

U.S. Department of Education
2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Paul Bailey

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

Official School Name Western Center Academy

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2345 Searl Parkway

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

City Hemet State CA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 92543-9706

County Riverside

Telephone (951) 766-9030 Fax (951) 766-0471

Web site/URL

http://www.westerncenteracademy.com/ E-mail pbailey@hemetUSD.org

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. Christi Barrett E-mail cbarrett@hemetUSD.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Hemet Unified School District Tel. (951) 765-5100

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. Vic Scavarda
(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. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
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 2011 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: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.
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 has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 14 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 8 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 6 High schools
 - 1 K-12 schools
- 29 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, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	63	66	129
7	72	64	136
8	64	65	129
9	31	32	63
10	28	41	69
11	36	26	62
12 or higher	13	13	26
Total Students	307	307	614

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 5 % Asian
 - 3 % Black or African American
 - 39 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 45 % White
 - 6 % 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 2015 – 2016 school year: 10%

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, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	23
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	24
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	47
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	471
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.100
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	10

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 31 %
Total number students who qualify: 190

8. Students receiving special education services: 3 %
14 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.

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

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 6
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	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	22
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	1
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	3
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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 32:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	98%	98%	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 2016.

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 X

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

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

Learners will be well prepared for a STEM major in college and a STEM career if they so choose.

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

The Western Center Academy is a dependent charter school of the Hemet Unified School District. As such, we follow the rules of the State of California for random lottery selection of our students. In short, there are no benchmarks, criteria, obstacles, or prerequisites to entering the lottery to attend Western Center Academy. The only advantages in the lottery (siblings of current students, employees' children, etc.) are detailed in the language from our charter copied below in Categories 1-4. An active wait-list is used to fill spots when they become available in order of number drawn during the lottery. Public Random Drawing
The WCA conducts a 60-day open enrollment period from March to April each year. Notice of the open enrollment period and the dates and times of the Parent Nights will be advertised in the recruitment materials, advertisements and forums mentioned in Element 7.

At the conclusion of the 60-day open enrollment period, all confirmed applicants are accepted unless the number of applicants exceeds the number of available spaces. Should applicants exceed capacity in any grade, a public random drawing (or "lottery") will be conducted to determine admission for the impacted grade level. Admission preferences in the case of a lottery shall be given to the following students in the following order:

Category 1 (Exempt from the Lottery): Returning students who have fulfilled and maintained their responsibilities as outlined in the WCA Student & Family Compact

Category 2 (Exempt from the Lottery): Children of WCA employees*

Category 3 (Exempt from the Lottery): Children and grandchildren of the WCA Founding Group (see page 5 of this Charter) and current members of the Western Science Center Board of Directors*

Category 4 (Exempt from the Lottery): Siblings of enrolled students in Category 1

Category 5: Residents of HUSD (weighted 2:1)

Category 6: Currently enrolled WCA students who did not fulfill and maintain their responsibilities as outlined in the WCA Student & Family Compact

Category 7: Siblings of enrolled students in Category 6

Category 8: Students currently enrolled in McSweeny Elementary School and students who reside in the McSweeny Elementary School attendance area (for purposes of the SB 740 Charter School Facilities Grant Program)

Category 9: All other students

* Students under Category 2 and Category 3 shall not exceed 10% of projected total enrollment.

PART III – SUMMARY

The Western Center Academy is a dependent charter school approved by the Hemet Unified School District and accredited by Western Association of Schools and Colleges. As a dependent charter school, our teachers are part of the local Hemet Teacher's Association, earn tenure within the district, and are placed on the same salary scale as other certificated employees in the district. Hemet Unified provides Special Education, Human Resources, ELD, and other services for the school through a mutually agreed upon Memorandum of Understanding that is renewed on an annual basis.

