

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mrs. Dara Arrington

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

Official School Name Gunter Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 200 West Elm Street P.O. Box 109

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

City Gunter State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 75058-0109

County Grayson County

Telephone (903) 433-5315 Fax (903) 433-1184

Web site/URL http://www.gunterisd.org E-mail jsiler@gunterisd.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. Jill Siler E-mail jsiler@gunterisd.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Gunter Independent School District Tel. (903) 433-4750

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 Dr. Gary Harris
(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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 3 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	28	19	47
K	21	19	40
1	37	34	71
2	26	25	51
3	33	19	52
4	35	17	52
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	180	133	313

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 27 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 68 % White
 - 3 % 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: 13%

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	20
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	21
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	41
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	325
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.126
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	13

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 17%
57 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 37%
Total number students who qualify: 123
8. Students receiving special education services: 7%
22 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.

- 2 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 2 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 4 Other Health Impaired
- 3 Specific Learning Disability
- 18 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 1 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	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	19
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	4
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	4
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 17:1
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	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 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.

GES will empower every student to attain an exceptional education that challenges them to exceed their own expectations and provides a foundation for success in life.

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

PART III – SUMMARY

Gunter Elementary School (GES) is located 50 miles north of Dallas and 27 miles south of the Oklahoma border. A traditional farming town, Gunter was founded in 1901 when the family of rancher “Jot” Gunter deeded 328 acres for the original town site. The population of Gunter is about 1500 but as the metroplex continues to sprawl north, the town anticipates growing very quickly in the coming years. Gunter Independent School District (GISD) is 66 square miles and many of its residents drive far distances to work in order to have the quality of life that Gunter offers. It is a tight-knit community that is centered on (and known for) its exceptional schools.

GES is home to 335 students ranging from pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) to 4th Grade. With over 40% of the student population designated “at-risk,” 37% as low-socioeconomic status, and nearly 20% as English Language Learners (ELL), the staff takes great pride in caring for, supporting and challenging every student. GISD is an open-enrollment district, nearly 20% of which is student transfers from neighboring districts. The reason listed in nearly every transfer application is academic excellence. High expectations and academic excellence are nothing new to Gunter – they are a legacy. With just 4 superintendents in the past 75 years for the district and 3 GES principals in the last 60 years, Gunter is a place where people want to be! This can be seen across the teaching staff as turnover is minimal and openings are coveted by outsiders.

This legacy of committed teachers and leaders has led to unbelievable academic success! In 2016 alone, nearly 95% of all 3rd and 4th grade students exceeded expectations on the state assessment (96% in 3rd grade reading and math; 96% in 4th grade reading; 98% in 4th grade math and 94% in 4th grade writing). As a result, GES received Distinction Designations in Academic Achievement in Mathematics, Post-Secondary Readiness and Top 25% Closing the Gaps. Over the past 4 years, GES has received 9 Distinction Designations. Prior to the current accountability system, GES earned the highest rating of Exemplary in 8 of the past 8 years, also earning 32 Gold Star Acknowledgements.

The philosophy of GES is “all in.” The staff does whatever it takes to make each child successful academically, emotionally, physically and socially. Surrounding schools often visit GES to see why these students are so successful. More often than not, visitors leave surprised; there is no magic bullet, no one “program” in which to attribute success. The classrooms are not fancy and students do not have technological devices to use throughout the day. What they have, though, is extremely powerful. GES teachers love and care for their students. They show up early to prepare for their own day so that they can be fully engaged during morning tutoring. They stay late to help with Homework Club and the After-School Care program. They provide weekend backpacks filled with food for families in need and help get school supplies to every child before the school year starts. GES teachers plan together to effectively teach the state standards while setting high expectations and holding students accountable by measuring individual mastery. GES teachers also thoughtfully plan and execute intervention strategies to fill the gaps for students who are struggling by working with them in small groups during morning tutorials and in small conferencing groups throughout the day. The entire staff is committed to teaching students what it means to be part of the “AMBUSH,” or family of tigers, through purposefully teaching character education daily in their classes. Most of all, they love to teach and make school fun!

