

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 Mr. Paul Covey

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

Official School Name Valle Verde Early College High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 919 Hunter Drive PO Box 2500

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

City El Paso State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 79998-0500

County El Paso

Telephone (915) 434-1500 Fax (915) 594-7112

Web site/URL http://www.yisd.net/valleverdeearly E-mail pcovey@yisd.net
college

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. Xavier De La Torre E-mail xdelatorre@yisd.net

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Ysleta Independent School District Tel. (915) 434-0000

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. Connie Woodruff

(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)
 - 11 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 12 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 60 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	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	37	66	103
10	46	65	111
11	40	55	95
12 or higher	36	62	98
Total Students	159	248	407

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 94 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 4 % White
 - 1 % 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	6
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	6
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	407
(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: 4 %
15 Total number ELL

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

Spanish

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 68 %
Total number students who qualify: 276

8. Students receiving special education services: 3 %
12 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.

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

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 8
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	19
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	0
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.	1

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 221:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	98%	98%	98%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	98%

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	82
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	87%
Enrolled in a community college	2%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	9%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	2%

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.

Valle Verde ECHS will enable students to graduate from high school with distinguished achievement, while earning an associates degree, through a rigorous curriculum and a system of support and intervention.

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

Valle Verde ECHS uses a rubric as part of the process for students seeking admissions to the school. Additionally, students are required to write an essay and go through an interview so that they can share their desires in attending an ECHS. Extra points are awarded for two targeted populations: economically disadvantaged and first-generation college attendees. Student applications are accepted annually from November through January. During this time, the campus administrative team presents at all twelve district middle schools as well as at our local Private-non-Profit schools. Additional information nights are provided for families who missed their home-school presentation.

PART III – SUMMARY

Valle Verde Early College High School (VVECHS) is one of 61 campuses in the Ysleta Independent School District (YISD) located in El Paso, Texas. Opened in 2007, VVECHS is the city's second Early College High School (ECHS). Over 80% of El Pasoans are of Hispanic background, 22% live below the poverty level, and 30% have postsecondary education.

Based on these demographics, the need for an ECHS is evident. The ECHS model focuses on graduating students from high school while allowing them to earn associate's degrees. While open to all students, three populations are specifically recruited – students who are underrepresented in college, from low-socioeconomic households, and first-generation college attendees. To retain the fidelity of the ECHS model, the application rubric takes into consideration the target populations while disregarding grades, test scores, and discipline. The VVECHS philosophy is to prepare students for success in college and careers through a rigorous curriculum that offers the opportunity to earn up to 60 college credits, and promote social-emotional growth through co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

The current enrollment of 400 students is made up of 55% first-generation college attendees; 68% economically disadvantaged; and 94% Hispanic. Although up to 300 students apply per year, 120 students are accepted due to physical limitations of the campus.

The 400 students, along with the faculty and staff of 33, have made VVECHS a Texas ECHS Demonstration School, as well as a state and nationally recognized campus for academic accomplishments, fiscal management, fidelity to the ECHS model, and technology integration. Over 85% of VVECHS's graduates earn an associate's degree while in high school, and over 90% continue their education at a four-year university. This success is attributed to the school's commitment to the development of the whole student, and its focus on six Pillars of Success: Academic Skills, Writing, Performance, Social Behavior, Instruction, and Partnerships.

Academic Skills focuses on developing the skills needed to master state high school standards, and the framework to succeed in college classes. Prior to high school, students attend Project Endeavor, a two-week summer camp that focuses on reading and vocabulary skills. Once in high school, students take classes such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and a school-created class, College Transition, which teaches and reinforces reading, note-taking and time-management skills.

The Writing Pillar emphasizes writing across the curriculum. All content areas are required to include an essay on nine-weeks' exams. Writing samples are collected from every subject to use during student-led conferences. Additionally, students take a writing class every summer in addition to their yearly English classes.

The Performance Pillar helps inspire the best from students and teachers. The school motto is, "With great opportunity comes great responsibility." Effort and grit are consistently emphasized in classes. Students are not allowed to withdraw from a class or from VVECHS in the middle of the semester. There are safety nets for students, as faculty and staff share in the responsibility of students' success. All teachers afford extended learning time every day to students. Our counselor and administration also meet with students to address emotional and psychological needs.

