

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. Jeff Hawkins

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

Official School Name The Connect Charter School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 104 East 7th Street

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

City Pueblo State CO Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 81003-4109

County Pueblo

Telephone (719) 542-0224 Fax (719) 545-9799

Web site/URL http://www.connectschool.org E-mail jeffhawkins@connectschool.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*Mr. Ed Smith E-mail esmith@district70.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Pueblo County School District 70 Tel. (719) 542-0220

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 Mrs. DeAnne Atteberry
(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):
- 11 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 6 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 4 High schools
 - 2 K-12 schools
- 23 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	48	48	96
7	43	52	95
8	24	53	77
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	115	153	268

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 6 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 32 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 62 % White
 - 0 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2015 – 2016 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, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	4
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	270
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.015
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 4 %
Total number students who qualify: 12

8. Students receiving special education services: 0 %
1 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

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

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 10
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	3
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	12
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.	0
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

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	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	98%	97%	98%	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

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

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

Our mission is to create and sustain an equitable, intellectually vibrant, and personalized school.

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

The Connect Charter School is a grades 6, 7, and 8 college preparatory charter school. Our school employs an open enrollment policy. Students may register and be placed on a waiting list and then be enrolled via a first come, first served basis. Parents generally place their students on our waiting list several years before enrollment, most before age 7.

PART III – SUMMARY

The Connect School is not your ordinary school. We believe in and practice a few essential principles the main one being that we are student centered. Our budget reflects our student-centered philosophy. We are a top school in the state in testing English/Language Arts, Math, Social Studies and Science. We close gaps because we know the fundamentals and teach them well. We provide before and after school tutoring for those needing the extra assistance. We build the whole child through academics, leadership, and life skills. We take teaching seriously and passionately. Our model works. We have received the John Irwin Award for schools that demonstrate excellent academic achievement every year since the program began in 2002. We just received the Colorado Governor's Distinguished Improvement Award; an indicator of longitudinal academic growth and a 100% score on the indicator related to academic growth gaps. And, this year we are honored to be nominated by our state to receive the National Blue Ribbon School. As Colorado's first Charter School, The Connect Charter School opened its doors to 69 students on September 9, 1993. We are now the home of 270 students grades six, seven, and eight. Our students come from all areas of the city and county from over twenty elementary schools. We are a diverse group both economically and socially. Our location, in the heart of downtown Pueblo, is in School District 60, but we are chartered by adjoining District 70. Over the past twenty-four years we have managed our growth for the benefit of our students because small schools allow every student to be known and they work better. We use our downtown location as a central part of our curriculum. We see our location as providing a City as Campus opportunity that provides real life growth experiences in an urban environment. Students learn to be safe and strong in today's challenging world. We host the police to a luncheon in our school. The businesses around us rave about our student's presence and behavior. They say we bring life to the area as we go out to lunch and walk to all of our activities.

Many of our students are placed on our waiting list at early ages, some younger than one year old. Parents understand that our waiting list is first come, first served. They are committed parents from all walks of life who want the best education for their children. Pueblo is still a blue color town and our district is one of the lowest funded public school districts in the state, but our city and county take pride in its youth and our school plays some role in that pride. We serve as a model of excellence. Our school been visited by newspapers from Virginia and Canada. The Democratic National Committee sent a team to study our school. We have been featured many times in our local newspaper and called "Pueblo's Super School." The Connect School thrives on excellent planning, talented teachers and appropriate technology. Our students enjoy a rich mix of instructional techniques. Our mornings are spent in traditional classroom settings mastering core skills. At noon, we transition to Connections (home room) and afternoon block classes where we practice and apply our skills in labs, simulations, field trips, exhibitions, science, and social studies. Class formats are the same for each subject. They stay the same each year. Once students know how the class operates, they can focus on learning. We use multiage grouping except for math. Multiage grouping allows students to grow faster, older students help teach and motivated students work toward higher grade level standards. We have before and after school tutoring in the core subjects. This tutoring (both short-term and long-term) is centered on our curriculum and skills needed to be successful. We are highly inclusive. All students are allowed to do everything, from answering the phone to running the schools copier. Our Connections class is a three-year homeroom for students. In Connections they find a teacher allied with their parents. Strong communication with parents is one of our highest goals and our Connections class, our monthly newsletters, our class guides, and our Friday reports all serve to inform and include our parents. Inclusive activities include: a semiformal winter lunch and dance, end of the year trip, graduation /dance, many field trips, a charm school (where students learn social etiquette, dress for success, and phone etiquette), S.T.E.M. challenges, engineering competitions, music, the arts, foreign languages, SAT practice, step aerobics, yoga, computer classes, History Day, and others. Students thrive in a safe, respectful, stimulating environment of the workshop-shop model, teacher as coach approach. The multiage classroom provides academic growth possibilities beyond those of the traditional classroom. The curriculum is rotated on a three-year basis (except for math) allowing the whole school to move through it together. We are truly on a journey together that bonds the students and staff. We are gratified that so many students have been successful and "thanked us" over the last twenty-four years and look forward to continuing the tradition. We are Connect!

