

**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 [X] Magnet [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Dr. April Williams

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

Official School Name Oak Forest Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1401 West 43rd Street

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

City Houston State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 77018-4106

County HARRIS COUNTY

Telephone (713) 613-2536 Fax (713) 613-2244

Web site/URL http://www.houstonisd.org/OakForestES E-mail AWILLIAM@houstonisd.org

Twitter Handle https://twitter.com/OakForestES 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. Terry Grier E-mail superintendent@houstonisd.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Houston ISD Tel. (713) 556-6000

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. Manuel Rodriguez  
(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

- Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
  - 153 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 37 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 40 High schools
  - 43 K-12 schools

273 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

- 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
- 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	14	16	14
K	66	61	127
1	71	59	130
2	71	67	138
3	76	68	144
4	58	59	117
5	61	65	126
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
<b>Total Students</b>	417	395	812

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 2 % Asian
  - 6 % Black or African American
  - 43 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 44 % White
  - 5 % 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: 7%

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	31
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	27
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	58
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	806
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.072
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 8 %  
61 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: 33 %  
Total number students who qualify: 266

8. Students receiving special education services: 5 %  
42 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.

- 10 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 2 Emotional Disturbance
- 3 Hearing Impairment
- 10 Mental Retardation
- 7 Multiple Disabilities
- 7 Orthopedic Impairment
- 7 Other Health Impaired
- 10 Specific Learning Disability
- 24 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 2 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	4
Classroom teachers	37
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	9
Paraprofessionals	8
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	6

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.

<b>Required Information</b>	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.

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

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

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2010

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

Oak Forest aims to provide an atmosphere that produces lifelong learners who are prepared academically and socially to reach their maximum potential.

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

Oak Forest Elementary is a Vanguard Magnet School. Fifty-four percent of our students are Gifted and Talented qualified. About 73% of our students are zoned to us. The other 27% of our students live outside our zone. Regardless of whether you are zoned or not zoned, in order to be in our Vanguard Program, you must apply. We use a matrix to qualify students. The matrix consists of 4 pieces of data for grades K-5 – Total ELA and Math on Iowa, CogAT scores, end of the year report card and a teacher recommendation. We also test entering kindergartners. This matrix includes 3 pieces of data – Wechsler, Woodcock-Johnson and a parent recommendation. If you live in the zone and qualify, you are automatically accepted into the Vanguard program. If you live in the zone and are not qualified, you are served in a traditional neighborhood program. If you live outside the zone and qualify, your name goes into a lottery. The district has a rule that 25% of the kindergarten students we accept can be siblings. The district runs all lotteries. If you do not get into the school and are qualified, you are placed on a wait-list. We work our wait-list in order as openings occur.

In order to get applicants, we go to early childhood centers in our area. We also attend four district recruiting fairs. We offer tours of our campus for interested families.

## PART III – SUMMARY

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Oak Forest Elementary School opened its doors in 1949 and moved into its new building in 2004. The neighborhood has been revitalized into a vibrant, diverse community, yet maintains a small town feel. The school is home to a beautiful arboretum, playground area, outdoor stage, compost vat, covered pavilion, and vegetable garden, all part of a learner-centered environment. Oak Forest has an enrollment of 812 students with an ethnic breakdown of 43% Hispanic, 44% White, 6% African-American, 5% two or more races, and 2% Asian students. 73% of children are zoned to the campus. The campus has hosted a Magnet Vanguard Program for 40 years and currently serves 443 gifted and talented (GT) students in grades K-5. The mobility rate has traditionally been low.

Academic success is a constant at Oak Forest Elementary. Since the onset of No Child Left Behind, the school has earned a rating of Recognized or Exemplary each year. STAAR standards are met or exceeded, and Oak Forest is a Texas Honor Roll School.

The school's philosophy is to educate the whole child—the brain, the body and the self. This is executed through differentiation of education, a focus on health and wellness, emphasis on core values and the teaching of cultural awareness.

