signing different kinds of music while learning about historical time periods and geographic regions. Musical performances provide an opportunity to incorporate theater knowledge and skills.

Students are able to audition for and participate in a special school performance choir in fourth and fifth grades. The quality of the school's music program is known across the state, and in 2012, Leon Heights Elementary was selected to perform at the Texas Music Educators Association's annual conference for music educators.

Art instruction is incorporated into all areas. In addition, students are provided with weekly instruction by a certified art teacher. The curriculum is designed to provide students with experience with different art forms. Instruction includes the study of four strands: perception, creative expression/performance, historical and cultural heritage, and evaluation. Student art is showcased at the campus throughout the year and annually at the districtwide art show. The seamless integration of art provides a conceptual understanding of topics in math, science and social studies while increasing achievement and student expression. Students use creativity to demonstrate learning through drawings and paintings, role play, and song.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION/HEALTH/NUTRITION

Physical education and health instruction encourages students to live active, healthy lifestyles. A locally designed curriculum, aligned to state standards, focuses on a coordinated approach to health designed to reduce childhood diabetes. Nutrition is taught in the classroom and by child nutrition staff in the cafeteria. Foods are labeled as "Go," "Slow" and "WHOA" to help students identify healthy choices. The physical education curriculum focuses on vigorous activity using a variety of equipment and strategies, all aimed at keeping students moving. The campus is equipped with jump ropes, scooters, balls, rock climbing walls, etc., which were provided by funding from a federal grant. In addition, mathematical concepts, such as counting and multiplying, are incorporated into daily physical activities. Students also enjoy participating in the National Great American Smokeout and the Jump Rope for Heart.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology education is an important part of preparing students to excel in tomorrow's world. That's why technology instruction is seamlessly embedded into every content area and can be observed in daily instructional activities at the campus. Using state standards for technology, teachers have systematically integrated technology competencies with core content areas to ensure that skills are not taught in isolation. Each skill can be identified in scope and sequence documents in math, English language arts, science and social studies. Technology devices are provided in individual classrooms, on carts, and in labs. Students are taught technology literacy skills that are designed to increase communication, collaboration, creativity and

critical thinking through core classroom content areas and to prepare students for middle school where each student is issued a device for learning and uses a learning management system.

LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

The library is an environment fostering excitement and interest in the area of reading. The librarian uses a curriculum for kindergarten through fifth grade built on the framework of the TEKS. The librarian and teacher collaborate in the development of curriculum units to support knowledge of the library and English language arts. Special projects focus on research, poetry, paired reading, guest readers, author visits and individual learning projects. The goal of the library is to instill a love of literature and to increase fluency in reading.

CHARACTER EDUCATION

Character education is important to emotional and social development. The counselor provides guidance lessons to teach and promote positive character traits including: culture of acceptance, personal safety, respect, care, responsibility, fairness, trustworthiness and citizenship. A locally developed anti-bullying educational program, “Tigers Don’t Bully,” complete with a series of posters and online resources, strives to create an environment of respect, collaboration, kindness and acceptance.

3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

The educational philosophy of Leon Heights Elementary has afforded the school a long history of success. At the core of the philosophy is a mindset that all students are given an opportunity to be successful and that all students are capable of academic growth and development. Instructional methods and techniques implemented at the school are representative of that philosophy and allow for each student to achieve established instructional goals.

On-grade level students are provided with a rigorous curriculum based on the state standards using systematically implemented programs in each core content area. Above-level and gifted learners participate in differentiated curriculum opportunities, individually and in small groups, to extend knowledge. Below-level learners are provided additional support through supplemental instructional provided individually and in small group settings using varied materials and strategies, including pull-out instruction from Title I teachers. Below-level students, if needed, are provided with modified assignments.

The master schedule is a key component of ensuring that each student receives differentiated instruction. A forty-five minute block is provided daily to allow for regrouping of students for on-level, above-level and below-level students, including specialized activities for gifted learners. Response to Intervention, a research-based process for identifying instructional needs and techniques for students, uses data analysis to guide decision making. Instructional methods and interventions are tracked, monitored and adjusted to ensure student success.