Hemet is a suburban community in Southwest Riverside County. The poverty level and unemployment rates are higher than average and most residents commute to other cities for work. The nearest research university is a 45-minute drive from WCA. Merely 12% of Hemet adults have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 27% statewide and 24% nationwide. Nearly 25% of Hemet adults did not complete a high school diploma.

WCA was founded in 2010 with grades 6-8 as a joint collaboration between community stakeholders, Western Science Center museum and Hemet Unified School District. WCA middle school receives nearly 3 times as many applications as there are openings. The middle school has consistently ranked a ten out of ten statewide and when compared to similar schools and performs in the top 1% of all schools in California. The success of the middle school created demand for a high school opportunity for our students. In 2014, WCA expanded to offer 9th and 10th grades and has added additional grades each subsequent year. 2017 will see our first graduating class and our students will have a 100% graduation rate, 100% college entrance requirements completion rate, and a 100% 4-year college acceptance rate.

The key component that makes WCA unique is our method of focusing on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. Our middle school students study their core subjects in the morning and in the afternoon are engaged in hands on STEM lab classes such as Computer Programming, Robotics, Archaeology, Aquatic Biology, and Engineering. Students rotate through a new lab every 9 weeks and experience 12 of these courses in their middle school years. The high school empowers students in STEM by offering additional advanced and college-level courses. Freshmen take both Honors Biology and Honors Chemistry to prepare them for either AP Biology or College Biotechnology sophomore year. Junior and senior year, they also choose from AP Environmental Science, AP Physics 1, AP Physics C, AP Chemistry, and a variety of dual-enrollment STEM courses. We accelerate our students through math beginning in 6th grade such that they may finish two years of AP Calculus before graduation.

Our school also focuses our clubs and competitive teams in the STEM areas. We are home to 6 competitive robotics teams, some of the best in the world. One of our teams ranked in the top 7 out of 4,600 teams last year at the World Championships. We have the twice best-in-the-nation Ten80 STEM Racing team. We will compete in our first Science Olympiad this year. We offer clubs such as Engineering, Computer Programming, Nature Photography, Debate, Rocketry, and more.

Since our school began in 2010, we have been graced with county and state awards. In 2013, we were honored with the status of California Distinguished Schools. In 2014, we received the Riverside County Models of Academic Excellence Award. We recently received our validation visit for a California Gold Ribbon Award.

The key to our success, as is the key to any successful school's success, is excellent teachers. The culture of our school, both the adult culture and the student culture is very attractive to local teachers. The reputation of WCA of giving teachers the freedom to be creative in their teaching and removing many of the barriers to good teaching helps us attract the best of the best. Our teachers present a technology-infused, project-based, group-led, interactive curriculum that speaks to all preferred learning styles and is well aligned with both the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards.

When students struggle at WCA, we have a host of resources available for them. Our counselor handles our 504 plans with the assistance of grade level team leads. The teams work to ensure the implementation of accommodations that help those students succeed. We have a Resource Teacher and instructional aides who

assist students with IEPs in being successful in the classroom. We have several tutors who help students in class and provide tutoring services every day at lunch and after school. When all of these interventions fail, we have a small group of students who are pulled from their STEM lab class for small group instruction and one-on-one assistance.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The City of Hemet is devoid of high-tech career opportunities, so many students lack role models or job prospects in the STEM area. That, combined with the museum nature of the campus led the original designers of the school to focus on the STEM subjects. Since then, the school's mission has been to allow students who choose to do so to become STEM majors in college and obtain a STEM career upon degree completion.

To support that mission in middle school, we accelerate the mathematics curriculum such that students can complete one or more years of calculus before graduation. Our middle school students complete honors 6th, 7th, and 8th grade mathematics as well as high school honors Algebra 1 before completing 8th grade. In high school, we continue to accelerate the mathematics with geometry, pre-calculus, AP Calculus 1, and AP Calculus 2 offered to our students. Our research has shown that this is the path that successful STEM majors must pursue in high school.

