

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 Ms. Bea Gonzalez Enevoldsen

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

Official School Name Whittier Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2004 N. Marrs

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

City Amarillo State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 79107-6943

County Potter

Telephone (806) 326-5600 Fax (806) 381-7322

Web site/URL http://whittieramaisd.sharpschool.com/ E-mail bea.enevoldsen@amaisd.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. Dana West E-mail dr.dana.west@amaisd.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Amarillo Independent School District Tel. (806) 326-1420

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. Jim Austin
(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):
- 37 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 12 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 6 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools

55 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	40	42	82
K	30	32	62
1	42	45	87
2	40	36	76
3	43	33	76
4	40	30	70
5	39	30	69
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	274	248	522

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 4 % Asian
 - 10 % Black or African American
 - 72 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 12 % White
 - 2 % 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: 20%

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	54
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	58
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	112
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	557
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.201
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	20

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 42 %
231 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Spanish, Burmese, Vietnamese, Laotian, Kirundi, Somalia, and Chinese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 92 %
Total number students who qualify: 509
8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %
40 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
- 2 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 3 Mental Retardation
- 7 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 8 Other Health Impaired
- 5 Specific Learning Disability
- 30 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: 5
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	31
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	10
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
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 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	99%	97%	97%	96%	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.

Our district and campus mission is to graduate every student prepared for success beyond high school.

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

Students are enrolled at Whittier Elementary based on boundary lines set by Amarillo Independent School District (AISD) and school transfer requests.

PART III – SUMMARY

Whittier Elementary shares the adage that “Successful schools are not the ones that have never struggled. They are the ones that never gave up despite the struggles”. This speaks to the heart of the work that takes place every day, in every classroom, for all students. It is embraced and understood that the school community may be poor, but the students are rich in experiences and opportunities provided by a caring staff.

The school was built in 1955 and serves 540 students in grades prekindergarten to fifth grade. The safety and security of the students is essential to their learning, therefore, the building is well maintained. The students are part of a school that has a strong sense of family. Staff members greet students by name, engage with them in conversation outside of the classroom and demonstrate their affection through hugs and honest praise. The staff equally engages with the parents when they visit the campus, during parent phone contacts and written communication. The school’s urban setting challenges them to reach beyond the drugs, gangs and crime so that the dream of a better tomorrow is possible.

Approximately 62.76% of the student population has been identified as at risk. Ninety-two percent of the student population qualifies as economically disadvantaged. The students are provided breakfast and lunch daily at a free or reduced price. Student demographics reflect several different languages from around the world with Spanish being the predominate language spoken. Due to the diversity of the student population, two different language acquisition programs are provided. Students who speak Spanish as their primary language and qualify for services are provided instruction within a bilingual setting. The teacher provides instruction in Spanish so that the students are acquiring academic content. Meanwhile, students who speak a language other than Spanish are placed with an English as a Second Language (ESL) certified teacher. Oral language skills begin to develop as academic connections take hold. Students in both language programs are provided vocabulary building and reading support beginning in prekindergarten. The language support continues until they are able to exit from the language programs. The Language Proficiency and Assessment Committee (LPAC) reviews data from different sources (i.e. state assessments, language proficiency) in order to determine if the student is prepared to continue to make academic gains without the need of additional language support.

The school embraces the idea that literacy impacts all content areas. Students in prekindergarten through second grade are offered a balanced literacy approach to engage students in reading, writing, speaking and listening. During a read aloud, guided reading, shared writing and phonics instruction, the teacher has planned lessons that are intentional with expected student outcomes. In every prekindergarten through second grade classroom, a listening station is provided so students are listening to good reading models. Students in second through fifth grade are provided take home recorders. The students record themselves reading for a minimum of twenty minutes daily. The teacher listens to their independent reading and intervenes as needed. Students in third through fifth grade, utilize novels and quality literature in order to master the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) in language arts. Instructional strategies promote creative thinkers who collaborate and are willing to participate in discussions that develop comprehension. The teacher becomes the facilitator enabling the students to navigate through complex text with a better understanding and application of literacy skills.