Oak Forest boasts a population of diverse educational abilities and provides academic development for each student appropriately. The needs of GT students are met through elevated curriculum, 100% GT trained teachers and project based learning. Traditional classrooms engage in Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) based lessons and deemphasize test scores. Students with multiple disabilities are serviced in the Preparing Students for Independence (PSI) classroom, while students with autism are serviced in the Structured Learning Class (SLC). Both of these classes employ hands-on, dedicated staff and have a low student to teacher ratio. Students with learning disabilities are supported through resource and inclusion settings with two general resource teachers and three specialized instructors. The bilingual program serves grades PK-K, and the Title 1 school-wide program provides support services, extra supplemental classroom materials, and tutorial services.

Educating the whole child involves teaching life-long habits. The campus has a Healthy Kids initiative that includes health and wellness (yoga), a school wide fun run, and an optional off campus triathlon. Oak Forest is also a No Place for Hate campus, proud of embracing diversity and ensuring all students feel safe and valued. The school counselor fosters cultural development by teaching lessons on coexisting with others, and students continue to be sensitive to their culturally diverse community. When students feel empowered physically and culturally, academic success follows.

Three years ago, the staff developed a character education initiative that supports seven core values: effort, motivation, perseverance, ownership, wisdom, empathy, and respect (EMPOWER values). Each value is highlighted on the announcements and discussed in the classrooms. At the end of each nine weeks, during a school wide celebration, students from every classroom are recognized who display these values. The initiative has been a successful character education program as evidenced in conversations that administration, teachers, and parents have with children. These discussions center on how student choices do or do not reflect the implementation of these values, and how they can use the values as a basis for making better choices both academically and socially. Campus wide, students are increasingly exhibiting these values and learning that their success begins with effort and is founded upon respect.

Families remain in the neighborhood generation after generation due to its beauty, its tight knit community, low mobility rate, and the chance to attend Oak Forest Elementary. Thus, the community feels a strong tie to the school and its traditions. There is high community turn out for annual traditions such as the book character parade, fall festival, Grandparent's Day luncheon, Thanksgiving luncheon, GT exposition, and school-wide book club. Furthermore, parents and community members sponsor numerous fundraisers and participate with the school in volunteer opportunities such as donations to homeless and pet shelters, wearing pink and red for cancer and heart disease awareness, donating to the holiday toy and food drive, and supporting each grade level's philanthropic projects.

The participation of current and former alumni is a testimony that the school is successful in keeping up with the old traditions as well as creating new ones. More families chose to move into the neighborhood to attend Oak Forest after the school was awarded the National Blue Ribbon in 2010. In turn, staff began to focus efforts to not only further support differentiated learning but to grow teachers as leaders. Teachers are taking on leadership responsibilities and learning to collect and interpret data to implement instruction. They are given the autonomy to grow in their specific areas of interest with support from the administrative team. Additional teachers were hired to support both remediation for struggling students and increased rigor for advanced students through project based learning assignments.

Additionally, to grow students as leaders, the principal began the peer assistance and leadership students (PALS) program to focus on teaching leadership skills through service hours around the campus and community.

## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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### 1. Core Curriculum:

At Oak Forest, differentiation is the center of the curriculum. Differentiation begins with backward design, an approach that begins with the end in mind. The results of assessments guide the differentiation of instruction to meet the needs of students in all subjects. Students work in flexible groups that allow comprehension of TEKS at their instructional levels. Additionally, individualized instruction for both below level and above level students is provided to ensure students access the curriculum at a pace that is appropriate. Differentiation is implemented through lesson plans, direct instruction, classroom tiered assignments and tiered projects.