The philosophy of “all in” also means the GES staff is committed to each student from pre-k to graduation. The elementary students attend GHS pep rallies to cheer on the Gunter Tigers; Gunter Middle School (GMS) and GHS students involved in athletics, band, FFA and other extracurricular activities visit GES to encourage students to work hard and go after their dreams; and every year, the senior class marches through the hallways of GES in their cap and gown to shake every young student’s hand. GES believes that these activities not only help develop students emotionally and socially, they introduce them to the culture of excellence that every Gunter Tiger strives for. The goal is not just about present-day achievement; but rather, long-term, life-preparing success!

While academic performance has consistently been stellar at GES, the leadership saw that students were struggling with readiness at the kindergarten level. The campus broadened the typical half-day pre-k class for qualifying four-year old students to a wide-ranging program that offered half-day, full-day, and

extended-day options for both qualifying students and tuition-based students that was open to both three-year old and four-year old students. This transition has significantly improved academic and social readiness for kindergarten students.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The curriculum for all instruction at Gunter Elementary School (GES) is the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The TEKS drive the district's scope and sequence for each course as well as the selection of instructional resources for implementation at every grade level. GES teachers are well-versed in the depth and complexity of student expectations, both horizontally and vertically. They work diligently to construct engaging lessons with researched instructional strategies to provide every student an opportunity to master the curriculum. Teachers monitor student mastery of the TEKS through unit- and teacher-created assessments and utilize this data to adjust their instruction.

A balanced literacy approach is used to teach English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) beginning with pre-k and continuing through 4th grade. Instilling a love of reading is started early through the introduction of various genres, visits to the school library and community library, author studies and author video-chats. Teachers explicitly teach key reading skills within the TEKS such as identifying the main idea, inferencing, drawing conclusions, and vocabulary in context utilizing a variety of genres. Guided reading is used to help students with their independent reading and to select an appropriate book for school-wide reading homework. Intensive phonics instruction is conducted in kindergarten through 2nd grade. This provides all students with a strong beginning in phonemic and phonological awareness as well as decoding which supports fluency. Integration of science and social studies non-fiction texts is a key part of grade-level reading instruction, providing an opportunity for students to utilize reading skills alongside science and social studies TEKS. Student reading progress is monitored regularly using a computer-based program with input from teacher-created, curriculum-based assessments. Struggling students are provided intervention through inclusion support, tutoring with their classroom teacher or interventionist, after school support with classroom teacher, and research-based activities through Response to Intervention (RTI). Students who have been identified as dyslexic or having a reading disability participate daily in a multi-sensory teaching approach program. Writing instruction is an integral part of reading instruction at GES. Teachers and students understand that writers read and readers write. Five-page books, journals, group writing, pen pals, created books, newspaper articles and research presentations all play a key role in teaching students the mechanics of writing, punctuation, as well as editing and revising skills.

In order to meet the TEKS requirement of rigor and application in mathematical processes, number and operations, algebraic reasoning, geometry and measurement, teachers provide hands-on learning activities, small-group instruction, whole-group instruction, and emphasize mathematical vocabulary. This varied curricular approach was chosen in order to provide an opportunity for students to grasp, apply, and master the TEKS in real life situations. Teachers use state-adopted textbooks, music, manipulatives, and teacher-created material to develop engaging lessons. Consistency is practiced by all grades in teaching problem-solving strategies through vertical teaming. Student progress is monitored through nine-week TEKS mastery assessments.

GES teachers instill long-term learning and interdisciplinary connections through the integration of Science and Social Studies TEKS into ELAR. Both subjects are alternately taught every two or three weeks to assure deep-focused learning on the concepts being covered. Social Studies instruction is guided by the district scope and sequence based on the TEKS focusing on history, geography, economics, government, citizenship and culture. Non-fiction trade books as well as textbooks, videos, and online resources are utilized. Students participate in multiple community outreach and service projects to increase their understanding of civic duty including the "Back the Blue" project, the community park build, the Veteran Project where students interviewed local veterans and invited them to be a part of a musical presentation that highlighted their learning of the multiple branches of the military. Teachers strive to provide enrichment opportunities for students through field trips, guest speakers, and video chats. This civic engagement-focused curricular approach was chosen to create a passion for serving the community.