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The Connect School curriculum is designed for the maximum benefit of students. Morning classes consist of reading, math, and writing. A class called connections serves as a transition to the afternoon block classes of social studies and science. Friday we flip the day with enrichment classes in the morning and reading writing, and math in the afternoon.

READING is a daily one-hour morning class. All reading classes are integrated grades 6, 7, and 8 with approximately equal numbers from each grade level. Junior Great Books Round Table (Books 1, 2, and 3) are taught one per year on a rotating basis. The program fits common core standards perfectly. Over the years we have added our own methodology of taking side notes (the students write responses and analysis directly in the textbook), which includes eleven elements of literature. We use SRA Spelling Mastery as our spelling program. At the end of each nine weeks a project is completed based on one of the books read that quarter. Thursday is school seminar day. Students are given a question to be answered by shared inquiry within the round table circle. They must cite at least two references. After three rotations in their three years at Connect, we produce top long lasting and high-level foundational skills in critical reading and discussion. Weekly before school tutoring is provided. Proficiency indicator tests aligned to state standards are given each quarter.

WRITING is also a one-hour morning class, and is integrated with grades 6, 7, and 8. Each day begins with Daily Oral Language and a mini lesson. Mini lesson topics vary throughout the year. Topics (supported by Write Source) include grammar, punctuation, poetry, sentence composition, dialogue, and outlining. Students follow the Writers Workshop writing process for all pieces they produce and file all pieces in their writing folders. The teacher and student keep track of the individual skills he/she has acquired, as well as the completed writing pieces. Types of writing include: Creative writing, Goals, and Assigned writing. Students complete eight writing pieces per quarter. Writing classes use the computer labs almost daily. Students must follow the writing process (plan, first draft, revise, second draft, self-edit, teacher edit, and final draft) and meet with the teacher as required for revising. Generally, twice every nine weeks students complete a grammar and punctuation review and test. Points for each writing piece are given for meeting the criteria and deadlines. Proficiency indicators include paragraph writing, essay writing, poetry, grammar, punctuation, and usage all of which are aligned to state standards.

MATH (Saxon COURSE 2, Saxon COURSE 3, Saxon ALGEBRA 1) MONDAY-FRIDAY: Students complete a Problem Set (lesson) a day in math. Tests are given on material from 4-5 lessons behind where students are currently at in their math books. This gives students a chance to master the material before being tested on it. Students must use pencil for assignments and tests. Daily notes are required to be recorded in notebooks. Work must be shown on all problems Proficiency indicator tests are given prior to the PARCC test and are aligned to state standards. Advanced students may test up a grade and take Saxon Geometry in their 8th grade year.

SOCIAL STUDIES AND SCIENCE (AFTERNOON BLOCKS 1:00-3:30): These classes are integrated with grades 6, 7, and 8. They meet twice each week. The extended period allows for experiments to be completed, field trips taken, guest speakers, research, and continuity in the topic being studied. Each subject involves its own set of skills. Science uses the CPO Science textbook series for middle school. Students rotate between physical science, biology, and earth science topics each year over their 3 years at Connect. The power of this idea is that they revisit the skills of each discipline every year. CPO features equipment and software supporting inquiry-based hands-on teaching of integrated math, science, and technology.