Reading/language arts instruction is based on the TEKS. These skills include reading to understand literary and informational texts; writing a variety of texts; research involving locating relevant sources and presenting ideas; listening and speaking in response to the ideas of others; and oral and written conventions in speaking and writing. Oak Forest chooses a backward design model to ensure consistency of what is taught and requires that differentiation is included to meet the needs of both high and low level students. This is achieved by creating common assessments based on the blueprint of the TEKS. From those assessments, lessons and activities are made based on the needs of the students. This process ensures that students are being taught the TEKS as evidenced through assessment results. Within this process, the foundational skills necessary for all students to learn to be avid readers are taught daily. Those skills are print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition, and fluency. Embedding these skills in a differentiated curricular approach enables students to become fluent readers with the ability to comprehend a wide variety of texts.

Oak Forest's mathematics curriculum approach is based on the TEKS and a basic set of foundational skills. The math foundational skills are: number sense and operations; algebra; geometry and spatial sense; measurement; and data analysis and probability. The approach chosen for mathematics is backward design and incorporates the TEKS and foundational skills. In addition, differentiation is required to meet the needs of both high and low level students. In mathematics, teachers utilize the TEKS blueprints in their common assessments and then plan their lessons and activities. This curricular approach produces students that understand math fluency and problem solving.

Science is provided daily in the classroom and weekly in the science lab. The backward design model was chosen to incorporate TEKS and foundational skills. The foundational science skills are planning and safely implementing investigations; using the scientific process, inquiry methods, analyzing information, making informed decisions; and using tools to collect and record information. Teachers utilize the TEKS blueprints to create assessments and then plan lessons and activities. Differentiation is required to meet the needs of both low and high level learners. Vertical planning is also an important curricular approach that is required. The vertical science team meets to ensure that spiraling of the K-5 TEKS occurs. Oak Forest uses this approach because some TEKS are only taught on one grade level and then tested on a state assessment in fifth grade. This approach allows students to consistently review and comprehend not only the foundational skills but concepts they might have forgotten from year to year.

Teachers incorporate the social studies TEKS and foundational skills into the reading/language arts block. Foundational skills include civics, economics, geography and history. The backward design approach was chosen so teachers could plan authentic experiences that allow students to participate in and understand relationships with others and the world. Teaching social studies as nonfiction texts allows students to access the curriculum at their level of instruction. Students work in homogeneous groups to access the learning and complete projects with rubrics based on student levels.

In the four curricular areas, teachers and support staff introduce foundation skills and basic concepts through think-alouds, addressing multi-modal learning styles. After concepts are introduced, they are revisited daily through direct instruction, center activities, and project based learning activities that assess the attainment of those objectives.

The prekindergarten classes follow the backward design approach to incorporate the TEKS and the same foundational skills for all subjects (reading/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies). One class is bilingual and the other is needs-based. Both are provided at no cost. Kindergarten TEKS are introduced to learners who have met the prekindergarten standards so that the needs of the higher learners are met. Low level learners work one on one with the teacher. The curricular approach of backward design and differentiation was chosen because it provides an academic jump-start, and kindergarten test results indicate the program's success.

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Oak Forest believes in educating the whole child, offering both performing and visual arts. The students are on a 45 minute daily, six day rotation that exposes them to art, music, physical education (PE), health and wellness, computer, and science lab.

Oak Forest has an art teacher who works with all grades in different art media and teaches art history. Through TEKS based art, the students develop and expand visual literacy skills using critical thinking, imagination, and the senses to observe and explore the world by learning about, understanding, and applying the elements of art, principles of design, and expressive qualities. Students use what they see, know, and experience as sources for examining, understanding, and creating artworks. Students are expected to identify the elements of art, including line, shape, color, texture, and form, and the principles of design, including emphasis, repetition/pattern, and balance, in nature and human-made environments. Students participate in city and district art competitions as well as an annual program that offers students the opportunity to earn local, state, and national recognition for original artwork they create in response to a specific theme.

The music teacher instructs all students in song, dance, music reading, and playing instruments. Students develop cultural awareness through exploration of different genres of music, all based on the TEKS. Additionally, fourth and fifth graders can participate in band with the school's part-time band instructor. They perform many concerts both on campus and in the community. They also compete in city wide competitions. Students have been selected to become members of the district's all city band because of their talents. Throughout the year, classes participate in seasonal performances based on learning objectives.

