

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2018 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mrs. Lori M Fox

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

Official School Name Haywood Early College

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 185 Freedlander Drive

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

Clyde NC 28721-9441  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Haywood County

Telephone (828) 565-4000

Fax

Web site/URL http://hec.haywood.k12.nc.us

E-mail lorifox@haywood.k12.nc.us

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. Bill Nolte

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail nolte@haywood.k12.nc.us

District Name Haywood County Schools Tel. (828) 456-2400

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 Chuck Francis

(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**

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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 2018 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 2012 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: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, or 2017.
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

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2017-2018) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 8 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 4 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools

15 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
  - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2017 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	12	26	38
10	15	26	41
11	8	20	28
12 or higher	24	25	49
<b>Total Students</b>	59	97	156

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 1 % Asian
  - 0 % Black or African American
  - 6 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 88 % 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 2016 – 2017 school year: 4%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain.

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	7
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	7
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	176
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.04
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 49%  
Total number students who qualify: 76

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

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

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>0</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>1</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	6
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	1
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 15:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	98%	98%	96%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	100%	95%	95%	86%	86%

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 2017.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	36
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	58%
Enrolled in a community college	22%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	20%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

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

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

One Pack, One Goal: Working together to make college a reality for all.

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

Haywood Early College is one of 207 early colleges in North Carolina, which means we are a public school of choice. Our goal is to target a diverse population representative of our school system’s freshmen class. In doing so, we accept students from every community within our county. Our emphasis for admission is on students who are first in the family to graduate from college and are able to succeed in a collegiate setting.

HEC begins the admission process by visiting all middle schools in our district for recruitment presentations and meetings with groups of students as well as individuals who want to know more in-depth information. Every middle school student that expresses an interest in attending HEC is given an application and an invitation to attend our prospective parent/student night. Charter schools and private schools alike have equal access to the online application and are invited to attend our prospective student/parent night as well.

During our prospective student/parent night, we present information on early colleges in general, high school and college pathways that our students follow throughout their time with us, advantages to attending an early college, both academic and financial, and HEC’s expectations and day to day life on our campus. We follow this up with a question and answer session with our entire faculty. We feel this gives prospective students and parents an opportunity to visit our campus for the first time and get to know us better.

At this point, students begin applying to attend HEC the next school year. We collect data from their previous schools which includes attendance, discipline, 504/IEP, AIG, test scores, previous and current grades, and teacher/counselor recommendations. We also follow up with clarifying conversations with counselors and administrators if needed.

A committee comprised of members of our school administration as well as central office staff is formed and students are chosen based on the criteria mentioned above. If middle school students are not accepted,

they are encouraged to have a strong ninth grade year in their traditional high school and we allow them to apply again if they so choose the next year.

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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They say not to judge a book by its cover.

The mundanely named 400-building, home of Haywood Early College, has the distinction of being the oldest building on campus. Its walls, an eclectic mix of original tongue-and-groove wood paneling, modern drywall, and, in some cases, synthetic composite, show decades of wear. The classrooms those retrofitted walls enclose are cramped, the by-product of trying to fit too much into too little space. The water-stained ceilings, mismatched furniture, and worn industrial tile speak of an old, tired building.

Look inside.

Despite these modest accommodations, there is nowhere else the faculty and staff would want to be. There has not been a single instance of turnover among the teaching faculty and our school counselor in the last five years, and that was when a mathematics teacher moved to the building next door to teach at the community college.

It is the students, of course, that keep everyone here. In many ways they resemble this Appalachian county in North Carolina as a whole: overwhelmingly white, rural, of modest incomes. Yet these students have chosen an untraditional path by choosing Haywood Early College, and they are united by that choice. The students have, of their own volition, volunteered to lead study groups to help others and founded a mentor program to guide the younger students. Students advocated for the creation of our various clubs and organizations. In a world so often marked by strife, their kindness to each other and acceptance of each other is humbling. There has not been a fight in the memory of the school. They could teach adults a thing or two.