On the science side of the curriculum, middle school students take their core science class in the morning and a hands-on engaging STEM lab in the afternoon. Sixth graders take Structural Engineering, Mythbusters, Robotics, and Archaeology in our simulated dig site. Seventh graders take Global Sustainability, Aquatic Biology, Advanced Robotics, and Paleontology in the dig site. Eighth graders take Forensics, Project-Based Engineering, Computer Animation, and Civil Engineering/Computer Programming.

The science focus continues in high school where all students are accelerated with more choices as they advance in grade levels. A typical high school science course sequence looks like this: Honors Biology and Honors Chemistry in 9th Grade, AP Biology or Dual Enrollment Biotechnology in 10th Grade, AP Environmental Science or AP Chemistry in 11th Grade, and AP Physics or another of the 11th grade options in 12th Grade.

Additionally, students have access to numerous science electives through our Dual Enrollment program. They may choose from Conceptual Physics, Psychology, Geology, Astronomy, or Logic and Critical Thinking for example.

Our students also take an honors humanities sequence including World History, US History, Honors Macroeconomics, and AP Government. Many take additional dual enrollment humanities classes including Cultural Anthropology, Modern World History, Ancient World History, History of Rock and Roll, Art History and Appreciation, History and Appreciation of Music, Sociology, and American History through Cinema among others.

Our students also take an accelerated, advanced English sequence. In 9th grade, they take a course that we consider to be Pre-AP English (although it is called Honors English 9). Sophomore year, they take AP English Composition. Juniors can take either Junior English heavy in literature or AP English Literature. Seniors take two dual enrollment college English classes through the local community college, English 101 and English 103.

Our philosophy about college readiness is, "What better way to prove that they are ready for college than passing several college courses?" Before graduation, our students will have taken one or more Advanced Placement courses, one or more in-person college courses taught by a college professor, one or more in-person college courses taught by one of our teachers, and one or more online college courses. Additionally, in California, students need to complete the "a-g requirements" to apply to one of the state universities. All of our core courses are a-g approved. We do not give student the option of making the wrong decision about their future. Every one of our seniors will go well beyond the graduation and a-g requirements.

We also support strong civic learning and engagement for students. Our students are also accelerated in

their advanced Social Studies curriculum, culminating in a college history course and an AP course. In addition, our students are active in their communities through community service, the arts, and involvement in community organizations. We take our students on cultural field trips such as The Museum of Tolerance, The Pantages Theater, and art museums. Our English classes are novel-based courses and the teachers specifically focus on the holocaust and civil rights as part of the core curriculum. Students read books on these subjects, participate in Socratic Seminars, create projects, write papers, and discuss themes around the topics in the books.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

To graduate and complete the a-g requirements, California students must take one Visual and Performing Arts class. We aim to have our students exceed that number, so we offer a variety of courses many of which are dual enrollment or Advanced Placement. Many of our sophomores take either Art History or AP Art History. Our local community college offers two art courses to our students, one is a drawing class and the other is a 2-dimensional design course. Many of our students take dual enrollment Art History and/or Art Appreciation courses including History and Appreciation of Cinema, History and Appreciation of Music, and History of Rock and Roll. WCA also has a very active Theater class and program that has performed Shakespeare in the local Ramona Bowl outdoor theater as well as the historic Hemet Theater. We have offered choir to our students and the high school is home to two rock bands who practice at lunch and perform at many of our school activities.

We also believe that physical activity is important and ensure that our students are active, although not through a traditional Physical Education program. California requires that all 7th graders take the CA Physical Fitness Test and all high school students must be tested annually until they pass the exam. To pass, a student must be considered healthy in 5 out of the 6 areas. Fully 70% of our middle school and 73% of our high school tested students passed 5 out of 6 areas. In the state, those numbers are 56% and 60% respectively.