In the Social Behavior Pillar, efforts center on fostering teamwork, developing leadership skills, encouraging positive competition, applying academic skills in real-world settings, and positively impacting various social causes. Despite the lack of facilities, the school has over 30 clubs or organizations, and provides athletic opportunities through intramurals, a cross-country team, and a fitness club with a yoga emphasis. VVECHS students are exposed to cultural arts by attending theater productions, visiting museums, and participating in local celebrations such as Día de los Muertos and Cinco de Mayo. Additionally, VVECHS was the first school in YISD to require students to earn 20 hours of community service annually.

The Instruction Pillar is based on the Common Instructional Framework (CIF), which consists of six

fundamental strategies to which the faculty is committed. They include collaborative group work, literacy groups, writing to learn, questioning, scaffolding, and classroom talk. Professional development is devoted to these proven approaches to teaching. With CIF consistency in every classroom, students devote attention and effort to what they are learning.

The Partnerships Pillar builds partnerships with businesses, institutions of higher learning, and parents. Students have the opportunity to intern in a variety of fields to gain experience in their chosen careers. Partnerships with El Paso Community College (EPCC) and the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) allow students to earn college credit and prepare them for a true college experience. Parents, in addition to volunteering, attend monthly meetings covering topics that directly impact their child's success in high school and in college.

VVECHS is a unique school that understands the education level of the local community is lower than the rest of the state. However, its desire to better the lives of their children and grandchildren is clearly present. VVECHS works hard to funnel that desire through the school so that it becomes a reality with each student.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

VVECHS courses follow the district-created pacing guides, which identify foundational skills and are aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS). Courses incorporate the Common Instructional Framework (CIF), which teaches critical thinking, analysis, writing, and academic talk, and ensures that TEKS-based content is accessible to students of all levels. Students are enrolled in AVID classes to enhance organizational skills and analytical thinking. A College Transition course taken by all students focuses on college readiness skills, grade monitoring, and character development.

The English Department follows the Texas Education Agency (TEA) TEKS-based curriculum and CCRS to emphasize analytical thinking, reading, writing, and fully developed foundational skills. Pre-Advanced Placement (PAP) English I and II prepare students for the rigor of the Dual Credit English III course, while Advanced Placement (AP) English IV prepares students for university-level writing. Students read and write using texts from classic and contemporary sources, diverse cultural and geographic areas, and various genres. Writing includes persuasive, analytical, research, creative and expository pieces to prepare students for the rigor of postsecondary writing. Students performing below grade level are grouped into End-Of-Course (EOC) skills classes, and attend tutoring. The department also administers the Texas Success Initiative exam to incoming students. Students who have not achieved TSI success by the beginning of ninth grade are first placed in a TSI review course, so they may enroll in college classes the following semester. Students performing above grade level can challenge the AP English Language exam, take additional English classes at EPCC, and participate in community writing contests.

In the Mathematics Department, foundational skills are integrated into lessons and reviewed using questioning practices. Following the district pacing guide ensures adherence to the TEKS-based curriculum and the CCRS. The curriculum is supported with instruction involving scaffolding techniques to help students learn progressively rigorous concepts. PAP courses are Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry, while dual-credit classes include Pre-Calculus, Calculus I and II, and Statistics. All students take a minimum four years of math. Questioning strategies, combined with writing, help students master rigorous concepts and analytical thinking skills. Project-based learning gives students opportunities to gather data, challenge obstacles, and use hands-on learning. Students performing below grade level attend tutoring, and are grouped with peers of different abilities to allow for assistance. Students performing above grade level are engaged with differentiated instruction by way of more challenging problems and projects, and move on to higher-level math courses.

The Science Department focuses on the process of scientific inquiry by following the TEKS-based curriculum and the CCRS through adherence to the district's pacing guide, which identifies foundational skills. All students take PAP Biology, PAP Chemistry, and AP Physics. Students also take a dual credit science course of their choice based on their expected major. Hands-on activities in labs are the cornerstone of this subject. Students defend their answers and persuade others to understand their view on topics such as global warming, energy dependency, and the use of GMOs in food – this also helps students develop civic awareness and engagement. Students reflect in writing, and create questions for fellow classmates. Struggling students are grouped with others of different abilities to facilitate discussion, and are required to attend tutoring. Students in danger of failing receive a special tutoring course; those performing above grade level are challenged with AP-style free-response questions – bonus questions that challenge their thinking – and independent projects.

The Social Studies Department follows TEA's TEKS-based curriculum, the CCRS, and the CIF to help students analyze data, and question events and decisions that have shaped our world. Students read primary and secondary sources, keep an interactive notebook, and create connections to modern-day events through projects and critical writing. Historical events are presented with an emphasis on political, social, and economic inclusion, and students evaluate the short- and long-term impact of events on society. Students take Human Geography and World History at the AP level in the 9th and 10th grades; U.S. History and U.S.