As students transition to middle school, they are well prepared to engage with the curriculum and meet behavior expectations. The middle school principal stated, “It is obvious within our school which students come from Whittier. They are prepared with completed homework, understand their role in the classroom and overall, have excellent behavior.” The student data from 2015-2016 reflects that Whittier students outperformed the other feeder school students by forty to fifty points in math and reading. The school expects that their students continue to be challenged and demonstrate academic mastery. The long term goal is to prepare the students academically so they have options available to them after high school graduation. College is the dream for all students. It is the school’s responsibility to work in collaboration with parents, so that this dream becomes an attainable goal.

Winston Churchill was quoted as saying, “Success is not final, failure is not fatal, it is the courage to

continue that counts.” The school recognizes the challenges that their community faces and the work that must be tackled so that the students are prepared emotionally and academically for the next level. Being successful today does not ensure success tomorrow. Experiencing failure is not detrimental. As a school, they must celebrate their successes, as well as identify their areas of “failure” and have the courage to take action with both!

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Whittier Elementary’s curriculum approach is built on the foundation that all students can learn and all students can have high academic success. The district curriculum is based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Teachers build lessons that address the TEKS with depth of knowledge, rigor, and complexity. Teachers use a variety of research based resources to vertically align and prepare the TEKS prior to instruction. This enables students to not only meet grade level expectations, but master grade level content, so they are well prepared for the future.

The English Language Arts curriculum is constructed to immerse students in literacy. The curriculum is aligned through the use of a balanced literacy program. During the foundational years in prekindergarten through second grade, the staff ensures that students have strong literacy skills. Phonics, guided reading groups, and literacy interventions prepare students to approach third grade ready to begin reading to learn. Students in kindergarten through second grade are grouped based on their instructional reading level. In addition, struggling readers are double grouped daily for additional reading support. Literacy activities in third through fifth grade are centered on the use of quality literature. Through literacy groups, the TEKS are embedded throughout the literature so the students deepen their understanding. As the text become more complex, teachers use questioning stems to extend the thinking within the different genres. Students share their thoughts and provide text evidence to support and clarify their analysis.

Math instruction focuses on early numeracy in prekindergarten through second grade. Algorithmic skills in second through fifth grade are tied to rigorous math scenarios and questioning. Math is taught through a sequential model of instruction using concrete models. Students demonstrate math skills in isolation before applying the skill to rigorous questioning. By mastering the skill first and then intertwining the skill into word problems or graphics, the teacher is able to assess where the students are struggling and find ways to intervene. Students are also encouraged to solve problems in many different ways. By allowing the students to share their thinking, they are able to cement their understanding of the content while teaching and learning from each other. Teachers are trained to write good math questions incorporating academic vocabulary coupled with rigorous questioning. Students who struggle are provided math interventions in a small group setting.

Science curriculum is based on experimental learning and is aligned to ensure that students are being exposed to academic vocabulary. Grade level academic vocabulary acquisition allows for students to obtain and apply knowledge while building on their schema. Experiments and inquiry based learning are also implemented so that students are exposed to problem solving and critical thinking. These hands on activities allow students to experience and observe physical science. Teacher lead questioning and journaling deepens their understanding and knowledge.

Social studies curriculum in the primary grades is based on understanding how communities work. Intermediate grades are exposed to government systems, geography, and history. The teachers implement lessons through document based questioning. Document based questioning exposes students to primary resources that they must analyze and produce a final piece of writing to answer a central question. This model allows teachers to incorporate language arts into social studies and the students to use critical thinking and problem solving skills to answer complex questions.

The campus has a diverse student population with implicit differences and similarities. Students are educated to be accepting of others through discussions and modeled behavior. The concept of a school family is embraced with an understanding of everyone’s role within the community. The family concept encourages relationships that promote caring for each other as individuals. Civic learning is promoted within the school and outside organizations. Students assist with cross walk duties, raise the flags and lead the school in announcements and pledges. Students in fourth and fifth grade volunteer as peer tutors with students in prekindergarten and kindergarten. Students are exposed to community outreach as they visit the elderly in predominately low socio-economic retirement homes. Fifth grade students provide and send

children who are hospitalized a valentine in lieu of a class party. These activities create awareness for service learning as they prepare to become young adults.