It has all happened so fast. Our school itself is just over a decade old. Few knew what to make of it when it began and misinformation was common. Some thought we just took the smart kids (due to the college bit of our name, no doubt), while many did not even know we existed. In fact, Haywood Early College was formed to serve a particular at-risk population of the county: first generation college students of families with modest household incomes, and, at just under half, we still exceed the traditional high schools in the county in the percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

Until recently we had few enough applications that denials were rare. These days though the word is out. We have had numerous state-level recognitions: as a school of distinction and as a school of excellence, a school report card of an A and a school that has exceeded expected growth. One of our students was recently awarded the UNC-Chapel Hill Morehead-Cain scholarship, the first time in nearly three decades any county student has done so. In the last graduating class, nearly one in six attended college with some sort of full-ride scholarship or assistance.

We have a close partnership with Haywood Community College that allows our students greater flexibility in picking among rigorous classes that speak to them. From classes on music appreciation to digital photography, from the Old Testament to psychology, our students can choose from a wide range of options that involve an in-the-flesh instructor and fellow students. In a time where such flexibility usually comes at the price of online classes, we are pleased we can offer classes where they can meet their teachers face-to-face, and develop strong and meaningful partnerships with them.

And so our county is waking up to this incredible resource that is there for them. Applications are booming as the people of Haywood County have now realized all we have to offer: small class sizes that offer instruction tailored to each student, teachers who eschew standard lesson templates in favor of innovation, layered support for each student ranging from peer study groups to one-on-one teacher-student sessions to institutional support from the community college.

Yet this still leaves something out. Our students feel valued, by their teachers, by each other, in ways that are hard to explain. How about this: our largest club is drama, and when they meet, stuffed into a small room, there is something thrillingly joyous about their boisterous clamor. Or this: our counselor's office

buzzes with omnipresent students who find pleasure in a sympathetic ear, a comfortable chair, good advice. Or this: that for a charity 5k, staff and students turn out the largest group from any organization. Or finally: the way our students feel comfortable being themselves and expressing their own particular identity, without fear of ridicule or rejection. The estrangement, the alienation, that seems such a fixed part of the high school experience, has been kept at bay.

So this is Haywood Early College: rigorous and innovative instruction, an experienced and committed staff, an appreciative and enthusiastic community, kind and united students. Oh yes, and an old and dilapidated building.

Come. Look inside.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum:**

The North Carolina standard course of study for English language arts is grouped into strands: reading (literature and informational), writing, speaking & listening, and language. At Haywood Early College we have the added challenge of taking students straight out of middle school and making sure they can make the transition to the community college as smoothly as possible. This means a strong focus on reading complex texts, discussing those texts through seminar, and producing strong, analytical essays. We place an emphasis on depth over breadth, covering fewer works more thoroughly. For instance, the English II class will write three papers on their first novel, from a short two page paper to diagnose writing tendencies to a standard four page paper. By the time students have finished their first work, we have been able to diagnose trouble areas for each student and make significant progress correcting those issues. Most of the writing is done in class so that we can provide individual assistance to students, and thanks to our small class sizes, we can often provide sustained one-on-one conferences. Fortunately, our English faculty are both veteran Advanced Placement teachers, so creating a classroom environment centered around analysis of complex texts through writing fits neatly into their existing skill sets.

Similarly, our mathematics department prepares students for college. We follow North Carolina's curriculum sequencing of Math 1, 2, and 3 with students taking their required fourth math course at the community college. We supplement the mandated curriculum with elective courses. These courses are created based on the results of a gap analysis which allows us to identify deficiencies in our students' mathematical abilities that keep them from being considered college ready. In our Navigating Numbers elective, not only are foundational skills such as spatial awareness and abstract reasoning addressed, the students extend their knowledge beyond the scope of the NC Math 1, 2, and 3 standards to include advanced geometry and matrix analysis. In our STEM elective, students learn to use multiple representations to model mathematics through the use of K'Nex construction kits, coding, and 3D printing software. Before some students advance to their first college math class, they are enrolled in another elective course designed to fill the gap left after Math 3 and to familiarize them with Pearson's MyMathLab, which is a computer program used in every college math class at Haywood Community College.