Government are additional dual credit courses taken by all students, along with Economics and dual credit Texas Government during 11th and 12th grades. Students performing below grade level are helped through tutoring and technology applications, which allow them to develop academic vocabulary in their primary language and improve their comprehension. Students performing above grade level are encouraged to take the AP U.S. History exam, and participate in history competitions.

University and community professionals visit VVECHS to present post-high school opportunities; discuss college majors and employability; present college admissions requirements; discuss college life and expectations; and raise awareness and promote civic engagement. Academic field trips always include a visit to local universities. Resources are allocated to pay the salary of a full-time English teacher for AVID 4 and college support, and for the course book created specifically for VVECHS by the AVID 4 teacher. Seniors learn about college options and are provided time, guidance, and editing assistance in applying for university admissions, financial aid, and a minimum of five scholarships. Additionally, the class includes a lesson on financial literacy.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

VVECHS students take art to complete the required one-year fine arts credit. Courses offered include Art I, Art II, and Art III. All courses are TEKS-based, and follow the district's pacing guides. Traditionally, ninth-grade students take Art I, and those who wish to continue studying art can enroll in Art II or Art III as an elective. Art classes meet daily for the entire year, and focus on developing strong foundations in observation and perception. Students express themselves through various media, including painting, drawing, and sculpture. They analyze and emulate the art of various cultures, geographical regions, social movements, and eras. Students evaluate and respond to their own artwork and their peers' artwork. Students performing above grade level can participate in art competitions while struggling students are given individual tutoring and guidance. The teacher organizes a field trip for interested students to National Portfolio Day, where students can have their portfolios reviewed by university faculty and considered for scholarships. Students participate in numerous city art festivals and competitions. For music, theater and dance experiences, students are encouraged to join the school's clubs in those fields.

Students must earn credit in health and Physical Education (PE) in order to graduate. Freshmen take PE, and seniors take health. PE class is 90 minutes long and meets twice a week, while health meets three times a week. The health and PE classes follow the TEKS, and employ the CIF and an action-based learning style with a focus on the relationship between physical activity, nutrition, disease prevention, and overall health. Students track their food choices, and implement physical activity into their daily life. The class includes lessons that require students to chart their family health history and analyze the probability of disease occurrences. Approximately 100 students become certified in CPR every year through their health class. The teacher started the school's first state-sanctioned cross-country team, which makes VVECHS one of the few ECHS in Texas with a competitive sport. The health teacher created an intramural program to allow all students the opportunity to participate in organized athletic activities throughout the year.

Although some students enter the school having earned a foreign language credit in middle school, 90% of the student body enrolls in a foreign language course. Courses include all levels of Spanish and French, and are open to students of every grade. All courses follow the district pacing guides and meet daily. The classes adhere to the TEKS-based curriculum and incorporate the five "Cs" standards of world languages education: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. Lessons ensure students learn cultural awareness, literature, language, and listening through an emphasis on group discussion, which prompts learners to analyze their thinking. Language technology applications are used to help students learn vocabulary and grammar. Field trips to museums and theater promote cultural awareness. Students attend yearly theater programs to experience Spanish literature, art, and drama presented by professional theater companies from Spain and Latin America. Students attend one local opera or musical theater production which has a background in either Spanish, Mexican, or French culture. Participation in university-level exhibits and showcases expose students to issues facing the communities who speak the language they are studying. Students reflect on all of these events through discussion and writing.

Students take Business Information Management (BIM) I in ninth or 10th grade to fulfill the state's

technology requirement. The course meets daily and requires students to earn certification in at least one part of the Microsoft Office Suite: Word, Power Point, Excel, Access, and/or Outlook. In 2016, 150 students were certified in at least one area and six received all certifications. The course uses TEKS-aligned technology programs to teach business ownership, money management, and advertising. Students who are struggling to master the BIM course receive tutoring, while those performing above grade level are encouraged to work toward higher level certifications – such as Excel and Access – at their own pace. Students interested in taking BIM II must earn all certifications. Students have access to technology through the computer lab, the writing center, the Robotics Club, and through tablets provided by the school. The BIM course gives students access to a 3D printer, poster maker, and laminator, which prepares them for part-time jobs and engagement in the community. Students can develop other technology skills, such as web mastery and filmmaking, through VVECHS technology clubs.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

At VVECHS, curriculum is based on sound instructional practices to ensure success for all students. The foundation of these instructional practices rests on two approaches: the Fundamental Five (F5) and the Common Instructional Framework (CIF). A solid curriculum design focuses on fundamental learning strategies while using technology as support to foster rigorous academic success – which, in turn, develops creative and independent thought. The curriculum design uses technology to take these strategies to the next level.