Our middle school hosts competitive athletic teams. We offer cross country, soccer, basketball, track, and volleyball. Approximately 25% of our students participate in these sports. Many others play sports outside of the school. Our high school students may play sports at their home high school and about 20% take part in this agreement. We have had athletes in nearly every sport, golf, cross country, football, baseball, soccer, softball, swim, water polo, and more who attend WCA for academics and play sports at another school. Our students have access to a field with athletic equipment at lunch and they may jump rope, play football or soccer, or dribble a basketball around.

To qualify to apply to a California university, students must take the equivalent of two years of the same foreign language. Our students take the equivalent of two years of a college foreign language. In doing so, they complete the high school graduation requirement, the a-g requirement, and likely their college general education requirement as well. We have a teacher with a degree in Spanish who helps ensure their success in the class. We have had a very high success rate with this strategy and we have alternative curriculum options in place for those who do not find success.

At our middle school, we have a combination of iPads, laptops, and Chromebooks enough for each student to use one. We use the suite of Google tools for curriculum management and communication. Beginning in 6th grade, students are instructed how to use these devices responsibly. Our high school students are each issued a Chromebook to take home to work on college courses, homework, and projects. Most of their assignments are completed in Google Docs and shared with their teachers or peers. Students may regularly be found working on their devices to film videos, edit photos, create posters, design brochures, program robots, collaborate on presentations, and many more tech-infused projects.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Because our school is located on the site of a museum, we have developed an instructional method that we refer to as “Museum Learning.” Museum Learning brings the joy of discovery to students. It models how adults learn, by researching, discussing with colleagues, and then communicating conclusions. It often takes

the form of technology-infused, project-based learning in small groups. In all subject areas, students can be found creating videos, recording newscasts, making stop-motion animations, inventing mythical creatures, making time-lapse videos of chemistry experiments, writing scripts for plays, editing digital photos, presenting posters to their peers, participating in Socratic Seminars, and performing simulations online. Classrooms are set up to facilitate group work and project-based learning with wheeled tables grouped together with the ability to easily change the setup. Often, this kind of Museum Learning work happens at the lunch tables in the piazza or out on the grass in the lunch area on a sunny day. Additionally, our high school students participate in Argument Driven Inquiry in which they design lab experiences, conduct the experiments, draw conclusions, and then use data to support their conclusions.

Our students have access to Chromebooks and all of our teachers use the suite of Google tools to communicate and collaborate with students. Homework assignments and test dates are put onto a Google Calendar that is shared with students, classroom lecture notes are uploaded to Google Drive, students collaborate on projects in Google Docs, and group messages are sent through gmail.

WCA is proud of the fact that all of our significant subgroups are performing well above district, state and national averages on CAASPP exams. Our Museum Learning methods and supports for struggling students have prevented any major achievement gaps. For example, in Language Arts, 91% of our socio-economically disadvantaged students and 93% of non-disadvantaged students scored at or above standard. In mathematics, the numbers were 71% and 77%. The largest ethnic gap we had between our highest group (Asian) and our lowest group (African American) in Language Arts was 100% and 91% respectively. For any of our gaps, the lower performing group was still well above district, state, and national averages.

When a student begins performing below standard, the school convenes a Student Study Team composed of teachers and administrators and meets with parents to develop an Academic Improvement Plan. This plan may include things like lunch or after school tutoring, Mammoth Club (after school study skills class), lab pull-out, assignment of an adult aide (for students with IEP or 504), homework planner signed daily, change of seating, extra time for tests or assignments, alternate testing environment, and more depending on the needs of the students. Every few weeks, someone from the team follows up to see if the plan is working and make adjustments as necessary. A follow-up meeting is conducted if the original plan is not successful. Sometimes, a student will be recommended for testing for Special Education services if all of our interventions fail to make the necessary difference.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Students apply to attend WCA generally for one of three reasons: the focus on STEM subjects, the engaging instruction, or the culture. We focus on and enhance those three factors to ensure that our students remain engaged and motivated.