Just as in mathematics, students build their understanding of the social studies curriculum through practical engagement. Our students visit the courthouse to sit in on actual cases to better understand the judicial process. They assist with voter registration drives and meet with veterans. We want our students to experience social studies through first-hand observation and interaction. It must be something real, something more than just a textbook. That is why they craft budgets using real-world local sources to demystify concepts like mortgages, interest rates, and down-payments. That is why rather than relying on a textbook as the primary source of information, their understanding of historical events is shaped through a reliance on primary sources as the main text, using secondary sources to buttress that knowledge. Our students read *The Edict of Fontainebleau* and Leon Battista Alberti's *I Libri della Famiglia* and Baron de Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws*. We build on this work through writing. We believe that the best assessment of a student's knowledge comes through their ability to write complex historical analysis. Much like in our English classes, these writing assignments provide opportunities to work with students one-on-one and shore up any weaknesses or misunderstandings they possess. We believe that these strategies have worked to build a strong foundation not just in social studies, but as a thorough preparation for college-level work.

Unlike our other core classes, our science classes are taught entirely by the community college, and students receive a mix of high school and college credit for them. As these classes are not taught by Haywood Early College faculty, we have limited control over the teaching methods employed. We trust our partners at the community college who do an exemplary job.

As an early college, our overriding goal is to prepare students for college, and that goal filters into just about every aspect of our classes. We visit colleges to make that end goal as tangible as possible. We choose texts and tasks with a view toward those that will provide the smoothest transition for our students when they

graduate. Our students do not repetitively solve problem sets, instead they solve problems that are authentic and engaging using a mix of individual work and collaboration. As a staff we expect much of them and we expect that they will rise to meet that challenge. And, far more often than not, they do.

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Students are offered a wide array of elective choices through our partnership with the community college. Each student is highly encouraged to take a designated number of credits to satisfy requirements for an Associate of Science or Associate of Arts degree by the time they complete their tenure at HEC.

These elective offerings encompass several disciplines which allow for self-exploration. Students are introduced to entire curriculum areas for the very first time. The study of the mind through a student's first psychology course may be the initial glimpse of a career path never considered before. Through learning how to properly operate behind a camera lens and create a print composition, a student may unearth a new skill that could aid in a career in marketing. Our students attain the reading and math standards, as measured by career and college readiness requirements by the state of North Carolina, to progress through our program. Due to these high expectations, students are able to focus more on preparing for a college pathway. The HEC career and college readiness approach is more holistic, which goes over and beyond identification by a test score. Not only are students prepared for the next step in academia, but have a social and emotional piece of student readiness fulfilled due to introspection through elective courses.

Many students explore the arts through ART 111 (Art Appreciation), ART 121 (Two Dimensional Design), and ART 264 (Digital Photography). Course objectives such as the historical development of art to the completion of artwork, through a variety of media, are accomplished through these courses. MUS 110 (Music Appreciation) and HUM 160 (Introduction to Film) offer alternatives for those who want to venture into the arts through a different facet. These credits are usually earned during the first two years of a student's time as an HEC student.

North Carolina requires that each high school student acquire a credit in Health & Physical Education prior to graduation. Within the first two years, HEC students earn HEA 110 (Personal Health and Fitness) and PED 100 (Fit & Well for Life). Through the completion of these courses, students gain a better understanding of lifetime fitness and wellness that will benefit them well beyond their time as high school students.

Foreign language courses are offered through a variety of methods at Haywood Early College. The large majority of our students take Spanish 111 and Spanish 112 through our partnership with Haywood Community College. These classes are typically taken in the third and fourth year. Even though North Carolina does not require foreign language to complete high school graduation requirements, we feel strongly that our students take two foreign language courses to allow them admission into four-year universities. In addition to the two courses that most universities require, this summer and next fall we will begin offering a third Spanish course for those students applying to more prestigious universities. HEC also offers several foreign language online courses through North Carolina Virtual Public Schools. These choices include German, Mandarin Chinese, French, Arabic, Japanese, Latin, and Russian.

Many students take a foundational technology course called CIS 110 (Intro to Computers) upon arriving at the early college. This allows each student to master the fundamental functions and operations of the computer. The community college library offers an incredible wealth of print and online resources to our early college students, along with a staff that truly enjoys the utilization of their space by our student body.