Social studies uses a similar approach rotating pre history to Civil War, Civil War to present, and government and citizenship in the third year of the rotation. We use History of Our Nation by Prentice Hall because it supports skills in geography, economics, history, and civics. We also use Nystrom's Atlas of World History and Nystrom's Atlas of the United States. Both classes are closely aligned to state standards.

CIVIC LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT: Our location at the heart of our city gives us tremendous opportunities for civic learning and engagement. We feature a City as Campus program. City as Campus involves our students in every venue in our city. Our favorites are: the Arts Center (2 blocks away: dance, art, displays, and theater program), El Pueblo Museum (5 blocks away: We did a fundraiser to move a large section of Pueblo's historic "Hanging Tree" into the museum, and we participated in the early excavation of the El Pueblo Fort.), YWCA (1 block away: We do fundraisers, toy drives and, coat drives for women and families in need.), Care and Share (7 blocks away: We do food drives and fund raisers.), and Pueblo's No Kill animal shelter (We fund raise and donate rugs for the dogs to sleep on.) We welcome speakers from every level of city and county government. We hoist a luncheon for the Pueblo Police Department. The list can go on and on, but the idea is deep and ongoing student and whole school involvement in our community.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

CONNECTIONS/Leadership (11:45 - 1:00 this includes 30 minutes for lunch) One day a week out to lunch (generally Taco Bell, Wendy's, and Subway). One day a week make-up work and clean the school. One day a week keyboarding tutorial-Ultra Key. One day a week Activity Day (includes bowling and ice skating - once a month). One day a week (every third week) leadership. Leadership class competitions include cleaning Olympics, door decorating, food drive, toy drive, manners, chess, typing, bowling, and special yearly competitions. Connections classes receive points for placing in each competition, and the winning Connections class receives a pizza party. Students are in the same Connections Class for all three years. Their teacher gets to know them very well and becomes their mentor and guides. No grades in Connections. This class is one of the most important for teaching social and leadership skills. Each class elects a representative and an alternate for student council. They have class discussions and have input into school activities through their representative. The many competitions teach the importance of planning, cooperation, and how to win and lose. Students also learn to be less self-conscious because everyone looks silly in a vacuum race. Cleaning and respect for your workplace and others in an important leadership skill. At noon the students clean the school, vacuuming, dusting, sweeping, cleaning tables, and dumping the trash. It is their school and they care for it. We do community service (toy drive, food drive, coat drive, fund drives for local museums and the animal shelter). The most important aspect of Connections is the three year relationships that teachers build with their students. Many tears are shed at graduation because the teachers get to know their students so well and the students are grateful for the advocacy the teacher provides in parent conferences and helping students build a yearly portfolio.

Connect School students lead by example. Our work is strong and accurate and beautiful. We are proud of what we do, and proud of how we respect both others and ourselves. We produce responsible, courteous, and trustworthy student citizens. Connections helps make all of that possible. Specific literacy skills include research, speaking, computer literacy, scientific literacy, mechanical literacy, and citizenship. Activities include Keyboarding and Technology, Exit Exam, History Day, Chess, S.T.E.M., and test taking. Over half of our students take the National SAT EXAM through Rocky Mountain Talent Search. Our students are taught social dancing, and we have two semi-formal dances with all students participating. We also teach drivers education (the written exam) and a sewing class. Our foreign language classes introduce French, Italian, and Spanish. Yoga, dance, and step aerobics are taught and practiced. Music and art classes give needed skills in learning to appreciate the arts. Connections classes tour the local arts and conference center twice a year.

One of the missions of The Connect School is to introduce students to a broad array of experiences, skills, and activities. Connections, Leadership, and Life Skill classes provide connections to the real world outside the classroom. These connections are a large part of the reason our students do so well in high school, college, and careers. When you are confident and prepared you can do anything. Connect School Students are not your ordinary students.