Whittier Elementary offers preschool services for children who are three or four years old and qualify for services based on language or income. The school has four sections of prekindergarten; two of the sections are specific for students who need bilingual services. A community based preschool is offered for students who are three and four years old. These students are presented curriculum that promotes their literacy and math skills. Students who attend prekindergarten have developed foundational skills essential for content readiness. The district curriculum (TEKS) is vertically aligned from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Students are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities such as physical education/health, music, orchestra, technology, drama and art. These activities are linked to middle and high school electives. Each of the extracurricular activities includes learning standards that are set by the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

Physical Education is more than exercising and learning sport fundamentals. The staff shares the belief that physical education aids in developing a positive lifestyle that supports good health. Nutrition, rest, proper stretching, and exercising impacts a student's self-esteem as they begin to experience body self-awareness. In conjunction with the school food service department, students are guided in making healthy food choices. It is a common practice that the physical education teachers integrate math and literacy standards into their instruction. Through structured games, primary grade students learn to do cross body movements while hopping, skipping, etc. that influence cognitive performance. Intermediate students, are taught basic fundamentals that are tied to basketball, football, volleyball, soccer and track. Students in grades third through fifth are assessed at the beginning, middle and end of the year with a physical fitness gram. Many of the students are not able to participate in out of school sports activities that require a monetary fee. The students enjoy learning the fundamentals with the hope of participating in University Interscholastic League (UIL) sports in middle and high school.

Similar to physical education, music is more than just singing. Students are taught how to read music by "tapping" out rhythm patterns and learning the language of music. The students learn their multiplication table by singing skip counting songs. Language development for English Language Learners (ELL) is influenced by the ease of song and understanding the flow of the English language. Students in fourth and fifth grade may choose to participate in Honor Choir. Students practice after school and perform in the fall and spring for students and parents. Fifth grade students are encouraged to participate in orchestra so that they are able to transition to middle school orchestra or band.

The campus uses a variety of technology resources that prepare their students to be digital learners. Students in second through fifth grade utilize a recorder to document their nightly reading. The recordings allow the students to critique their fluency. The librarian provides instruction on internet safety, the impact of social media and trustworthy data bases. Students create the end of the year slide show and other digital products using different resources. The campus offers two computer labs where students learn keyboarding and have access to websites that support their reading, math and science. Every classroom has access to computers, interactive boards, and tablets that support whole and small group instruction. The district provides a digital learning leader that guides teachers and students as technology is integrated into the learning.

Teachers balance art and drama by incorporating both into other disciplines. While students are listening to a read aloud they may be drawing the visual representation of what is being read. As they are learning content, the students create literacy quilts, timelines, dioramas, or posters. They illustrate and publish their own stories digitally or by creating a big book. Drama is ever present as students do reader's theatre, poetry and as they act out a story line.

The staff recognizes that in order to optimize the learning for the students, they must incorporate TEKS from all extra-curricular activities within all other disciplines. Prekindergarten students are provided instruction concerning technology, music, art, drama, and physical education within their classroom. They

are dancing, singing and creating through a variety of mediums. Kindergarten through fourth grade students are scheduled for physical education and music for a combined time of fifty minutes daily, five times a week. Fifth grade students are scheduled differently to accommodate students who choose orchestra for their music class. They have an “A” and a “B” schedule that alternates days between music/orchestra and physical education for fifty minutes, twice a week, alternating on Fridays.

Balance is key so that students benefit from a strong academic program and extra -curricular activities. All programs and activities are intentionally planned so student needs are being considered and served in the best way possible.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Whittier Elementary uses an array of instruction strategies and interventions to meet the needs of each student. Formal and informal assessments drive which instructional strategies and interventions will be put in place. Each instructional strategy and intervention is targeted to meet individual student needs. Teachers are able to meet the diverse needs by tailoring instruction for each student. When students struggle to master content, appropriate interventions are put in place in a timely manner.

