

**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) [X] Title I [ ] Charter [X] Magnet [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Mrs. Kathleen Lynch McCabe

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

Official School Name Dr. Ronald E. McNair Academic High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 123 Coles Street

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

Jersey City NJ 07302-1917  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County New Jersey

Telephone (201) 876-4804

Fax

Web site/URL

[http://www.jcboe.org/boe2015/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=429&Itemid=1047](http://www.jcboe.org/boe2015/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=429&Itemid=1047)

E-mail kmccabe@jcboe.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Dr. Marcia Lyles

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail mlyles@jcboe.org

District Name Jersey City Public Schools Tel. (201) 915-6000

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. Sudhan Thomas

(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):
- 27 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 4 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 9 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 40 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
<b>PreK</b>	0	0	0
<b>K</b>	0	0	0
<b>1</b>	0	0	0
<b>2</b>	0	0	0
<b>3</b>	0	0	0
<b>4</b>	0	0	0
<b>5</b>	0	0	0
<b>6</b>	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	83	96	179
<b>10</b>	47	104	151
<b>11</b>	87	93	180
<b>12 or higher</b>	78	95	173
<b>Total Students</b>	295	388	683

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 45 % Asian
  - 15 % Black or African American
  - 14 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 19 % White
  - 6 % 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: <01%

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	0
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	0
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	683
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	<.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	<01

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: 47 %  
Total number students who qualify: 321

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

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

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</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>0</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: 2
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	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	45
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	2
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
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	96%	97%	97%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%

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	184
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	96%
Enrolled in a community college	3%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	1%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

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

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2008

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

We seek to provide a challenging college preparatory curriculum that maximizes intellectual excellence, personal development, and civic responsibility within an ethnically and racially diverse environment.

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

Eighth grade students who are residents of Jersey City may apply to attend Dr. Ronald E. McNair Academic High School. The criteria that affect the admission decision are, in descending order of importance, PSAT 8/9 scores, grades earned during 6th-8th grades, teacher recommendations, extracurricular activities, and attendance. Demographic data is also considered, as all of the applicants are sorted into demographic groups. The top 50 students in each one of four demographic groups (African-American, Asian, Hispanic, and Other) are admitted. In addition, all remaining applicants are ranked from highest to lowest admission score, regardless of demographic group and placed on a waiting list. In total, approximately 240-250 students will be admitted every year in order to create a 9th grade cohort of 180-200 students.

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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Dr. Ronald E. McNair Academic High School is an intentionally diverse magnet school serving the highest achieving students who reside in Jersey City, a community which has been recognized as the Most Diverse City in the United States for three of the last four years. Originally chartered in 1976, the original Academic High School admitted 25% of its students from each of four demographic groups: African-American, Asian, Hispanic, and Other. When the school moved to its current location in 1996, it retained its admissions procedures, but it was renamed Dr. Ronald E. McNair Academic High School in honor of the scientist and astronaut who perished in the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster.

The student body of McNair Academic mirrors the diversity of Jersey City. The majority of our students speak another language at home. They are most likely either immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants. They hail from all of the neighborhoods of the city, from the least to the most affluent, yet 47% of our students qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch. Many of our students will be the first in their families to attend college, and many more will be the first to attend college in the United States. Several years ago, the admissions procedures were updated. As students notify the school that they will not be enrolling at McNair, we admit students off of a waiting list comprised of students without regard to ethnicity. This has tended to skew our population away from a strict representation of 25% of the students from each demographic group.

If you were to visit McNair Academic, you would be able to easily and immediately identify how we align our work with our core values of intellectual excellence, personal development, and civic responsibility.

Our students get to class on time. They work past the bell. They are enrolled in challenging courses, including our 26 different Advanced Placement classes. Over 100 students enrolled in Independent Science Research this year, meaning they stayed after school until well past dark every day. Eleven of the seventeen Gold Medals awarded at the Hudson County Science Fair were won by McNair Academic students, and two of those Gold Medal winners will be traveling to the INTEL International Science and Engineering Fair in May. This year will be the third time in four years that our students have had the opportunity to showcase their work at that prestigious event.