In addition to providing differentiated instruction for below-level students in the classroom, special education and Section 504 students receive support based on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Trained special education teachers are an integral part of the development of the IEPs and provide inclusion and pull-out support as needed. English language learners (ELL) are supported by teachers who have state certification in ESL.

Leon Heights Elementary has established an academic culture of care and support. One example of this is the “Buddy Readers” program which allows students in fourth and fifth grade to read with kindergarten and first grade students two times per week. This peer approach assists beginning readers in building fluency and comprehension skills while developing relationships and leadership among students. Students grow both academically and socially as they support one another.

Finally, teacher collaboration and learning is essential to meeting each student’s needs. Teachers meet in professional learning communities weekly with the principal and instructional coach to discuss unit plans, instructional approaches, achievement data, and student needs.

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

Leon Heights Elementary uses a variety of assessment data to analyze and improve achievement. Formative and summative assessments provide valuable data. Formative assessments are designed to check for student understanding and provide teachers with valuable information to guide instruction. Data is used to identify individual learning needs for reteach and guided learning. They are based on oral and written responses as well as intentionally designed student products and are focused on specific learning objectives. Formative assessment provides the teacher with immediate feedback and the opportunity to quickly impact student learning.

Summative assessments cover a broader set of learning objectives. Data is analyzed to inform student progress and allow individual and teams of teachers to adjust instructional activities and the placement of the standards within the curriculum. Common assessments are provided for every unit of instruction and are an integral part of the summative assessment process. Upon completion of a unit of instruction, students are given a common assessment. Data from these assessments is analyzed and discussed in teacher grade level and/or content area meetings. Teachers are able to compare results of their students with those from other elementary campuses, identify strategies that were effective, develop tutoring groups, and identify reteach strategies.

Beginning, middle, and end of year assessments are used in math and reading to monitor growth. These assessments are focused on the primary grades and provide valuable information. They are used to assist teachers in the placement of instructional grouping and the selection of reading materials for each student. They also provide information used for supplemental instructional activities such as tutoring and Title I pull out services.

Students in third through fifth grade take the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) assessments in reading, math, writing, and science to assess student achievement of state standards. These assessments provide data to identify gaps in performance between student populations. Data is compared to schools within the district, the region, and the state. When gaps of ten or more percentage points are identified, the campus improvement plan is reviewed to ensure that strategies for professional development, instructional approaches, interventions, and curriculum development are clearly identified and focused on decreasing gaps.

Assessment data is shared with parents through progress reports, report cards, and parent conferences. An annual schoolwide parent conference day is held whereby parents receive assessment information and discuss results with their child's teacher.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

The climate and culture established at Leon Heights Elementary is student-centered and fosters a love of learning. With a focus on the support and care of students and teachers, the school is effective in keeping students engaged and motivated while supporting teachers to increase knowledge and skills of effective instructional practices. The result is a positive atmosphere that supports the academic, social and emotional growth of all students.

The implementation of a strong character education and anti-bullying curriculum, along with a positive behavior intervention and support program, provide the foundation for a safe and respectful culture that emphasizes the social and emotional development of all students. Expectations are explicitly stated and a common language around those expectations ensures consistency among classrooms and teachers. Students respond positively to these programs and learn self-responsibility while demonstrating respect and acceptance of peers.

Teachers genuinely care about the success of each student and demonstrate their commitment by going above and beyond what is required. For example, all teachers from kindergarten to fifth grade participate in a campus-wide tutoring program that is held after school for third through fifth grade students in need of additional support on high-stakes state assessments. It is a collaborative effort and ensures that every student demonstrates growth and success.