Students are given the opportunity to explore a plethora of elective courses through the community college. COM 120 (Intro to Interpersonal Communication) and BUS 110 (Intro to Business) are frequently taken upon a student's arrival. These courses, along with the ones mentioned previously, allow students to identify their strengths and evaluate their weaknesses. After the completion of the first year at HEC, students become more comfortable exploring their interests in courses such as PSY 150 (General Psychology), POL 120 (American Government) and REL 112 (Western Religions). By a student's third year, they are bold

enough to challenge themselves with courses such as COM 231 (Public Speaking), as they know they will benefit at future speaking engagements due to the skills acquired from the course. Fourth and fifth year students, have pinpointed their future area of desired discipline and tend to venture into courses such as DFT 170 (Engineering Graphics), CIS 115 (Intro to Programming and Logic), and SOC 210 (Abnormal Psychology) to better prepare themselves for the transition to a four year university.

### **3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:**

The instructional approaches used in math classes alone at HEC are astounding in their differentiation and ability to engage all students to their highest levels. One such approach is task problems, utilized in all three levels of math, which ask students to creatively solve real-world problems. These task problems allow for student creativity and promote critical thinking: they teach students that there are multiple ways to reach an end goal, and students analyze the benefits and costs of following each plan. Students showcase their varied levels of understanding and learn new ways of thinking. Task problems are an equal access practice, meaning that students of all levels can work to their particular skill level, thus providing a challenge for high-achieving students and access for low-achieving students. Math classes at HEC demonstrate Socratic-style learning, a technique that engages students on a higher level. The teacher acts as a facilitator by asking students questions to further their ideas, rather than providing answers. Students also are trained to ask their peers questions - students model questioning for their peers to reinforce the kinds of exploratory questions that will bring them closer to their goals.

Math assessments vary based on the skills being taught and the students, but a unifying characteristic is self-assessment. Students are always asked to assess their own work, as well as their peers, and posit possible alternatives and correct errors. Math teachers do not mark problems correct or incorrect; instead, students receive feedback in the form of questions that ask the students to further answer the questions or clarify their responses. Students are rewarded for revisions and rethinking. Math teachers focus on understanding and assess each students' ability to draw conclusions and successful acquisition of the skill.

Instructional methods in History and English classes at HEC prepare our students for college. Seminars that explore open-ended and thought-provoking questions on challenging texts allow students a chance to explore ideas while the teacher facilitates. Both History and English classes teach students research skills through student-chosen debate topics on real and controversial issues. In HEC's closely aligned English classes, writing is used as a way to engage students in critical thinking while taking into account personal interest. Students develop their own theses on broader topics that challenge students to their appropriate level. In both History and English, writing is a process that goes through pre-writing stages and revisions. Assessment and feedback are a daily practice. One-on-one writing conferences allow teachers to work with students on their particular issues and identify areas to work on. Peer editing and team writing assignments foster growth and community in our classrooms, and struggling students are supported in their endeavors. Self-assessment is also an oft used tool to allow students to analyze personal growth and plan for future areas of focus.

While all of our teachers plan lessons with universal access in mind, interventions for struggling students or enrichment for excelling students is also common practice at HEC. Teacher-created instructional videos in math class differentiate learning for students by further scaffolding instruction and providing review of material that students can access at any time. The Kindle reading app used in English classes provides read-aloud assistance when necessary. All of our classes utilize group work, and knowing our students' strengths and weaknesses so well means our teachers can group students purposefully to scaffold learning. For example, certain students tend to be stronger at identifying and explaining key text while others are strong at integrating text in analytical papers or organizing information, so groups can be formed to account for strengths and weaknesses. Peer teaching is a school-wide intervention strategy because we believe that students teaching students creates the most powerful learning. Teacher-student tutoring is an intervention strategy that is happening daily before and after school and during lunch. HEC has developed classes as intervention tools as well. The Foundations of Math class allows struggling students a chance to review and strengthen math skills. ACT Prep allows students a chance to work on strategies for test taking and review material covered on this college-entrance exam. Struggling students are regularly discussed in staff meetings, and teachers solve problems together. Interventions for students who are achieving beyond

expectations can be seen in the personalized class schedules at HEC. One 2nd year student, for example, is currently in Math 172, his fifth high school math credit, Chemistry 151, and an engineering graphics course.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Our students arrive to us from middle school. Before they come to us, they are used to following routine, herded from one location to the next, their every move planned out for them. At Haywood Early College, we empower them. Here they are responsible for their routine. Though only fourteen or fifteen when they arrive, we treat them with respect and expect them to attend class, complete coursework, and be a contributing member of the campus. Far more often than not, they do just that. We feel that empowering students in this way creates a culture of responsibility, of maturity, of scholarship. Those fourteen- and fifteen-year-old become our seventeen- and eighteen-year-old campus leaders. That is how we create school culture: by having our students model it for each other. Our younger students learn from the example of their elders and their motivation comes from each other and from the desire within themselves to be a part of the community we have fostered here.