The F5 focuses on the appropriate teacher and student interaction to allow instruction to be student-centered. The CIF provides a common campus instructional strategy language that is proven to help struggling students while pushing high-performing students to the next level. Through the concepts of both approaches, teachers facilitate active learning. This provides opportunities for purposeful talk, cooperative learning, recognition and reinforcement, as well as rigorous questioning and scaffolding for struggling students. Teachers use proximity instruction by working in the power zone, as well as various questioning strategies to monitor group progress and scaffold learning for students struggling with the concepts of the lesson. Technology assists with this approach, as instructors use numerous apps to enhance student learning. This practice allows active movement around the classroom by faculty to demonstrate a concept on tablets mirrored to smart boards.

It is not uncommon to see the AP Physics class recording balls falling from the roof, then uploading data into a program that measures how high the balls bounce, and the curve each bounce makes to determine motion analysis. A Pre-Calculus class may make videos to demonstrate how Ponzi schemes operate in real-life scenarios, while students in an AP Literature class may communicate their thoughts on literature through class blogs and the use of an app that allows for multiple student editing at one time.

VVECHS believes all students have the ability to succeed. This philosophy leads all teachers to develop intervention strategies that are data-driven and aimed at yielding the highest progress with students. The Campus Support Team (CST) – made up of the administration, instructional coach, and all department heads – attends extensive data-driven intervention workshops. The data analysis tools and intervention strategies provided at this training are currently the foundation of the Spartan Intervention Plan. Data from district common assessments/benchmarks, state accountability exams, AP exams, and ACT/SAT results are analyzed by the CST for patterns and trends. Based on this evaluation of data, appropriate curriculum adjustments and needs are identified. Department heads share data analysis with their professional learning communities where intervention strategies are devised. Teachers produce quintile performance reports to determine high-, middle-, and low-performing students. After patterns are identified in low-performing state standards, mini-lessons are devised to reteach those concepts. Departments discuss content-specific curriculum adjustments that must be made in order to address student needs. All content teachers invest in planning the intervention as a team.

The Spartan Intervention Plan is also supported by grade-level professional learning communities, which meet monthly to discuss common struggling students. If students are failing more than two classes, they are identified as at-risk, and flagged in our intervention system. At-risk students are monitored and required to attend mandatory tutoring, and are enrolled in an advisory class that provides additional support within the

school day. If further intervention is necessary, a Student Intervention Plan is created with student and parent input, clearly delineating the role of the teacher, student, and parent. These contracts are reviewed monthly in grade-level professional learning communities, and adjusted as necessary. English Language Learner (ELL) students are monitored through an extra intervention level. Administration monitors them by asking teachers to report ELL progress through the ELL Progress Report form. These forms are reviewed regularly through the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee to provide additional interventions.

While students with academic needs are thoroughly addressed through the intervention plan, careful intervention is planned for students who achieve at advanced levels as well. Students in this tier are taught to identify their strengths and weaknesses through analysis of their own data. Strategies for self-analysis, such as 3-2-1 and Careless/Clueless, are used regularly. In AP classes, students regularly analyze their performance on exams according to College Board standards. Students identify patterns in their performance, and identify strengths and weaknesses to develop learning goals that help maximize success. The VVECHS philosophy of empowering students to help themselves is key to success at high levels. With faculty and students working together, students are provided the best personalized intervention for their individual success.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

VVECHS prides itself on being a small community with authentic relationships. Because of the unique student demands of an ECHS, it is essential that students feel they are a vital part of the campus. All students attend a transition program called Project Endeavor, a two-week camp hosted by faculty and student leaders. The purpose of this camp is to introduce incoming students to the concept of an ECHS, and work on team-building skills and foundational skills to prepare them for VVECHS. Through this unique program, the faculty begins to create an authentic and supportive relationship with incoming students, who then feel confident and united as Spartans when school begins in August.

Further support is extended over the next four years through the schoolwide AVID program and the VVECHS-created College Transition class. A customized, tiered program is in place to help students develop college readiness skills and master the state standards. Students identify their areas of need and seek help from peers and teachers, a key organizational skill for college success. This skill is evident when students organize study groups on their own for their college classes.