The expectation is that students are provided sound Tier I instruction by following sequential instructional steps. This instructional model is fluid and encourages the teacher to go from direct instruction to collaborative work prior to the student working independently. The teacher provides instruction, then the teacher and students work together. The students then work in pairs to cement the learning. The final step allows the student to independently demonstrate the skill being taught. The instructional model also allows for differentiation. Students who have mastered a skill or concept quickly are allowed to work independently or in groups while the teacher pulls small groups that are in need of more support. Students working in groups or independently are able to extend their thinking and learning through peer interaction. In addition, teachers use questioning stems to increase rigor within collaborative discussions. Prepared higher order thinking questions and questioning stems challenge students to go beyond surface level learning and use higher order thinking skills.

After Tier I instruction has been delivered, students are assessed through the use of informal and formal assessments. Formal assessments are created prior to instruction. They may use exits tickets, teacher observations, running records, and benchmark assessments. In addition to these assessments, six weeks assessments, midyear assessments, the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) release test, and weekly formative assessments are used to identify student strengths and weaknesses. Six weeks and benchmark assessments are shared with the administration prior to instruction to ensure that the assessments are rigorous and instruction is aligned to the curriculum. Individual student assessment data is analyzed by the staff and categorized into three different levels; approaching grade level expectations, meets grade level expectations, and masters grade level expectations. The culture of accountability requires that assessment data be shared with all stakeholders. This culture of high expectations drives teachers to work toward all students reaching mastery. Student assessment data drives instruction and interventions with the goal of closing the achievement gap of the special education subgroup. The school utilizes inclusion, resource time and appropriate interventions to address this need. Teacher collaboration with interventionists provides continued support for students who require more time and practice.

Whittier uses a multitude of interventions to meet students’ individual needs. Struggling students may be placed in an array of interventions that support literacy, math, and language development. Additionally, students are offered after school tutorials, double grouped guided reading, focus groups, Saturday School, and homework club. Every student is provided academic support so they can master grade level content. The interventions must be explicit to each individual student need. The culture of the campus is to intervene appropriately and in a timely manner. The staff shares student concerns immediately and develop/modify an action plan that addresses the student’s needs. The use of various instructional models and early interventions allow Whittier to maintain a high level of student performance. The school's culture of accountability develops students that are prepared to graduate and be successful after high school.

The school acknowledges that a student’s perception of himself as a learner is more important than how

others perceive him. Students who struggle with learning become disengaged in the learning and lack hope that education can change their lives. As a campus, this perception has been addressed by building relationships with students about the learning. Having a relationship outside of the classroom with the student is important, but not as important as the relationship built around teaching and learning. They often tell their students, "I love you enough to help you learn."

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

In order to improve academic achievement for all students, the staff recognized that the culture and climate of the school needed to be addressed. In discussing the needs of the community, the overwhelming response for lack of achievement was attributed to poverty and the dysfunction of the family unit. The cultural shift was based on evaluating current student outcomes and determining future student learning expectations. As student outcomes were reviewed, it was evident that the students were not prepared to be competitive in the academic realm. The staff assumed ownership of the learning deficit, understood their role in improving student performance, and embraced the vision of preparing the students for success beyond high school.

Campus personnel are committed to mentoring teachers, providing appropriate staff development, and improving instructional support. Every staff member contributes to the work of developing and maintaining the purpose of the school which is teaching and learning. The staff shares collective responsibility in finding solutions for identified problems. Teachers are empowered through shared decision making and shared leadership. Teachers thrive on positive affirmation through daily comments or small gestures that validate their work.