Our students are courteous, holding themselves to the highest standards of behavior and comportment. They hold the door open for each other. They almost never raise their voices except to cheer for the athletes on one of our twenty different extracurricular sports teams. Our dress code is business - casual, lending a professional air to our learning community.

Our students are connected to their teachers, coming in early or staying late for extra help, and engaging with the faculty advisors of one of our over thirty different clubs. We have students at McNair Academic from 7:15 a.m. until 6:45 p.m. when the security guard tells them they have to head home for dinner and homework.

The students care about Jersey City and the world around them. They volunteer, often well beyond the number of hours required for graduation. They work with city and state leaders to effect change on issues that affect them directly. This week, for example, we are celebrating “Green Week,” an initiative coordinated by the Environmental Club. Each day this week, we have a different challenge, culminating in a “dress-down” fundraiser for an environmental charity.

In its forty-year history, McNair Academic has only had three principals. The first two each had a tenure of close to twenty years, and the third started in September of 2016. The change in leadership is evident, most directly, in the steps taken to encourage and amplify student voice. To that end, we have embarked on a series of cultural celebrations and Town Hall Meetings in which students are able to celebrate the McNair Academic experience, reflect upon their lessons, and lend their voices to the discussions about school culture and climate.

Dr. Ronald E. McNair Academic High School was a previous recipient of the National Blue Ribbon School award. In 2008, we were recognized for our academic excellence and service to the community. Since then,

the students and faculty of McNair Academic have continued to excel academically. The most recent accolade came in February when the State of New Jersey ranked Dr. Ronald E. McNair Academic High School as the #1 school in the state due to our attendance, graduation rates, and PARCC scores. Being recognized at both the state and national level is an honor, and we have greeted these awards as invitations to develop our leadership within the district and the larger educational community. Our teachers and administrators have presented at national conferences, and we have mentored teachers are just beginning to teach Advanced Placement classes. We have continued, as well, to provide service to the community and we have ongoing and productive relationships with over twenty-five different local organizations, including the Historic Harsimus Cemetery, the Golden Door Film Fest, Haven House Youth Respite, the Embankment Coalition, St. Joseph's School for the Blind, the Liberty Humane Society, the Boys' and Girls' Club, St. Mary's Santacruzian, and the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs.

Dr. Ronald E. McNair Academic High School is a unique and impressive school. Our students cherish the opportunities provided for them, and our teachers work hard to help every child reach his or her potential. We celebrate our successes as we continually look for new opportunities to learn and grow.

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

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

At Dr. Ronald E. McNair Academic High School, our expectation is that our graduates will be well-rounded, thoughtful adults who are prepared to engage in advanced study in whatever field they choose. While most of our graduates are interested in pursuing a career in science or medicine, we know that their ultimate success depends upon having a strong liberal arts education. To that end, in order to graduate from McNair Academic, students are required to complete 160 credits, far in excess of the state requirement of 120 credits. We require thirty credits of English, ten more than the state requirement; we require twenty credits of social studies/civics, five more than the state; and we require ten credits of visual/performing arts, five more than the state.

Our English curriculum begins with a required 9th grade course in Critical and Creative Writing. This foundational course provides the students with an opportunity to strengthen their skills in both narrative writing and argumentation. This course is a complement to our four literature-based core courses (Literature 1, Literature 2, Literature 3, and Literature 4). In order to satisfy the six-course requirement, students must take at least one additional elective. We offer Film Studies, World Literature, Mythology, Shakespeare, African-American Literature, Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition, and AP English Literature and Composition. Our teachers meet regularly to discuss expectations for each grade level so that each one of our graduates has a strong command of reading comprehension, written expression, and communication skills. For the Class of 2018, over 75% of them will have completed either AP English Language or AP English Literature. Every student in every AP course has to take the corresponding AP test, and our passing rate on the AP English exams far exceeds the national average.

Our mathematics curriculum has a similar focus around student preparation for the AP tests. Our students have the opportunity to take AP Calculus AB, AP Calculus BC, AP Computer Science, and AP Statistics. In order to help the students perform well on those tests, all of our math teachers continually reinforce the standards of mathematical practice, starting with our 9th graders in either Algebra I or Geometry. Our teachers help the students to analyze the errors in their own work and to become adept at metacognitive strategies required in advanced mathematical work.