That community in turn helps support our students' growth: academically, socially, and emotionally. In addition to all of the one-on-one help provided by faculty and counselors, students regularly study together. They also put on plays together, run together, play games together, visit colleges together, and volunteer to help others, again, together. It is embedded in our school motto: One Pack, One Goal. So when a student comes by at the end of class to announce that she is leading a study group in biology, or when a group meets after school each Wednesday for a two month long game of Axis and Allies, or when a group taking a college trip is led through campus by an alumnus, that is just our community at work. We look out for each other. We can count on each other.

As for our staff, one advantage of a small school is that everyone gets input on just about every decision. Our entire staff is a part of the school improvement team, for example. Our staff meetings can cover a broad range of material: from the granular level where we discuss the needs of individual students to the big picture items, discussing our vision of the school and our strategies for how to get there. In our school, each staff member has a sense of efficacy because everyone feels like they have a voice in many of the decisions made.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

We are dedicated to giving parents and families the same level of support and individualization as we provide for our students. All teachers provide weekly grade and attendance updates through PowerSchool, and parents have access to that information through ParentPortal. Faculty members are in constant communication with the families of our students through phone calls as well as emails because our goal is to be proactive rather than reactive. Teachers also utilize the Remind app as a way to communicate with parents. Our school counselor holds parent information nights for families to educate them on FAFSA and the college application process. The principal and college liaison prioritize meetings with parents regarding their student's progress, high school and college pathways, semester schedules, or future goals and opportunities. Relationships are paramount to us, and in turn we have created a culture that embraces family involvement.

We build community in our classrooms. Our English classes skyped with a professor from the University of Michigan, and our history classes have met with a professor of Anthropology from Western Carolina University. Staff from NC State's Agriculture Research Station visited this year to discuss GMOs and current trends in agriculture research; our county's Emergency Systems Director presented on the technology used to find lost hikers; and Great Smoky Mountains National Park staff presented on summer internship opportunities, just to name a few. We welcome our community into our school to share experiences and pique our students' interests as they contemplate their futures.

Administration sends out automated phone calls and remind texts frequently to keep parents and students abreast of upcoming events. Our school website and Twitter account provide two more areas to access information. We schedule our bi-yearly open houses with our students and their families' schedules in mind

to ensure maximum participation.

Our goal is to continue to strengthen our relationship with the community college. Our students are not only students of HEC but of HCC as well, and we participate in many campus-wide events such as Spring Fling, Week of Welcome, and Library Week. HCC's last two student government presidents have been HEC students. The vice-president of the community college's honor society is also an HEC student. It is important for us to encourage student participation in these activities because they not only foster our students' personal and academic growth but also strengthen our presence on the community college campus.

We are also involved in our county community. Our students participate in the Power of Pink 5k to support breast cancer research, deliver Veterans Day cards to veterans employed in our school system, visit HCC's daycare to read to children, serve at the community kitchen, participate in waterways cleanup, and serve in a variety of volunteer roles as individuals throughout our community.

### **3. Professional Development:**

We feel that stagnation breeds complacency, and we seek out professional development that will challenge an experienced staff. Our approach is simple: if teachers and administrators find a beneficial program they want to do, we make it happen.

Individually, our teachers have a history of looking for challenges. Half of our faculty is National Board certified which speaks to the individual commitment of our teachers to reach their full potential through reflection and enhancement of their craft. Our history teacher just earned the Global Educator Digital Badge through the North Carolina Department of Education. This requires one hundred hours of global educational professional development. She stresses living and working in an interconnected world throughout her history classes. In order to keep expectations high, some of our staff attend Advanced Placement workshops in their subject area. Though we do not ourselves teach classes for AP credit, those workshops are filled with some of the brightest and most engaging colleagues a teacher would want to draw inspiration from.