Science instruction is a rich blend of inquiry-based learning supported by reading and writing opportunities based on the district scope and sequence for the TEKS in each grade level. This curricular approach guided

by hands-on experiments at each grade level helps build a foundation and love for science. A mix of non-fiction texts and digital media is utilized to support instruction. Topical vocabulary is explicitly taught at every grade level in order to ensure all students are provided with the understanding needed to access rigorous content.

Gunter Elementary School offers a pre-k class for 3-year-old and 4-year-old children. The Texas pre-k guidelines, which align to the TEKS, are implemented to provide readiness for success in kindergarten and subsequent grades. The goal of the pre-k classroom is to provide experiences and instruction for the whole child that are developmentally appropriate. Teachers utilize state-adopted instructional materials and research-based supplemental material (including technology) to immerse the student in literacy, numeracy, language and social engagement during whole group, small group, and play centers. Students who participate in the pre-k program begin kindergarten academically, socially, and emotionally better prepared.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

GES understands the importance providing opportunities for students to develop into well-rounded people. A large part of this development comes from non-core curriculum areas such as music, art, physical education (P.E.), nutrition and health, technology, and character education. Just as with the core curriculum, the TEKS drive instruction, activities, and projects in these areas.

Fine Arts is divided into three parts: music, theater arts, and art. Music is taught to all students for 45 minutes on a rotation with P.E. Students learn the history of various genres and time periods of music. Students learn foundational concepts of musical literacy within the TEKS such as the importance of melody, rhythm, scale, and timing. Students are given the opportunity to apply many cross-curricular learnings such as math, social studies, and science into the lessons. Students participate in productions that incorporate theater arts TEKS of performance and production as well as music TEKS. Performances are held for the campus and for the community at GES. These productions are always “standing room only.” Art TEKS are integrated into all disciplines at all grade levels. Students are introduced to famous artists and art through reading and social studies. During college and career week, artists and art-related jobs are discussed and researched. Through the campus PTO, an elementary art show is planned for students, parents, and the community. Student artwork created at school and at home is displayed for all to see, allowing students the opportunity to display their creative expression.

Kindergarten through 4th grade students participate in P.E., health and nutrition 45 minutes every other day. During this time, students focus on developing lifelong skills such as working cooperatively in teams to accomplish a goal, the importance of sportsmanship, and how to live a healthy lifestyle. In P.E., the TEKS focus is on movement, physical activity and health and social development. Students learn the sports of bowling, badminton, tumbling, and others they may choose to play during their varsity years. Through the physical fitness program, students have an opportunity to participate in a jump-rope-for-heart and a skate-a-thon to raise funds for national and local non-profit organizations. Kindergarten through 3rd grade participate in an additional 30 minutes of health and nutrition. This is taught by the school nurse and P.E. teacher. Students learn about personal hygiene, safety at home and school, communicable diseases and heart health. Students also learn about nutrition, the food pyramid, food groups, and healthy eating from the TEKS standards. Nutritional resources are provided by the district food service department.

The technology applications TEKS drive the technology instruction students receive. All students receive instruction in the computer lab between 120-150 minutes per week, and have opportunities to use technology in their classroom. Students receive instruction on TEKS such as digital citizenship, communication and collaboration. Students learn how to digitally search for information and organize it using presentation software or word documents. Interactive whiteboards are in each classroom to engage students and provide visual representations for ELL's. Younger students have access to iPads in centers and classroom computers to practice skills in reading, math, and spelling. Older students utilize Chromebooks in the classroom and also have access to classroom computers, which they utilize for skill practice and projects. Online audio reading access has been extremely beneficial to students identified as dyslexic or having reading difficulties.

Character education is an additional curriculum area in which all Gunter Elementary students participate. TEKS that focus on personal and interpersonal skills, decision making, and personal responsibility throughout the disciplines are addressed during this time. The character education program also focuses on positive character traits, school pride, and manners. Students receive instruction in character education in a variety of ways during the school week. Kindergarten through 3rd grade attend a rotating specials period with health and nutrition. In addition to this time, all students in pre-k through 4th grade receive guidance lessons from the counselor in the classroom once a month. These lessons focus on different topics such as bullying, friendship, conflict resolution, and life skills. To reinforce these guidance lessons, teachers utilize provided resources such as a character word for the week. Every Monday morning, each classroom engages in a time that supports positive character development as well as relational skills.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