Our science curriculum begins in 9th grade with Chemistry Honors, and our students progress through a sequence of Chemistry, Biology, and Physics. Beyond those three courses, our students have the opportunity to take AP Chemistry, AP Biology, AP Physics I, AP Physics C, AP Environmental Studies, Forensics, and Anatomy & Physiology. In addition, the students engage in Independent Science Research after school. We had over 90 students presenting their research at the Hudson County Science Expo this year, and we have had students present at INTEL International Science and Engineering Fair and Regeneron Science Talent Search in three of the last four years. Even when their experiments are not successful, our students learn valuable skills from the research process.

Our social studies curriculum starts in 9th grade with US History I-AP. The second year of that course, US History II-AP, follows in the sophomore year. All 9th graders are enrolled in the first year of the AP course, however, they can elect to move to US History II-Honors in their sophomore year if they choose. The state requires one year of World History in addition to US history, and our students can choose either World History Honors or AP World History. Beyond these courses, we also offer AP Microeconomics, AP Macroeconomics, AP Human Geography, AP European History, AP United States Government and Politics, and AP Psychology. Outside of the classroom, all seniors must complete 50 hours of community service before they are awarded their diploma. In all of the social studies courses, the teachers stress critical thinking skills, close reading of primary and secondary texts, and civic engagement.

All of our students are required to take one AP course before they graduate. Our expectation is that our students will pass at least three AP tests. We have established this rigorous expectation for several reasons. One, we know our students are capable of achieving it. Two, we believe that the rigor of AP courses will help them to be successful in college. Three, our hope is that each student will enter college with advanced

standing due to their AP performance. Advanced standing saves students money, allows them to accelerate their coursework, and gives them the reassurance that, despite the fact that some of them may be the first in their family to attend college, they are indeed ready and they can handle the work.

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

The State of New Jersey requires five credits of visual and performing arts courses, but, at McNair Academic, we require ten credits for graduation. On their application, all prospective students indicate which course they would prefer: Exploring Music or Instrumental Music, and that course becomes part of their schedule. Exploring Music incorporates vocal performance as well as keyboard playing, while students are able to select an instrument to explore in the Instrumental Music course. With five credits of their requirement satisfied in 9th grade, the students must then select a five-credit visual art course to complete before they graduate. We offer Intro to Art, Ceramics, Sculpture, and Drawing. These classes are taught by two full-time art teachers. In each of these classes, students are taught the fundamentals of the creative process, basic technique, and assessment and critiquing skills. They are provided with opportunities to personalize and individualize each assignment so that they can develop their own vision for each work.

Because we are a secondary school in the Jersey City Public School system, our students are eligible to enroll in the Jersey City Arts programs at Henry Snyder High School and James J. Ferris High School. Jersey City Arts is a comprehensive program which offers Media Studies/Film, Acting, Dance, 2-D and 3-D Art, including Advanced Placement Studio Art. Our Jersey City Arts students take two classes at the other schools and are transported to McNair once their courses are complete. Although it doesn't satisfy the requirement for visual art, the students can also take AP Art History as an elective. Advanced music students can apply to take Advanced Placement Music Theory. These courses provide us with the opportunity to challenge the students to achieve at an advanced level within the fields of visual and performing arts.

In the Physical Education/Health Department, every student is enrolled in a half-year course of Physical Education and a half-year course of Health each year they attend McNair. In Physical Education, the students participate in a series of assessments of their physical well-being. They are given a pre-assessment, and they are expected to improve their performance by the end of the unit. This attention to their actual performance compels the children to try to improve their skills and performance. In Health classes, the students study nutrition, health living habits, professions in the healthcare field, as well as public health issues and concerns.