The school employs a full-time and part-time PE teacher. In grades PK-2, students begin to develop a vocabulary for movement and apply concepts dealing with space and body awareness. Students engage in activities that develop basic levels of strength, endurance, and flexibility. Students learn to work safely in group and individual movement settings. A major objective is to present activities that complement their natural inclination to view physical activity as challenging and enjoyable. In grades 3-5, students continue to develop strength, endurance, and flexibility. As students begin to demonstrate mature form in fundamental loco-motor and manipulative skills, they are then provided opportunities to transfer those skills into dynamic game situations. Students also begin to identify personal fitness goals for themselves and begin to understand how exercise affects different parts of the body. Oak Forest is on a three year grant which provides health and wellness to students, teaching yoga poses and the importance of healthy eating and living.

In the computer lab, students acquire technology TEKS through project-based learning. After collaborating with classroom teachers and examining the classroom curriculum, the computer lab instructor develops assignments which have core subjects as the main focus but require the application of technology TEKS to fulfill the project. To ensure access to technology for all students, each classroom has at least four computers and 10 tablets. The school has 3 laptop carts and 3 tablet carts that can be checked out for class projects.

Aside from these ancillary classes, Oak Forest offers other curriculum programs that align with TEKS and supplement the education of students. Weekly Spanish classes are taught to Vanguard students in Kindergarten through fifth grade. Each classroom has a vegetable garden maintained by the students. A gardening education organization teaches the importance of gardening and helps students plant and maintain their plots. First, second and third graders participate in a writing program in which an accomplished writer works with a class for an hour a week, showing the students how to think and write like a professional.

An online reading program motivates students K-5 to read at their level, take tests on the books, and earn points and prizes, with their accomplishments recognized on an achievement wall. By the end of the year, almost every child is on the wall. Students have the opportunity to participate in a reading competition, where they read over 30 books and compete against other district schools. To allow students to experience the great things Houston has to offer, each grade goes on four field trips a year. These include museums, plays, farms, wildlife parks, universities and stadiums. Fifth graders also attend a district sponsored camp each year.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

To support students' learning achievement, Oak Forest teachers use many instructional approaches, methods, and interventions in the classroom. Grade level teams collaborate weekly through professional learning communities (PLC) to discuss the best practices that support the needs of the students. These include collaborating on formative assessments, implementing differentiated instruction, and using technology in the classroom.

Formative assessments provide crucial data that teachers need to drive instruction and interventions. They are used for all students, no matter their academic level, and are given throughout the entire school year. Teachers measure student progress toward unit objectives and annual learning goals through face-to-face assessments, smart device applications and computer programs. They also use instant response devices for quick assessments and quizzes. With these tools, teachers are able to gather student data that summarizes the students' strengths and weaknesses, allowing for more tailored instruction.

Instruction and lessons are then differentiated to engage students of all learning styles and abilities through small groups and work stations. Interventions are conducted when needed, as teachers adapt the lesson pace and spiral back to TEKS that students did not master on the formative assessments. Students who are not in need of support are given opportunities to excel through project-based learning opportunities and learning expos.

Oak Forest continues to meet the needs of all students by exploring a variety of learning tools, including technology. Each classroom is equipped with 10 electronic tablets with a variety of applications, at least four desktop computers, a document camera, and an interactive smart response board. Teachers are able to clench the attention of students through technology-based teaching, with programs to support math, reading and writing, science, and social studies and history. These programs individualize instruction based on the students' needs and hold the attention of students of all levels.

All of these instructional methods provide student data that summarizes the students' strengths and weakness to guide teachers' small groups and work stations. Oak Forest employs two general resource teachers and three interventionists who specialize in one subject. These interventionists and teacher assistants support general education teachers by closing the educational gaps for students who are struggling in the school setting through an inclusion model. They are working in small groups within the general education classroom, using the co-teach model, and splitting the classes in half to reduce the student to teacher ratio. All teachers provide manipulatives, graphic organizers, or similar devices to reinforce lessons as well.