We focus on STEM in several ways. First, our middle school lab classes are highly regarded by students and satiate their hunger for STEM. Additionally, many of our clubs and activities are centered around STEM. For clubs, we have engineering, computer programming, nature photography, videography, rockets, and more. For competitions, we have Science Olympiad, Robotics, Ten80 RC Racing, Mathletes, and CyberPatriot. Our students also participate in the district science fair. At the high school, the students participate in engineering activities such as the Cardboard Boat Regatta, Pumpkin Catapults, and Walk on Water.

Our Museum Learning approach to instruction keeps the learning active and engaging, thus keeping students excited about their learning and keeps their attendance high which also contributes to better academics. Our culture values academics over social status, athletics, or any of the other non-academic factors that tend to dominate many schools. We treat classroom minutes as sacred, discuss with students the importance of education, and we speak to them about the importance of higher education. Our small, safe environment is supported by the use of school uniforms. We have found that uniforms rid the school of much of the drama and conflicts surrounding fashion as well as helping keep our campus safe from intruders by making our students easy to recognize at a glance. We also prescribe to the broken windows philosophy that if we allow small misbehaviors, that becomes our culture and misbehaviors will grow. We reinforce the small, positive behaviors constantly and we do not tolerate negative behaviors.

Our staff and teachers feel supported and respected foremost through the academic freedom and autonomy that they are afforded. Our staff has nearly complete control over their curriculum, daily classroom lessons, and extra-curricular activities. Additionally, teachers are given time to collaborate with their peers to grow professionally and share their passions. Nearly every teacher is involved in student activities outside of their regular teaching assignment doing something that they are passionate about. Administration has created a culture of open dialog to convey mutual professional respect and to discuss potential pitfalls before they become a problem.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

WCA has a strong system of academic intervention for struggling students. We start by front-loading interventions before students begin to struggle. We have tutors available at lunch and after school daily. We have school-wide policies on makeup work, test corrections, and test retakes.

When our built-in interventions do not work, we begin an improvement process for which the first step is meeting with parents and teachers. We set up dozens of these meetings, trying to catch students early. In the meetings, we discuss homework, organization, study skills, missing assignments, test scores, etc. We create an Academic Improvement Plan with recommendations including pull-out tutoring, lunch and after school tutoring, study and organizational skills training (Mammoth Club), extra time on digital resources, signed homework calendars, and more on a case by case basis.

Three weeks after the initial Academic Improvement Plan is created, an administrator follows up with parents to see if the plan is working, grades are moving in the right direction, or if the plan needs to be modified. If the plan needs to be modified, parents and teachers are called together again to look at the data since the last meeting and make adjustments as necessary. Having the parents involved in every step of this process adds a great deal to the accuracy of the interventions applied.

In more general parent involvement, we have parents participating in most aspects of our school. We have

parents serve as mentors on our robotics teams and Ten80 racing teams. We have parents assist with our theater performances. We have parents involved in planning dances and fund-raising events through our very active PTSA. We have standing room only information meetings for incoming parents. We regularly have meetings for our high school parents regarding college entrance, financing a college education, and FAFSA completion. We do not require parents to participate, but we have many opportunities for those who wish to.

3. Professional Development:

As a dependent charter school, Western Center Academy teachers are welcome to participate in any Hemet Unified School District professional development activities. Our staff have participated in district trainings on Common Core Standards, Positive Behavior Interventions, and a series of workshops to develop district-wide lesson plans called Rigorous Curriculum Design. Our new teachers participate in Beginning Teacher Support Assessment trainings through HUSD.

Locally, the school provides training on a variety of topics through department, grade-level, and schoolwide PLC meetings weekly. Teachers have learned how to use new writing curriculum, Argument-Based Inquiry, Google tools, and new technology among other things. Teachers have also participated in book discussions, most recently on John Hattie's "Visible Learning." These professional development sessions are led by peer teachers, administrators, counselors, or representatives from the district office.