Serving the community is a priority for students. Students are assisted in finding authentic community service opportunities that build on their natural talents, and create lifelong relationships that extend beyond graduation. This concept is also extended through extracurricular opportunities. Spartan faculty recognize the importance of extracurricular opportunities to shape and develop well-rounded students. As such, they sponsor several clubs and honor programs to provide opportunities for individual growth beyond academics – such as the National Honor Society hosting the district’s Special Olympics, or the Art Club helping El Paso orphanages brighten up their centers with murals. Additionally, there is a Presidents’ Council consisting of the presidents of all the clubs, who meet for lunch with the principal quarterly to discuss issues and solutions. A variety of opportunities are provided to create a well-rounded high school experience and a sense of belonging.

Spartan teachers are committed and invested in the school’s vision to build well-rounded students. Working in this setting requires a commitment to wearing a variety of hats, as well as being excessively flexible. Teachers support each other through their varied professional learning communities, and are given weekly opportunities to meet and develop ideas. The Spartan Hospitality Committee develops and hosts events that foster community. Teacher potlucks, as well as celebrations for school and personal accomplishments, are designed to bring the faculty together so they may value each other collectively and individually. Teachers are highly motivated and invested because they feel valued and appreciated.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

VVECHS recognizes the important roles that family and community play in the education of children, and works to maintain communication with both. Parents are welcome at the school, encouraged to visit with administrators, and invited to serve on the Campus Educational Improvement Committee. Parents also serve as volunteers at the school and at school functions, such as dances and movie nights.

In the first few weeks of the school year, grade-level parent meetings are held to inform parents of school policies and provide an opportunity to meet the faculty. Parent handbooks are distributed at this meeting, along with a schedule of monthly Parental Involvement Meetings. Throughout the year, the school utilizes an automated phone call system app, the school’s website, and social media to inform parents of events. A monthly parent newsletter is sent to every family with information, important dates, and messages from administrators and counseling departments.

Parents are asked to perform three hours of service at the school annually, which can be met through volunteering or attendance at Parental Involvement Meetings. These meetings cover various topics, including financial aid workshops, technology training, and parenting skills. In March, VVECHS holds a Drive-Thru Breakfast meeting, where parents are served breakfast by administrators as they drive up to the

school to drop off their children.

The community is heavily involved in the growth of VVECHS students. In addition to a partnership with EPCC and UTEP that allows our students to attend college classes, professors are invited to visit our campus. The Science Department participates in the National Science Foundation's Scientist in Residence program, where a scientist co-teaches with VVECHS science teachers throughout the year. The Social Studies Department makes students aware of opportunities for learning through UTEP Law School Preparation Institute presentations.

College representatives visit VVECHS regularly to speak to students about university requirements. Additionally, a growing alumni network facilitates access to guest speakers who visit VVECHS throughout the year to speak about college opportunities and experiences. These presentations are not limited to seniors – students from every grade are invited, as well as parents. This closeness between students, parents, and the school allows parents to learn about university early in their children's high school experience, thereby giving them time to have serious conversations about college options.

Every fall, the school opens its doors to the community and welcomes hundreds to the annual VVECHS Fall Festival. School clubs donate candy, students decorate the classrooms, and community families come in to trick-or-treat. The Fall Festival has expanded the sense of unity that exists between the community and VVECHS, with over 500 children participating annually.

3. Professional Development:

VVECHS professional development empowers faculty to make complex decisions using data; to identify and solve instructional problems; and connect theory and practice with student outcomes.

Professional development is planned each year to support school-wide use of the CIF to focus on promoting rigor and college readiness, and to support solid technology integration. These initiatives are determined each year by the administration and teaching staff to target areas identified for growth, and continue the development of areas of strength. Because teachers are included in the identification process, they are highly invested in the implementation of professional development sessions.

The Instructional Rounds model empowers teachers to explore educational dilemmas as a group. Using data from 2016, all content areas determined that complex inferencing was a common weakness across all tested contents. English I and II found that making complex inferences about texts and use of evidence to support understanding (TEKS Figure 19B) are targets for improvement. The U.S. History data proved that questions requiring students to use critical thinking and analyze relationships, make generalizations, and draw sophisticated inferences and conclusions about history (TEKS 29 a-h) are also targets for improvement. Biology data proved similar – when students were asked to use critical thinking to make informed decisions and draw inferences based on data, as well as evaluate the impact of science research (TEKS 3 c-d). Finally, there was a need for improvement in math where students must analyze mathematical relationships to connect and communicate mathematical ideas (TEKS 1f).