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

Using assessments and assessment data effectively is the key to improving instruction and student learning. Every August, the campus sets aside time for grade level teams to analyze both state and campus assessment data. The analysis looks at the strengths and weaknesses of teachers and individual students.

To improve instruction, the team pinpoints objectives from assessment results that individual educators need to improve upon as well as areas where teachers showed tremendous success. With the latter, the team finds out what those teachers are doing differently and encourages their teammates to utilize the best practices that brought about that success. In regards to improving student learning, assessment analysis looks at individual

students' scores to create homogeneous instructional groups and intervention groups. This year-long process involves students looking at their own successes and creating goals for areas in which they need to improve.

Along with initial data analysis of both students and educators, the team creates a yearlong assessment calendar wherein students are assessed in math, reading, writing, and science every nine weeks. Those assessments are scanned into an online tool that allows for teachers and administrators to dissect the data on multiple levels to drive both instruction and student learning.

During the fall open house, the principal is charged with leading the conversation to explain our data results. Parents are encouraged to ask questions and participate in a data disaggregation session that helps them understand our goals for the current year as well as test results from prior years. Parents are continually kept up to date on student progress through an online grade book as well as individualized assessment reports. Such reports include nine week common assessments, sight word evaluations, teacher made tests, and guided reading running record reports.

An area for growth at Oak Forest is with the special education students, who traditionally show an approximate test score gap of 30% from the scores of all students, in both state and common assessments. To increase these scores and help close the achievement gap, students were assigned to a different special education teacher, an interventionist went into the classroom to help modify the curriculum for students, and teachers were encouraged to hold tutorials after school. Currently, common assessment data has shown increased scores of these special education students.

To maintain high achievement rates, administration and teachers consistently look at data to improve teacher instructional practices as well as individualize for students. It is not enough to have students pass a state test. Students' areas of weaknesses must be understood to surpass prior year's scores.

At Oak Forest, understanding how to plan for and utilize assessments is paramount for instructional planning and student learning.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

The mission of Oak Forest Elementary is to provide an atmosphere that produces lifelong learners who are prepared academically and socially to reach their maximum potential. In order for students to want to come, participate and learn, they must feel comfortable, safe and supported. Academic growth is supported through verbal praise, honor roll awards and recognition in the classrooms. When struggling students conquer academic tasks they are often brought to the office to share their accomplishments with the administration.

Oak Forest's core value system, referred to as EMPOWER, focuses on positive character qualities and is founded upon respect. Starting the first day of school, the campus staff instills in students the school's EMPOWER values, and throughout the year, teachers award students for their efforts in achieving these values. Each letter represents the behavior that students are expected to follow. The students' goals are to illustrate to the campus that they are EMPOWERed to learn by showing EFFORT to do their best; having MOTIVATION to learn; having willpower to PERSEVERE through activities; taking OWNERSHIP for their actions; using WISDOM to make good choices; showing EMPATHY to others; and having RESPECT for themselves and others. EMPOWER values are expectations that set the tone for every classroom. When students exhibit these positive behaviors, they are acknowledged during an award ceremony every nine weeks.

If students are expected to show they are EMPOWERed, then teachers and staff must do the same. Teachers are encouraged to highlight a colleague exhibiting EMPOWER values and do a great job of promoting these core values and representing them as a staff. Every week, the administrative team chooses a teacher of the week that has gone above and beyond. The recognition is posted on social media pages, the school website and a monthly newsletter. Professional development is provided and encouraged throughout the year to improve teachers' skills and the administration maintains an open door policy to ensure the needs of teachers are being heard and fulfilled.

Teachers are also given leadership opportunities throughout the year in multiple ways. Grade chairs advocate for their teams through monthly meetings with the administration. Department leaders represent the campus and their teams at monthly district meetings and also bring back important updates for their colleagues. To boost morale among staff, the parent association provides monthly treats and luncheons to teachers as a way to show they are appreciated.