Friday Morning-Enrichment Classes (8:30-11:50) The Friday morning Enrichment classes are each 45 minutes long and include the following: Fitness, Computers, Geography, Music, Foreign Language (Spanish/ French/Italian one per year), Life Skills, and Art. Students will study Art, Life Skills, Geography and Music one semester. Grades are Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. Attendance is part of the student's grade as well as project completion or quizzes. Reports are required for students missing more than 3 Friday

Enrichment classes during the year. All students take all classes.

EXHIBITIONS (Generally Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/ Thursday, October - February) This class is a research based class in which students will write a two-page research paper, prepare and give a two minute speech, and working with an assigned group, build an exhibit board proving the group thesis. The final letter grade is based on a rubric, which covers all components of the class. Exhibitions is our signature program and is detailed in part VI.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Our success as a school and a community can be attributed to our detailed planning and uniform instruction. We use many instructional methods during the day and year. In spelling we practice direct instruction, in math we use the Saxon approach, in reading we all use shared inquiry and Socratic questioning, in science we challenge our students with experimental design reports involving a broad skill set, and in social studies we model effective citizenship, critical thinking, and research skills. Our leaders and teachers are generalists first. They are specialists second. They take on multiple obligations as teachers, counselors, and managers. We are committed to the entire school. There are no teachers doing their own thing behind a closed door. We are coaches and the students are workers. Through our tutoring program and our classroom interventions, we provide our students intensive support and the resources they need to succeed. In order to assure that all content and skills are taught and assessed in a timely and orderly manner, all classes have a pacing guide calendar (pacing guide), which all teachers in that subject are expected to follow. In addition, because Connect classrooms are multi-aged we use differentiated grading. However, for advanced students, the higher grade level expectations can be given as assessment goals. Our teachers produce detailed curriculum notebooks, which are used for reference in our three-year rotation and are essential for training of new staff.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

A great school defines its expectations and builds strong traditions. We call the process connecting the dots. When you walk into our building you see happy students in an open environment doing meaningful things. Here is how we successfully build the whole child. Connect School students move on to higher education with exceptional academic skills. We emphasize mastery level skills in reading, writing and mathematics. We feature multiage grouping. Our processes and procedures provide focus and strengthen the school community. We are one of the top schools in the state in all core academic areas. We received a 100% score for academic achievement, student growth, and bridging achievement gaps. We honor our students with a great deal of responsibility and we expect them to live up to this honor. Rather than seeing school as a task or job, students are given the responsibility to carry out academic projects, identify and use specific skills, produce exhibitions, and reflect on their work and their learning. We have created a “Library of Excellence” area to display student work, projects, community service, and leadership. The Connect School practices a tone of trust, decency, and excellence. We are aware, courageous, disciplined, we value knowledge, and we have fun. As a school we share these values. The students, teachers, staff, and leaders all model them. High expectations, fairness, generosity and tolerance are very important to our school. We reinforce our values program with our “Cowboy Ethics” class and our association with the nearby Center for American Values. Outlined in part IV, leadership and life skills classes and experiences give students a step up in their education and careers. Connect School students understand the foundational importance of achievement and learning at a high level. They leave Connect prepared for high school honors classes, early college, and advanced placement. They have clear high school and college goals. We use Colorado Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) a career readiness program starting in 6th grade, to develop career pathways to be college and career ready. The goal of education is the effective use of acquired understanding, knowledge, and skills. There are only a small number of important long-term transfer goals in each subject area. Transfer skills are performance based, occur in new situations, and require a certain amount of student autonomy. Connect School emphasizes the teaching of transfer skills.