The first and foremost goal at GES is great “first teaching.” It all starts with the relationship between the teacher and student, and the GES staff love their kids. Teachers plan for instruction together daily. They collaboratively develop lesson plans, assessments and share teaching strategies. They visit one another’s classrooms to see different instructional methods in action. The instructional arrangements vary throughout the day combining full-class instruction, small-group work and individual conferencing with the teacher, all the while adjusting these methods and class arrangements to meet student needs. Student voice is important and students are encouraged to talk, write, and collaborate on various activities throughout the day. GES teachers are always looking to engage students and will use game-like instructional strategies like Four Corners, Think Pair Share, Vocabulary Pyramid, or IQ Slap Down. Differentiated instruction is used to challenge students at all levels, with struggling students receiving small group and individual conferencing time during the day with the teacher and advanced students choosing extension activities to take the learning further. Music, movement and physical activity are utilized to provide brain breaks to enhance student learning. In the pre-k room, students are seen taking magnifying glasses around the campus to sleuth for different letters. In 1st grade, a teacher may be observed giving students extra fluff balls for every descriptive sentence they add to their writing; when they finish their final projects, they get to throw the “fluff” on the teacher! In 3rd grade, students work in small groups to analyze different aspects of a novel; later, they video-chat with the actual author to hear her perspective and learn about her writing process.

Although great instruction is the main goal for GES staff, it is inseparable from assessment. GES has multiple formal and informal systems of assessing student progress. For all grades, students are given a Beginning-of-Year (BOY), Middle-of-Year (MOY) and End-of-Year (EOY) assessment in reading and math. These assessments are then coupled with mastery assessments which are given each nine weeks and reflect the curriculum that is being taught. Assessments, however, are meaningless unless the results are used to adjust teaching or intervene with students. This is where the staff at GES shine. The focus for GES teachers is to determine whether or not students are mastering the content. These assessments inform the tiered instruction, indicating which students need specific intervention and how that intervention should take place – during conferencing sessions during the instructional day, morning small-group intervention time, or after-school Homework Club support time. While the formal assessment program is robust and powerful, the informal formative assessments during instruction are just as critical. GES teachers utilize a multitude of ways to look for mastery during instruction, including such methods as holding up differently colored cards; using an interactive response system; using a wipe board; walking around checking work or holding individual conferences with students. This progress monitoring is essential to allow teachers to customize their instruction at the time of the learning and ensure mastery for each student.

To maintain this high level of achievement, GES implements an in-school intervention time for students to receive support and assistance. It occurs first thing in the morning but is a part of the actual school day. All students arrive at school, eat a healthy breakfast and then are broken up into various groups based on current instructional needs. Gifted students use this time to work with a GT Teacher on projects while other students have opportunities to work with teachers on lessons in art, computer, character education and more. Students with instructional needs work with their teacher on pre-planned lessons that correlate to the learning going on in their classrooms. This is an opportunity for teachers to vary the instructional method or pace in order to achieve mastery. In addition to morning intervention time, teachers use other opportunities for intervention. The dyslexia teacher utilizes a multi-sensory teaching approach for struggling learners

while other teachers offer a digital intervention environment for students. Two instructional intervention specialists provide small-group and one-to-one instruction with different groups throughout the day and the ELL teacher provides small group instruction for students as well. Utilizing these approaches have allowed GES students to perform at the 90th percentile on criterion-referenced assessments and state assessments.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

From the moment students arrive at GES in the morning, they know they are someplace special. Along with campus staff opening every car door, students are often greeted by GHS Tigers. Whether it's the athletes and cheerleaders, the GHS Band members playing music, or the singing GHS Choir members dressed as anything from Disney Princesses or Santa and Mrs. Claus, it is always an exciting day at GES! The principal often shares a word of encouragement and teachers meet their students at the classroom door.

High expectations are ingrained as part of the GES culture. Students are challenged to grow academically through various quarterly academic honor rolls. Teachers also track individual mastery for every student and celebrate academic growth for each student. The GES culture supports student's social growth through the Superintendent Honor Roll program which honors students for their hard work, character and leadership on the campus. Teachers recommend students for Student of the Month and students nominate each other for weekly "Shout Outs" to highlight students who are making great choices. To support emotional growth, the GES Counselor developed a Mentor Program where leaders for each grade level are nominated and trained to serve as mentors to new students. Student leadership is also encouraged in that older students serve as mentors to younger students allowing opportunities to grow socially and emotionally.