Oak Forest prides itself on promoting a campus climate that develops attitudes and skills of learners that maintain relationships, express empathy and make responsible decisions.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Here at Oak Forest, the staff understands that the school is the hub of a flourishing community, and that as the school nurtures neighbors, they will nurture the school in return. Immediate neighbors are acknowledged with hand delivered treats and a thank you note at the beginning of each year, knowing that traffic may impact them. Local businesses are encouraged to participate in galas and festivals, not only as sponsors but as community partners, offering support and inspiration to the campus. A college bound culture is celebrated each week, and area middle and high schools are invited to perform at events. Non profits also come to the campus to promote 21st century workforce goals, and these learning opportunities have correlated to student success in both academics and self improvement.

In turn, Oak Forest shares their talents with the community. The band performs at local events, such as parades and jazz festivals, as well as holiday and spring concerts open to the public. Peer Assistance Leadership Students (PALS) sing at neighborhood events, where the band performs as well.

Because the school is so blessed with generous neighbors, volunteers and local businesses, volunteerism is a large focus of Oak Forest. This year alone, employees and students have posted thousands of words of encouragement to each other with sticky notes, sent hundreds of holiday cards overseas to deployed soldiers, and hosted hundreds of visitors including grandparents, parents, friends, student teachers, and interns. The annual fall festival—active for over 40 years—is enjoyed by the whole community, including alumni, many of who have chosen to return to the area and raise their children here at Oak Forest.

The PALS program consists of responsible fifth graders who lead others in service projects such as collecting food for food banks, collecting donations for charities, and simply being good citizens of their community. Their spring service projects are completely student driven, and they have chosen to go out into the community and bless others at nursing homes, fire stations, and more with songs, baked goods and friendship.

And perhaps Oak Forest's largest community asset is the school's incredible Parent Teacher Association (PTA). With an active body of 460 members, these men and women offer tremendous support to the school and neighbors. They are not merely a fundraising group but a group of volunteers working together for a healthier, happier student body.

Being a part of a community involves coexisting and working together for a common good. Children are Oak Forest's common good, and the efforts of the school and community are evident in the excellence of each one of the students at Oak Forest Elementary School.

### 3. Professional Development:

The school's approach to professional development is collaborative between administration and teachers, fostering teacher leaders in cutting edge instructional practices. Professional development is thoughtfully chosen through examining the needs of students through common assessments and state test results, as well as observations of staff by administration. Furthermore, teacher feedback is vital to determine the professional development needs of the campus. This collaborative approach ensures that students' needs are met on a differentiated level, developing students into global graduates.

The district began an initiative this year where all campuses focus on producing global graduates. A global graduate is a student that is a skilled communicator, a critical thinker, and is adaptable and productive. Oak Forest's vision and professional development has always been geared towards creating global graduates by ensuring the curriculum is centered on the 21st century learner. This is accomplished by providing professional development that ties current technology into the curriculum. Training of staff focuses on online individualized lessons through the district's digital platform. Other professional development is geared towards utilizing differentiated reading and math programs on computers and tablets.

The district provides an immense amount of professional development through direct and online instruction. This campus accesses both platforms through school wide trainings and individual learning. Additionally, teachers have access to a regional education center that offers year round training on a variety of pedagogical topics. All campus training opportunities are geared toward the TEKS. Every month, the campus chooses one instructional practice from the TEKS that is also a teacher appraisal criteria to study. The district provides online training videos to examine the practice and also provides articles of successful implementation of the practice. Teachers who excel at the practice are showcased on an instructional practice bulletin board. The effect of these month long instructional practice studies have been two-fold. First, the understanding and implementation of best practices has improved for all staff members. Second, with improved instructional delivery comes deeper student comprehension of the curriculum.

One challenge that has plagued Oak Forest through the years is the lack of focus on data as a tool to drive instruction. This year, three teacher leaders were selected to man the charge as the campus data team. They prepared a two-day professional development workshop that guided teachers on best practices in relation to data and have supported teachers throughout the year during PLC time, early dismissal days and faculty meetings.