VALUING AND SUPPORTING TEACHERS: Our environment and our culture are dedicated to great teaching. We all (principal, directors, and deans included) teach in the classroom or in special projects and school leadership and life skill programs. We plan together and execute our curriculum as a group. We support and empower our teachers. We build beautiful things together. We mentor and support our Emerging Teachers in all areas (classroom management, planning, and instruction). Our Professional Teachers build a solid foundation for instruction and help to build and maintain curriculum and our skills based leadership and life skills programs. Our Lead Teachers mentor and share their skills and knowledge. Our Deans (products of our career pathway) schedule, plan, teach, and innovate. We are generalists and we all support the entire school. Our resources are focused on our students and our teachers. We budget for well supplied classrooms and extensive hands on activities. Our professional development is focused on our mission and helps us all discover our talents and feel fulfilled.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Connect Is More Than A School, It’s A Community. For us engaging is the same as connecting. The Connect School design incorporates the Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools as well as our own philosophy of education centered upon the building of connections. We offer a strong grounding in the basics, because reading, writing, and mathematics are tools, which connect all learning. And, we provide sophisticated connections to the world of information and technology. We constantly use our technology to travel the world and study our city and who we are. We connect to our community by being in the center of downtown, and by acting appropriately in an adult world. To quote a local businesswoman we “bring life to downtown”. It is important to say thank you, to give up your place in line to an elderly person, or open a door for someone. We use the term City as Campus because our surroundings shape our thoughts, emotions, and actions. Downtown is an interesting place full of learning opportunities and experiences. Located on Santa Fe Avenue in the heart of Pueblo, The Connect School is surrounded by rich educational and cultural opportunities. The Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Center, El Pueblo

Museum, Rosemount Museum, the Rawlings Library, Mineral Palace Park, Pueblo Plaza Ice Arena, the Historic River Walk, and various government and commercial buildings are used to enrich the curriculum and provide students with physical and cultural activities including skating and bowling. One does not have to be in school to be in class. We engage our community by inviting the police department to a luncheon in our school, and by inviting parents, families, and our community to Exhibitions day. We directly involve our community by training judges for History Day, by sharing our portfolios with our parents, and by inviting our families to parents' night and 6th grade orientations. Parents work with the school by arranging to bring their child to school early or have them stay late to attend tutoring in a subject either for the whole school year (if they have not met proficiency) or a shorter period of time when skills are learned. We train our staff and students to be very helpful and inviting to parents and guests. We learn proper manners in our charm school that students promptly share with their parents and siblings. Our planners and newsletters are of great benefit to our parents communicating all activities and expectations and we receive their help in return. We treat each other and our guests with respect and dignity. We expect nothing less.

3. Professional Development:

A great school has to have an energetic, committed, and well trained staff. We have been successful with 75% of our teachers scoring highly effective on the state evaluation rating.

The Connect School provides Connect School-specific development programs for its faculty. The Connect School has spent many years developing and refining its highly effective culture, curriculum, and structure. We are not an ordinary school. We are a safe, supportive, nurturing school where habits of the mind and habits of the heart are taught and practiced in a student-centered environment. Our teacher and administrative training provides the resources and programs that support and sustain this vision. We begin our next year's planning on the last day of the school year. Training continues on select dates during the summer and is maintained throughout the year. Short (15 minute) point meetings are used to focus on important tasks and give feedback on our successes. Training is a part of our culture and our evaluation process. The Connect School is unique in its emphasis on planning and curriculum mapping with pacing calendars. Rigorous and relevant curriculum maps are developed and followed for every class and specific knowledge and skills are tied to core standards and measured by state and national testing and the SAT.

Nine weeks planners are shared with parents. We team plan on Friday mornings in all core areas. We have staff development days dedicated to training in specific skills and needs. We use short point meetings to present and train for upcoming events and activities. Our classroom observations by lead teachers and administrators are helpful and supportive of both the teachers and our program. Three areas of our curriculum and assessment require special and ongoing training. Exhibitions is foreign to all teachers and requires the most training. Teachers are provided with an Exhibitions notebook that details every part of our process. Summer training involves selection of topics and an introduction to our framework. Teachers are helped and guided every step of the way with point meetings and training along the way. The most difficult part is that the Exhibitions require deep research and analysis of that research. It generally takes a minimum of three years for teachers to feel comfortable with the process. Similar training is required to train the teacher as coach model to guide students in building their portfolio and in preparation for their Exit Exam. Both require deep knowledge of the whole school curriculum and the skill set required of the student. This is why we hire generalists.