Beyond just pursuing their own improvement, our staff also collaborates to collectively improve as well. Our math department presents annually at the statewide math conference as well as MELT (Mathematics Education Leadership Training) at Appalachian State University each summer. Upon return, these teachers collaborate with math departments across our school system to share what they have learned and gained from these experiences. HEC has a new 1:1 iPad initiative and a couple of our teachers attend NC TIES (Technology in Education Society) through a grant with our technology department. All of our teachers use iPads in their classrooms along with our students to enhance learning and this opportunity allows us to be cutting edge with the technology we use.

Our school system also provides a yearly professional development day that we all attend. A wide variety of content specific sessions are available for faculty and administrators. System-wide meetings with high school teachers are also mandated to allow collaboration on pacing guides and benchmark tests. Teams also attend early college specific learning opportunities offered through NC DPI and private sector organizations throughout the school year.

On the school level, we are constantly discussing and sharing ideas that we learn from each of our individual/team professional development experiences. Our weekly staff meetings lend themselves to including discussion on what we have learned and what we need to be looking to attend next.

### **4. School Leadership:**

In a small school such as ours, the principal must have a vision and the staff must have a voice. Our school is barely a teenager in age, and in that time, we have had three principals, the first of whom presided over all but the last three years. She established a clear precedent that instruction needed to be effective and innovative and produce definitive results and then left it up to the individual faculty members on how best

to achieve that mandate. She provided resources and support; the faculty produced results. Subsequent principals have kept that structure, and as a result the faculty are encouraged to try a range of approaches. Our principals have provided staff with a level of support and autonomy that is without equal, and we feel that is one of the key drivers of our high levels of student achievement.

But even an innovative staff can find itself boxed into paradigmatic thinking. Our current principal has reshaped our schedule in new ways, making arrangements with the community college that allow for greater flexibility of scheduling during our first block. This in turn allows us to offer more sections of particular classes which, in turn, allows us to increase our enrollment despite our cramped classrooms. Her vision will allow us to serve even more students without diminishing the services we provide.

Our principal is supported by a community college liaison who has, in her short tenure with us, already provided invaluable aid in making sure we have access to college resources: rooms for testing and a stage for our drama students. These might not seem significant, but it has not always been easy to get such access. Our lead teacher is also a full-time teacher, unique in our county, and regularly advocates for teachers at county level meetings and arranges testing that regularly balances out competing needs.

Finally, the staff itself collectively occupies an important leadership position. All members of staff have shown a willingness to advocate for themselves and their views, something that only takes place if the environment is viewed as fair and supportive. Though any good staff will have disagreement - it is a natural by-product of a passionate and educated staff - our school leadership has shown itself capable of listening at least as much as leading.

## **Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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If we have done a good job explaining ourselves through this application, then there should be little doubt what our most important practice would be: we personalize education for our students. Technically, this means identifying each student's idiosyncratic tendencies and tailoring instruction to those needs. It means eschewing rigid pacing guides and plans in favor of adaptation. It means creating collaborative frameworks like writing workshops and problem-based learning, where students can develop their own particular skills working with others. Above all, it means a close collaboration between teacher and student with plenty of opportunities for one-on-one tutoring and instruction, both inside and outside of class.

But while all that is accurate, it is a cold reflection of the school. The truth is something warmer and far less technical. Our strategy boils down to trust and acceptance and comfort and family. It is the sort of place where students with free time in their schedule might come back to sit in on a class they have already taken and passed because they want to. We have older students who come back to sit down and read *Romeo and Juliet* with the first-year students, or they might sit through a civics class for an entire semester for no other reason than they want to be there. They go back to the high school faculty for help with their community college classes (calculus has been drawing them back to one of our math teachers lately). Our alumni keep in touch, particularly with our school counselor, who spends hours and hours with individual students each year walking them through the application process, explaining how financial aid works, and helping them line up scholarships and prepare for interviews. They remember.

The faculty remembers too. If teaching is a calling, then it is not so because of the tests and test scores and growth and proficiency. Nor is it because of the subject matter: the Pythagorean theorem and photosynthesis, Hamilton and Hamlet. No, if teaching is a calling then it is because of the extraordinary and ineffable feeling of being able to matter, to make a difference in a young person's life, at that age when making a difference really does matter.

It is not a strategy or a practice so much as it is the reason to get up in the morning.