Teachers at Leon Heights Elementary are considered the most important factor to student success. As such, they are treated as professionals and expected to continually strive to improve instructional practice. Professional development opportunities are varied and include conferences and training sessions held during the year and in the summer. Sessions are conducted by campus and district experts as well as by professional organizations and consultants. Professional growth is also supported by a full-time campus-based instructional coach. For their efforts to go above and beyond to attend summer professional development, teachers are able to exchange two days of training for workdays within the school year.

Each member of the Leon Heights Elementary community is valued and celebrated in a variety of ways. A “Tiger Talk” wall, maintained in the main hallway of the school, is used to share information about students and teachers. It begins with teachers posting their pictures and information about personal interests and achievements. Students are then added and celebrated each week. By the end of the year, every person is recognized as a valued member of the Leon Heights Elementary community.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

At Leon Heights Elementary, families and community members are an integral part of the educational process and continuously contribute in extraordinary ways to ensure that students are provided the resources and support to reach their educational potential. As a result, achievement is consistently high. A variety of practices and systems at Leon Heights Elementary demonstrate the value that the school places on parental involvement. Parents and families are welcomed with open arms. “Meet the Teacher” occurs a few days before the opening of the school year to allow parents to tour the school and meet teachers and staff. In October, “Parent Conference Day” is provided. Teachers meet with each child’s parent to discuss academic achievement and answer questions. In the spring, an “Open House” event is held during Texas Public Schools Week to showcase student work and give parents another opportunity to interact with the staff. In addition, parent nights held throughout the year provide an overview of core content area concepts and teach strategies that parents can use at home to support instruction.

Communication with families is a high priority. A special electronic system allows the principal and individual teachers to text and/or email information and announcements regarding individual classes, grade levels, or the entire campus to parents at any given time. Newsletters, reminders, and other information can be disseminated quickly. In addition, the campus maintains a Facebook page where reminders and special

celebrations are posted so that families stay connected and informed. At the classroom level, teachers use folder systems to provide daily feedback to parents about student progress, upcoming assignments, and parental involvement opportunities.

A strong Parent Teacher Association (PTA) provides additional opportunities for parents to become involved. The PTA welcomes new parents to the campus, organizes volunteer activities, and hosts special fundraising events such as the annual fall carnival. Funds are used to provide special projects and enrichment activities for students. The PTA also supports teachers with luncheons and recognition activities.

Parents and community members play an active role in supporting students, and can often be seen reading to students and volunteering in classrooms. They serve as members of the campus improvement committee and provide valuable input on student achievement initiatives and other programs designed to address safety and health. Parents and community members also host special events such as an annual health event focused on family wellness.

3. Professional Development:

A professional development plan focused on improving teaching and learning at Leon Heights Elementary is developed annually as a result of a comprehensive needs assessment completed by the campus improvement committee. The committee examines student achievement data to determine gaps and then identifies professional development priorities. The plan focuses on job-embedded learning as well as building teacher knowledge and skills through districtwide professional development sessions and the use of consultants and other experts. In addition, funding is available to teachers to attend professional conferences.

The instructional rounds process is used as a framework for identifying campus based professional development needs. Teachers and administrators work as a team to identify an instructional practice or challenge to be addressed and then collectively observe in classrooms across the campus to collect data on student and teacher behaviors in the learning process. The data is then analyzed and discussed to assist the team in identifying trends and patterns of instruction that impact achievement. As a team, recommendations regarding the next level of practice are identified and discussed. These recommendations inform professional development needs and provide the administrator with valuable information that guides ongoing learning opportunities at the campus. As a result of instructional rounds held at the school this year, a comprehensive plan was developed to address the school's challenges in targeted areas. The plan provides for a three-year commitment to improving teaching and learning in those areas.

Job-embedded professional learning is built into the school day with multiple opportunities for teachers to collaborate with each other, the campus instructional coach, and the principal. Teachers meet in vertical and horizontal teams to collaborate on the development of curriculum, lessons, and formative assessments. Intentional planning and ongoing study of the TEKS is a major focus of the work of these high functioning teams.