The mission as a campus is continual growth. Collaborative opportunities to plan and attend professional development is a must for students to achieve their maximum learning potential.

#### 4. School Leadership:

The leadership philosophy at Oak Forest is to offer autonomy for teachers, promote positive relationships among teachers, staff, students, campus leaders and parents, and embrace lifelong learning.

The Oak Forest Elementary administrative team consists of a principal, assistant principal, teacher specialist and magnet coordinator. Each position plays a crucial role in the success of the school. The team meets every Monday to collaborate about teachers, students, weekly goals and activities and any other timely items. The principal, as campus leader, is responsible for shaping the campus vision of academic success for all students, creating a positive campus climate, and growing leaders from within. The assistant principal is in charge of discipline and data. The teacher specialist oversees the Special Education department and students and the magnet coordinator works to ensure the Vanguard program meets all the needs of the diverse student population as well as the needs of the gifted and talented learner.

During weekly Professional Learning Communities (PLC), the administration team joins teachers to provide information and support that helps strengthen the academic achievement of students. This is done through modeling, learning, data-driven conversations and planning. The administration team also works closely with the parent association, shared decision making committee (SDMC), and the peer assistance leadership students (PALS).

The parent association plays an important role by offering events throughout the year to provide financial support for the campus, with the spring auction being one of the biggest events of the season. They also host Muffin Man Mornings twice a year, an annual fall festival and the first day of school's Boo Hoo Breakfast for first time parents. These events are able to bridge collaboration and support between the community and school and nurture strong relationships throughout the year. The SDMC meets monthly to discuss important topics regarding the school, such as safety and budget, and is comprised of administration, teachers, parents, and community members. The PALS complete community service around the neighborhood and positively promote the campus during school tours and other events.

The administration team believes that every stakeholder plays a vital role in the success of the campus. As leaders of the campus, the administration seeks to remain dedicated to the mission and vision of EMPOWERing students to excel in everything they do.

## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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At Oak Forest, the one practice that makes a significant impact on students' success is the collaboration within PLCs. PLCs increase student and teacher performance by collaboratively planning lessons, grading assignments and using formative assessments. Members of the PLCs hold each other accountable for continual campus academic improvement.

Each week the grade level teams and support staff meet weekly for a PLC. During this collaborative session, the teachers discuss the curricula and data as a team. These weekly meetings allow teachers to dissect the lesson plan guides and data, then decide what best practices and assignments will be utilized to deliver instruction the following week. Additionally, during PLCs teachers focus on four areas: using data-driven instruction that analyzes students' assignments and assessments; planning for instruction; role playing instructional delivery and feedback; and sharing methods that develop student content knowledge.

It is important for teachers to collaborate because it boosts the teachers' moral as they work as a whole to set standards for the school. The teachers leave these meetings with clear academic expectations for themselves and for their students. While the primary focus of PLCs are academic, one of the school's best initiatives came out of PLCs. The staff wanted school wide behavioral standards and vocabulary that would guide them in fostering a culture of learning, and high expectations for all, including themselves. Administration gave teachers the task of formulating which values they wanted students to exemplify academically and socially. From those meetings, seven values were agreed upon, beginning the EMPOWER values initiative.

The administration team assists in the success of the campus by actively working to make all students, parents, and staff members feel that they have a significant impact on school culture. Everyone is held accountable for his or her actions and level of ownership. The staff has created and maintained a learning environment that is responsive to the exceptional qualities of our students and teachers. Through collaboration and shared leadership, the school community embraces a vision of academic success for every student through the PLCs. Everyone is given an equal opportunity to be successful and show a consistent implementation of rules and school guidelines. The professional educator strives to create a learning environment that is nurturing to reach the full potential of all students. Oak Forest teachers and staff are life-long learners, committed to hard work and implementing practices that increase student learning.