4. School Leadership:

The Connect School is a mature school with outstanding programs and proven results. We continually review our programs and reflect on our performance. We are successful because we find what works and we stay the course. Our summer planning and training efforts serve to evaluate and refresh our excellent program. We believe in continuous improvement. Our leadership is responsible for sustaining our program and our processes. Our clear expectations are powered by thoughtful and disciplined execution. A great school knows what it wants to achieve for its students and how it can do that. This takes excellent leadership to maintain and polish all that we do. While many schools rely on a single leader, The Connect School relies on depth in leadership. We have a broad leadership team, including our Academic

Coordinator, Operations Coordinator, Instructional Principal, Deans, and Lead teachers. Everyone on our team, including the secretaries and custodians are highly involved. Using current management models we make the process of communication, collaboration, and support highly effective. We are able to provide a broad range of high quality educational experiences and activities essential to our student centered approach. Effective leadership depends on the quality of staff. Great teachers want to teach in great schools. They want stability and an exciting and effective instructional design. Teachers are drawn to strong school leadership and they want to learn from those who lead them. They value our motivated students and our whole child emphasis. Connect school teachers are generalists committed to the students and the school. Our teachers believe in the school's mission and vision, and through their dedicated leadership, make them attainable. Continual and relevant assessment of system effectiveness is one of the most important duties of leadership, and we use several tools. Grades: The Connect School uses classroom grading to document academic process. We do not give group grades and we do not give zeros for work not done. Grades matter and all students do all of the work. Exhibitions: The Connect School uses a long-term, project called Exhibitions, in which students demonstrate mastery of skills and content in a very challenging and informative way. They learn to understand themselves as learners, learn how to work with others, and how to effectively communicate their ideas. Exhibitions is a key element in an Essential School.

State Testing: The school and parents need to know how a Connect School education ranks compared to others in Colorado and the nation. The Connect School excels in high stakes testing. We are currently ranked third in the state overall and first in the state in both reading, and writing.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The Connect School does many things well but the one practice that best reflects our great student outcomes is Exhibitions. Exhibitions is at its heart a very authentic demonstration of mastery. It reflects our school vision (Learning to use one's mind well, Depth over coverage, Goals apply to all students, Personalization, and Demonstration of mastery). Exhibitions is a four-month process of research, writing, crafting, and presentation that ensures engagement among students, staff and the larger community. Exhibitions are performance-based assessments that are visible, public demonstrations of mastery completed over many months. Because to the depth required, we depend on participation of people from outside the school community as mentors, resources, and judges. We use the National History Day theme (for example, Taking a Stand in History) because it provides the components of completion at the school, state, and national level. At Connect every student participates fully. All work is done at school so the student's work is authentic and personal. All of our classes are strengthened through the exhibitions process. Students at Connect begin their journey in October, and continuing for about 15 weeks. Students at Connect conduct original research through the use of primary and secondary sources. Synthesizing information is required. 8th grade students who have received advanced scores are given choices of projects to choose from (web page, documentary, extended papers, individual exhibits, or performances). All other students work in groups of four to conduct research and complete a group exhibit. In addition to the project, students working on the group exhibit, write a research paper, a process paper, and give a speech. On Exhibitions Day in early February, after countless interactions and mockups, students display and present their projects for peers, family, and the community at large, at the local Arts and Conference Center in Pueblo. Every student gives his or her speech and explains their research and results. Students say that Exhibitions prepares them very well for high school and college presentations and research. Those who many years later visit our school, still remember their Exhibitions Project. Exhibitions extends throughout the year as many of their projects compete in Colorado History Day in Pueblo and later in Denver. Our state winners compete in June at National History Day in College Park Maryland. At nationals, one of our teams won a trip to Ireland where they met the prime minister. We have finished as high as third for a documentary on Dr. Seuss, and sixth for display board on Seeing Eye Dogs.