Focusing on this common target, the faculty participates in rounds, which are conducted by district assistant principals. Additionally, they look for evidence of Hess's Cognitive Rigor Matrix, a district-wide initiative. Feedback from the rounds is used to develop further professional development. In addition, the Technology Cadre provides training on new applications to further support campus initiatives and prepare students for digital demands at competitive universities.

Teachers are encouraged to travel annually for professional development to bring new and fresh instructional approaches to their content. Teachers attend AVID institutes, curriculum conferences, College Board institutes and conferences, and numerous other recognized conferences that focus on instruction, brain theory, and data analysis to keep abreast of new and cutting-edge developments.

VVECHS administration believes rich professional development occurs while educators are networking and participating in collaboratives, standards development, and assessment work. Because of this, the

faculty routinely participates in providing staff development within our district and across the state, and provides feedback through state assessment development panels.

Administration participates in all campus professional development as cohort facilitators, and meets monthly with district administrative teams to discuss common goals for professional development at the administration level.

4. School Leadership:

Shared authority and responsibility is the foundation of the leadership style of VVECHS. The principal believes all teachers and staff members should not only be part of the decision-making process, but assume positions of leadership.

The school has 13 different standing committees (Gifted and Talented, Hospitality, Graduation, Communication, Technology, Educational Improvement, Language Proficiency, Crisis, Campus Support, AVID, Response To Intervention, College Readiness, and Anti-Bullying), and every teacher is a member of at least two committees. Of the 33 teachers and staff members, at least 15 hold chair or co-chair positions. Additionally, all 19 teachers, along with three staff members, hold leadership positions by sponsoring, coaching, or directing one of over 30 clubs at the school. The basic premise is that – similar to the school’s mascot, the Spartans, who faced the Persians at Thermopylae – individuals must work together and assume equal responsibility for the school’s success.

In sharing responsibility, trust amongst the faculty and staff must exist. This trust is modeled by the principal, who believes in allowing each teacher the freedom to try new ideas in order to achieve higher levels of success in the classroom. From the assistant principal to the custodian, everyone is encouraged to be innovative. Carefully thought out risk-taking is encouraged, as it can bring great success or lessons learned. A frequently repeated phrase is to take the road less traveled – unless the road, through previous trials, is known to go nowhere. It is sometimes frightening to try new ideas or be the first to implement a new program. However, with the encouragement of administration, the faculty and staff understand they will be supported in their efforts to bring the school and students further down the road of success.

The administration knows micromanagement and threats neither instill trust, nor bring the best out of an individual. Teddy Roosevelt once stated, “The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint to keep from meddling with them while they do it.” This epitomizes the leadership approach at VVECHS. Talented men and women are hired to do their best, given clear expectations, and supported in their efforts without undue hindrance or unnecessary delays.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

While the school's success is undoubtedly connected to its six "Pillars of Success," the underlying factor for the overall success of VVECHS is our commitment to work with the whole student. The school-wide desire is to have students mentally and emotionally prepared to handle challenges – not just in institutions of higher learning, but in their careers and lives.

Many believe this can be done by simply working effectively with the student within the four walls of the classroom. At VVECHS, however, this is accomplished through a campus-wide philosophy of working with and supporting each student in all aspects of his/her life, both inside and outside the classroom. To achieve this, every employee is expected to work toward knowing the complete child. For example, school faculty and staff volunteer to work with our students in various clubs and organizations, and support students in their involvement. How many schools have three or four teachers running with the cross-country team during practices, even though they are not coaches? How many teachers volunteer to serve as competition for the High Q team in practices (and regularly suffer the agony of defeat)? At VVECHS, such support and interaction is commonplace.

These kinds of interactions serve three purposes. First, it allows the faculty to get to know the complete student – they learn the student's behaviors, attitude, beliefs, and work ethic in areas other than academics. Second, it allows students to see their teachers in different environments, and interact with them in different settings. Third, this allows a different type of bonding to occur between adults and students that would not ordinarily occur in a classroom setting. All of this leads to more dynamic success in and out of the classroom.

In the classroom, teachers can more easily adapt lessons to fit the personalities of the students, and personalize projects to make learning more relevant for each student. The staff is also able to understand the life obstacles each student is going through, and use this knowledge to assist students as they work to overcome them. By knowing the whole child – as one instructor has said – it is easier to know whether the metaphorical iron fist or the velvet glove is needed in order to get the best out of each student, and guide them toward successfully facing life's challenges.