WCA teachers are also invited to participate in county, state, and national conferences, meetings, and online trainings. Recently, teachers have attended the California Science Teacher Association conference, Expository Reading and Writing training, Amgen Life Sciences Summer Institute, and numerous Advanced Placement academies.

When teachers return from these conferences, they are encouraged to share what they have learned with their colleagues at the next PLC meeting. This has a multiplying effect on the information gleaned from their experiences.

Administrators also participate in district, county, state, and national conferences. Additionally, the districts hosts all principals once per month for an entire day and assistant principals once a month for a half day for professional development. Time is spent at these meetings in job-alike groups discussing issues, learning about new programs, hearing from guest speakers, and discussing books.

4. School Leadership:

WCA has a clearly stated mission that focuses on preparing students for college and career opportunities based on student interest in STEM areas. This focus strongly correlates to the belief that although the student population of WCA faces economic and societal barriers, the mission of the school instills a personal responsibility within students to make choices that will have a lasting positive impact on their lives. The simplicity and focus of the mission statement also reflects the recommendations of the Western Center Academy's Local Control Accountability Plan the goals that are set by the Governing Council on a yearly basis. The Governing Council is made up of the following stakeholders: Western Science Center representative, STEM Community representative, College Representative and two parent representatives. Meetings occur monthly to discuss school policy and WCA's mission acts as the primary guide in effective decision-making. The principal serves as the secretary for the Governing Council and WCA staff have representation at the meetings. Hemet Unified School District also has a representative that participates in each meeting.

Staff have an active role in developing curriculum, establishing master schedules and setting budget priorities for the school. Policies, procedures and positional duties are clearly defined at the site level as well as at the governing board level. An example of these clear duties are evidenced in the role of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) to make recommendations on matters including school goals, curriculum, purchasing and staffing. The Western Center Academy Governing Council meets twelve times per year and follows an open meeting policy that encourages transparency and discourse among all

stakeholders.

WCA staff, students and parents complete surveys each year to provide feedback on school leadership practices with respect to student achievement. Administration works with the Instructional Leadership Team to use this data to modify school practices on an annual basis. WCA also provides three 60-minute blocks of professional development and collaboration time per month to focus on best practices and student achievement. The ILT has helped to design a school day that allows for minimal interruption during core academic time. This unique structure to the school day allows WCA to maximize the time for “bell to bell” learning and allow for consistent teacher planning.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

If we had to choose one factor that contributes most to our success, it would be our teachers and the instructional strategies that they use. The engaging methodologies used in the classroom contribute to increased attendance, improved morale, and greater completion of classwork and homework. These three things work together synergistically to improve student success. In addition, the strategies are excellent for learning and help prepare students for the 21st Century. Our test scores and attendance rates have continued to show that these methods are working well. We hire teachers who buy into these engaging strategies and then give them the freedom to implement them with their own dash of creativity.

Secondarily, our middle school lab classes motivate students and fulfill their interest in STEM. Students get to dig up artifacts in our simulated archaeology/paleontology dig site, they build robots and program them to complete tasks, they raise fish and learn to care for them and measure their growth, they become detectives using forensic examination to solve simulated crimes, and many more engaging, hands-on activities. In their MythBusters lab, students crush watermelons with rubber bands, make diet coke volcanoes, and repeat many of the experiments that they have seen their STEM role models perform on television. Most students come to WCA because they are interested in the STEM subjects and this is one of the main ways that we satisfy their interests.

Third, our culture has a great impact on our success. Our teachers do not spend time dealing with behavior issues in class because our academic-focused culture makes negative behaviors out of the norm. Students do not miss school because they are stressed out over being bullied or harassed and our students' emotional health and well-being is high.

We believe that it is these things (excellent teachers, focus on academics, engaging instruction, and a small, safe culture) that have led to our success. Our first graduating class has validated that our methods are working and their success in college will be our measure of our ultimate success.