Teachers are valued and supported by the administration at all levels through an open-door policy. The GES Principal sees every child and every teacher daily as she greets students and staff at the door. The superintendent visits the campus often, shares updates at staff meetings, involves staff during major decisions, and utilizes campus climate surveys to address any growing issues. Multiple staff members are also recognized quarterly through a staff recognition program. The GES staff also designates a Sunshine Committee to plan special gatherings and find ways to support and encourage staff. Teachers also have an opportunity to grow and develop their own skills through ongoing professional development opportunities.

Students are motivated to come to school and be successful because the staff makes school and learning fun! From taking part in the Homecoming Pep Rally to the musical productions at various grade levels to the AMBUSH Assemblies with GMS and GHS students, to the Texas Reads One Book initiative, there is always something to look forward to at GES! This environment is a key factor in the success of GES!

2. Engaging Families and Community:

The schools are the heartbeat of the Gunter community! Multiple events are held throughout the year to welcome the whole town, including Art Show, Fun Day, Fall Carnival, Grade-Level Musicals, and Movie Night. Parents and community members are encouraged to get involved by joining the site-based committee, various advisory groups and parent-teacher organizations.

Communication is critical to keep families and the community engaged. GISD and GES have a robust social media presence spotlighting student success and upcoming events. The school utilizes a communication program to send out important information and teachers utilize a tailored program to give weekly updates about their classes. Teachers hold conferences with every student annually and send home sheets to communicate student progress and performance daily. Teachers frequently send home personal notes of encouragement to students as well.

GES regularly engages the community to support academic performance in the classroom. One example is literacy. During the fall and spring book fairs, GES opens its doors to the community through Muffins with Mom and Donuts with Dad. These fairs allow families time to enjoy breakfast and invest in literacy. The ELL Coordinator facilitates another literacy night for the community where students and parents participate in "make-and-take" literacy games and activities. GES also participates in an initiative where the school purchases a book in English or Spanish for every student and the families are encouraged to read a chapter every night. These opportunities have fostered a love for reading and have enhanced academic

achievement.

GES also supports community organizations and civic responsibility through fundraising. Last year, 4th grade students wanted to support the police officers, so they designed a GES “Back the Blue” t-shirt and sold them to the community; funds were donated to the local police department. Students have also participated in a canned-food and toy drive that benefit the children’s hospital, local crisis center, the children’s advocacy center and the volunteer fire department. GES students have also rallied around their own classmates by holding fundraisers for such causes as juvenile diabetes and alopecia to share awareness about those diseases with the community and each other.

This past year, the Gunter community raised over \$200,000 to build a playground at the park next to GES. Teachers volunteered time to help build the park and the district closed school on the final Park Build Day so that each family could volunteer alongside the staff. GES students now play on that playground every week.

3. Professional Development:

Professional development is critical to student success because the classroom teacher is the greatest school-level factor in student achievement. However, professional development can be challenging for small school districts that do not have the budget to bring in nationally recognized speakers or employ staff whose sole focus is in developing teacher capacity. GES has worked diligently to overcome these issues in a number of unique ways.

GES has the highest percentage of poverty students in the district and that number has risen rapidly. Student performance has historically struggled within that particular student population, so GES and GISD partnered with multiple area school districts to jointly bring in a national expert on teaching with poverty in mind. The speaker discussed how poverty affects behavioral and academic performance and gave tangible TEKS-based strategies to help students be successful in the classroom and beyond.

Each year GES teachers choose one area of professional growth to focus on throughout the year and create a self-directed development plan for that growth. Each teacher meets with the principal annually to set goals and share the growth area. Last year the data showed that teachers wanted more tools to engage students in the classroom. Again, the district partnered with a neighboring district to customize professional development around student engagement. The campus principal then supported this professional development by highlighting various staff members at monthly faculty meetings who had been utilizing different engagement strategies.