Before student learning expectations could be addressed, parent support and engagement were identified as necessary components for long term student achievement which in turn promoted a positive school climate. The relationship between home and school was critical because it held parents, students, and staff accountable to each other. It is important that the students be empowered to contribute to their overall success. Students are encouraged to participate in the Drug Free Halloween Parade, nonprofit sport groups, honor choir, orchestra, field day, holiday celebrations, Achievement through Commitment to Education (ACE), community outreach, homecoming parade, tutorials, and Saturday School. The students needed encouragement and motivation so that they were part of the process of owning their learning. Students are self-motivated when they see themselves grow academically, emotionally and socially. As students continue to experience success they become intrinsically motivated to excel. This intrinsic motivation opens the door for success to breed success. Prior lack of achievement is left at the door. The students have faith that the learning community is vested in their learning.

The improved school climate is due to the commitment of a school staff who works as a team to ensure student success, the parents who make sacrifices for their children, and the students who are willing to take the time to invest in their own future. The staff often states that they are employed by children because they work for children.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Whittier believes in early intervention with students and families. The earlier that the school engages families and the community in supporting student learning, the more options the students will have upon reaching adulthood. The partnership between home and school is not only important during special events, but on a daily basis. Students must see that parents and educators, together, are vested in their learning and future.

The school recognizes that ongoing communication between teachers and parents is crucial for student success. The staff connects with parents through a communication app that encourages two way conversations. The teachers are able to share photos, videos, and messages throughout the day. Likewise, a parent may request information or have dialog concerning their child. A face to face parent conference is scheduled with every parent during the fall and the spring semester. These conferences are vital to the culture of the campus. Parents are provided opportunities to discuss academic, social and behavioral concerns about their child. The school provides parents a bilingual monthly newsletter that contains information about upcoming campus events and parenting tips. The newsletter is shared with parents via the communication app and a hard copy is sent home with students. The campus utilizes a phone

messenger system in order to further communicate with parents. Having an open door policy encourages parents to visit the campus. At the beginning of the school year, parents, students and teachers sign a home school compact that specifies what responsibilities are for home, the school and the student's. The compact encourages parents to be involved in their child's education by assuring the child has good attendance, is rested and prepared for class. The staff is always mindful that building a positive relationship with the parent and student will foster a strong connection to learning.

Parents are invited to campus activities such as the Open House, Back to School Night, Drug Free Halloween Parade, Thanksgiving Dinner, Christmas Sing Along, talent show, choir concerts, orchestra concerts, Family Science Night, Community Resource Fair, book fair and student recognition assemblies. The school is the center of the community; therefore, it is utilized as a resource. Families are encouraged to seek out assistance when they experience struggles. The counselor may provide vouchers for clothing, food and information for a student/family advocate to address counseling needs. These campus activities create opportunities for the community to be involved while building trust between home and school.

3. Professional Development:

The Whittier staff believes that their school is founded on two premises: teaching and learning. This not only applies to students, but staff members as well. In a typical school, students are expected to learn while educators are expected to teach. At Whittier, both students and staff members are expected to be teachers and learners. Staff members are provided opportunities to acquire skills that enable them to grow as educators. Staff members recognize that it's not about a program, but about improving instruction. In order to provide effective instruction, teachers must have a thorough understanding of the standards, include content vocabulary in their planning and instruction, and create rigorous assessments that match their instruction and planning. Their mindset is to improve instruction for all students at all times by being very selective about staff development. Staff development must be driven by student data and campus needs.

Campus data reflected that the staff development agenda needed to be focused on creating a stronger basis for how instruction was delivered. New teachers, as well as senior staff, agreed that students were not given ample time to practice what they were learning before being asked to apply the taught skill independently. During the 2013-2014 school year, the school adopted a sequential method for instructional delivery. Even though all staff members were trained, the school continues to revisit this instructional model. If it is important to scaffold learning for students, it is equally as important for teachers to be supported in their learning.

Along with the sequential method for instructional delivery, the school has trained the staff on how to utilize question stems that promote higher order thinking as students are engaged in the learning. The questions that are being asked of students before, during and after instruction must go beyond knowledge based. The questioning stems improve instructional strategies so that teachers understand what questions to ask in order to promote critical thinking.