Teachers also participate in districtwide professional development sessions on scheduled professional development days and during the summer. Opportunities to meet with teachers from other schools allows for rich dialogue around the TEKS including the understanding of content area vocabulary, interpretation of student expectation levels, and the objectives for each curriculum unit. An array of sessions provided at the Elementary Summer Expo focuses on best practices in all content areas as well as classroom management and technology. Last summer, 100% of the school's teachers participated.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership philosophy employed at Leon Heights Elementary is based on a belief that leadership is the professional work of everyone in the school. It is collaborative in nature and focused on building the professional capacity of each person working in the system. DuFour and Eaker (1998) explained that the new tasks of this kind of leadership involve skillful participation, vision, inquiry, collaboration, reflection,

and improved student achievement. These practices have been critical to the success of Leon Heights Elementary and have allowed the school to maintain a reputation of success.

The principal and instructional coach provides support to teachers by ensuring an organized system. They lead an ongoing conversation about teaching and learning to ensure that student achievement is the primary focus. They value teachers and empower them to make professional decisions. Teachers are given the autonomy to make decisions about student learning to best meet the needs of their students. Using formative assessments and classroom observations, teachers are able to adjust instruction to ensure that all students are successful. When teachers observe campus-wide challenges, they are expected to share their observations and recommend solutions that strengthen instruction and improve student achievement.

The top priority at Leon Heights Elementary is to keep student achievement and the needs of students at the forefront of all decisions. The campus motto is “Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day.” The administrative team, teachers, and support staff each play an integral part in creating a productive, safe environment for students. Leadership goals promote shared leadership, flexible decision-making, and intentional planning. This leadership style aligns with the educational philosophy that all students are capable of academic growth and development and will be successful.

Teachers are also learners. They seek guidance from other colleagues to make the best decisions to support students. They are encouraged to try new ideas, and provide unique learning experiences for students using innovative and creative instructional approaches while delivering the curriculum. Teachers each assume various roles on campus committees to support improvement, student health, student safety, student intervention, behavioral support and grade level leaders.

The campus improvement committee consisting of teachers, parents, community members and district support personnel also participate in the leadership of the campus. They analyze data and discuss ideas and strategies for improving student achievement. They are an integral part of the school improvement process.

Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The single most effective practice that Leon Heights Elementary has adopted to make it successful is an investment in effective teacher-student relationships. The relationships that teachers have formed with students are crucial to the high achievement and ongoing success of the school and start with a mindset that all students are capable of academic growth and development. Teachers genuinely believe that the academic, emotional, and social development of each child matters. That belief permeates all aspects of the school's culture.

Evidence shows that investing time and effort into building relationships with students is one of the most powerful things that educators can do to increase achievement. According to John Hattie, renowned educational researcher, teacher-student relationship has an effect size of 0.72 in relation to improving learning outcomes. At Leon Heights Elementary, teachers establish caring relationships with students. They do this by accepting students for who they are, communicating to them that they are important, seeking to understand how they feel and think, and recognizing their strengths and talents. Teachers genuinely believe that all students are capable and create an environment of high expectations that allows them to perform at their maximum educational potential. Teachers value students as people, take interest in their lives, and provide them with strong guidance, while nurturing personal responsibility and self-regulation.

Because teachers are the key element to student success, each one is carefully selected to serve the students and families at Leon Heights Elementary. The administration identifies and interviews teachers who are highly qualified and well prepared in the subjects that they teach. Interviews include scenario-based questions designed to give the interview committee insight into the teacher's feelings, attitudes and beliefs about children, as well as gauge their mindset regarding academic growth and achievement. Teachers who demonstrate that they are effective in building relationships with students are identified and selected to teach at the school.

Lee Jussim, professor of social psychology at Rutgers University, stated, "...if you can create a combination of high standards with a warm and supportive environment it will benefit all students, not just the high achievers." Leon Heights Elementary exemplifies this statement in its philosophy and practices. A culture of high expectations for all students is maintained in a warm and caring environment where students are highly successful. That's what makes Leon Heights Elementary deserving of being recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School.