Often the best professional learning comes from peer-to-peer teaching and coaching. This is often difficult in a small district where, after 3rd grade, there is only one teacher per content area. The district partnered with an area school district and developed professional learning communities so that teachers collaborate on teaching strategies for various TEKS with grade-level teachers from another district. Other sources for professional development include the educational service center, and other national programs and speakers.

A more recent request from the teachers for professional development was to motivate staff to think outside the box and bring new ideas into the classroom. The Technology Director developed a Tiger Stripes Professional Development program that allows teachers to enroll in a class weekly and either attend a face-to-face session or work online towards earning a “stripe” in a particular tool that will help engage students in the classroom. This learn-as-you-go model has had an immediate impact on the teaching and learning in the classroom with administrators noting increases in student engagement and teachers seeing increases in mastery of knowledge.

4. School Leadership:

The underlying philosophy in leadership at GES is servant leadership, or leading by example. The campus leadership can often be seen cleaning cafeteria tables, sweeping the floor or picking up trash. When a staff member has a family emergency, the principal covers classes until a substitute can be secured. When the

school has to close early due to bad weather, every teacher calls every parent to ensure students will go home to a safe, warm house. The leadership open car doors, sit in on tough parent meetings, work lunch duty and send notes of encouragement when their teachers have had a tough day. Because the leaders set that example, the staff follow suit, modeling servant leadership to their own students and helping in ways that go well beyond the scope of their normal duties.

The leadership of GES consists of a Principal and a shared Assistant Principal. The GES Principal hosts weekly meetings to ensure clear communication and build community within the campus. Teacher input is valued and teachers have a voice in things like the school calendar, teaching schedule, instructional resources and budgeting. The principal listens to all ideas and values all opinions. If the principal must go in a different direction, they communicate the “why” and thank the staff for their input and support. Most importantly, teachers have great autonomy in the classroom. While the “what” of teaching is clearly articulated through the state standards, the “how” is left largely up to teachers, allowing them to use their creativity and passion to teach their students. This trust allows teachers and students to perform at the highest possible academic levels.

The leadership of the campus is also surrounded by strong, stable leadership of the district and school board. The school board has over 70 years of combined service and the willingness of the board members to serve to ensure stability has contributed to strong overall performance. The district and campus leadership are steadfast in ensuring that all policies and programs revolve around what is best for student achievement.

The GES leadership is focused on student success. The principal is deeply involved in the early intervention process through monitoring grades, reviewing progress monitoring assessments and analyzing reading fluency levels. The principal strategizes with teachers weekly to support struggling students. This degree of attention to individual student progress is a critical factor in the success of GES students.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The one factor that sets GES apart is a strong sense of family. This starts in the relationships between students and teacher. GES strives to keep class sizes small and teachers invest in every child – from buying school supplies to conferencing with parents to sending students notes of encouragement. That teacher follows that child all the way to graduation. In a special rose ceremony, the seniors walk out into the audience, often searching for their favorite elementary teachers to give them a rose of thanks for having an impact on their life. That relationship also means meeting basic needs. GES teachers ensure every student has the proper supplies; they send home food each Friday with the Backpack Program; and they make sure struggling families are supported by local organizations for Christmas. In the classroom, this practice translates into every child’s learning needs being met, whether that involves writing a grant for stability balls and bouncy bands for energetic learners or learning a new form of technology to better engage students.

Being a family also means doing whatever is necessary. The elementary organization is flat. There are no titles when there is a crying child in the hallway or a spill on the cafeteria floor or a classroom needing coverage when a teacher has a family emergency. Everyone steps up. The entire staff has an “all-in” attitude - it is what family does for one another.

There are no greater aspirations than the ones held for family members. This is exhibited in the expectations that are set for the students at GES. Every child knows that there is an adult who truly believes that they can learn and is dedicated to making that happen. Families care about the whole person and the teachers at GES care just as much about the kind of character and integrity they are developing as they do the academic skills that they are helping produce. Just like family, GES teachers hold their students and each other accountable.

The foundation of a family is love and there is no lack of love at GES! The GES staff love kids. They love to inspire their students to dream big and celebrate with them on their accomplishments. GES is successful because every child who walks through the door knows it is going to be a great day because of the loving adults who pour their hearts into every child!