Grade level teachers collaborate in professional learning communities (PLCs) with each other twice a week and with the administrators once every two weeks. Through PLCs, they discuss lessons, TEKS, assessments, and any concerns they have about students. This time is utilized so that they can problem solve together and learn from each other. During PLCs, staff members are often seen sharing strategies with one another through modeling. PLCs encourage collaboration between staff in order to achieve better results for students.

4. School Leadership:

Whittier Elementary believes that leadership should be shared by all campus personnel. By encouraging leadership, all stakeholders buy-in to a school culture that serves students. Leadership is shared with a variety of campus personnel (i.e. curriculum specialist, principals, team leaders). Teachers lead in their grade levels by sharing instructional strategies that are successful and proven by data analysis. Teachers are also encouraged to lead outside of their classrooms with opportunities to work with struggling students

during Saturday School and after school tutorials. Teachers are empowered to demonstrate their content knowledge and instructional strengths as facilitators during staff development. They have ongoing grade level collaboration in order to ensure students a viable curriculum through improved lesson planning, rigorous assessments and Tier 1 instruction. Each grade level is represented by a team leader who is selected based on academic expertise. The team leader has a variety of responsibilities such as structuring PLCs, collaborative lesson planning and obtaining additional instructional resources. Communication between team members and their team leader is imperative for student growth.

The curriculum specialist collaborates with the administrators in order to identify content or instructional areas in need of growth. Teachers are provided assessment data that is utilized to guide instruction. The curriculum specialist and administrators work hand in hand within classrooms by modeling lessons or team teaching. Through these approaches, teachers are presented with different strategies that aid in teaching content and problem solving.

As instructional leaders, principals support staff members by protecting learning time so that the focus is on teaching and learning. Administrators embrace the importance of building positive relationships with parents, students and staff. Each person is held accountable for their job and their contribution to the overall success of the campus. They are held accountable for student outcomes. By implementing ongoing communication, and being solution oriented, administrators contribute to the culture of achievement. They understand the important role parents have in working with the school to find solutions regarding academic and behavioral concerns that are affecting student outcomes. Servant leadership drives the school's vision. They strongly believe that their role within the school is to serve students and staff in order to support instruction, which in turn, promotes student success.

Leadership may come from any person and at any given time. Understanding that by working collaboratively towards a mutual goal, they are utilizing their strengths and developing their weakness, to foster learning for all students.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Whittier Elementary embraces the concept that they work for children and their families. The school uses the state curriculum Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) to develop rigorous lessons, assessments and instructional strategies that are aligned from grade to grade. Content vocabulary and content question stems are incorporated into the lesson planning to ensure student thinking, understanding and application of the skill. Instructional time is protected from the first bell to the last bell. Students are engaged in learning within their homeroom or with an interventionist. Student learning is scaffold by intentionally incorporating teaching strategies prior to independent work.

Being a Title 1 school has its challenges and its rewards. The school has been identified for the past three years as a high progress, high performing rewards school. The school was highlighted in 2016 by Region 10 in a video titled, “Increasing Learning Time to Improve Instruction; Best Practices in Action”. This type of academic success is attributed to the changed mindset of the school community regarding high expectations for all.

Regardless of a student’s current situation or academic struggle, the staff believes that they can and will make a difference for every student. The staff begins with a growth mindset for themselves as well as their students. Having high expectations is difficult to describe but very visible to the eye. Students are engaged in meaningful tasks with caring adults that understand the value of what they have to offer. For example, one student described his fifth grade math teacher in the following manner: “She is a very positive teacher with a sweet tone. The way she teaches, doesn’t hold on to our hands, but she lets us practice alone with her guidance.” High expectations require a balance between guidance and direct instruction.

The school continues to incorporate high expectations within the language arts curriculum by using complex text in teaching the TEKS. Students are exposed to different genres that are on or above grade level reading at third, fourth and fifth grade. Through carefully structured instruction, students are taught how to navigate through a novel by using question stems and graphic organizers. The school is thoughtful in its practice in order to challenge themselves and their students. The school has the responsibility of modeling behaviors that enable students to be prepared for college. High expectations must be more than a belief; it must be a daily practice.