Our 9th graders select a World Language sequence upon their application to McNair: French, Spanish, or Mandarin. Our course sequence starts with the basics in September of 9th grade, and concludes with Advanced Placement during their senior year. The vast majority of our students speak a language other than English at home, so students are provided the opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency in one of the offered languages in order to advance past the introductory course. For advanced Spanish students, we offer both AP Spanish Language and AP Spanish Literature. In every World Language course, teachers stress proficiency in all four components of language acquisition - reading, writing, speaking and listening - and they assess student growth in each area.

Beyond the seven curricular areas already addressed, we have three additional programs that enrich the student experience at McNair Academic. First, we have a vibrant Junior Reserved Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program in which students learn leadership skills through a curriculum developed by the Army and implemented by former Army personnel. Currently, there are over 100 students enrolled in the JROTC program. In addition to their classwork, they also compete at local and regional competitions for both drill performance and academic endeavors. Second, we have an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle class in which students design, program, and engineer drones. The UAV class, along with our AP Computer Science courses, and our Science Research program, allows students to develop skills in technology and practical arts. The Journalism course rounds out our practical and technical course offerings as it essentially a computer-based graphic design course focused around the creation of the school yearbook. Finally, McNair Academic students have distinguished themselves in the Jersey City Summer Internship Program, a city-wide, competitive job placement program. Our students earn high school credit upon successful completion of their employment and career-readiness training.

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

The students of McNair Academic High School have routinely and consistently performed well on standardized tests. This year, our average ACT score was 29. Our average SAT Verbal score was 662. Our average SAT Math score was 646. We administered over 900 AP tests last year and 70% of our scores were passing, well above the national average. Yet, we know that we can do better. One of the obstacles which had prevented universal student success was the prior practice of allowing only 80 freshman into the ten-credit, double block Advanced Placement United States History course (APUSH). The selection was predicated upon the students' PSAT 8/9 scores from 8th grade. While most of the selected students did well on the AP test, the practice of marking some of the 9th graders as "APUSH" kids and others as not making the mark was problematic.

Our research showed that, historically, the students who did not make the cut for APUSH tended to be less successful over their four years, taking fewer AP tests and having lower GPAs. This was not an outgrowth of any deficit in their ability. Reviewing the full complement of their testing data, after graduation, APUSH students had taken more AP courses than their classmates with similar scores. The research showed that marking some kids as more talented than others within the rarefied world of an exclusive magnet school decreased student achievement among those not chosen. Our students rarely meet with failure during their years in grammar school. Starting their experience at McNair with failure was demoralizing and decreased their motivation to succeed.

This year, we enrolled all of the 9th grade students in AP United States History I and we will have 135 students enrolling in AP United States History II during their sophomore year. Allowing the students to select whether or not they want to pursue the second course has eliminated the stigma of not being chosen and we hope it will lead to increased student participation in AP courses throughout their four years. As part of this initiative, the 9th grade teachers worked as a team to establish clear expectations for writing across the curricula in order to provide the students with a strong and shared foundation for their high school careers.

Our students, typically, are exquisitely talented visual and auditory learners. If they read something in their notes, or if they see their teachers solve a problem on the board, they will be able to absorb and understand that material. They are focused and driven to succeed, so they enjoy being told the correct answer or method of deriving the answer. They are not always comfortable with abstraction or ambiguity. To that end, our teachers consciously and intentionally build toward abstraction. They present their students with challenging assignments which have more than one correct answer whenever possible. They invite the children to consider more than one perspective or text related to a subject. They present challenge questions and problems so that the students always know that there is more to learn.

While our performance on the PARCC test helped us to qualify as the highest ranking school in New Jersey according to the Department of Education, we do not tailor our instruction to the challenges inherent in that test. We look to present challenging assignments in all of our classes and find that our high expectations are in line with those of the creators of the PARCC.

While our SAT scores are high, we do not chase scores on that assessment either. We encourage our students to prepare for the SAT using Khan Academy, but we do so because we know that higher SAT scores increase our students' chances of being accepted by prestigious, competitive schools. Our efforts are part of a district-wide initiative to connect the students' College Board accounts to Khan Academy so that they have the opportunity to benefit from constructive interventions targeting their specific learning needs. Khan Academy is also part of an effort to ensure that our students are getting practice at seeking out resources that will help them to be successful, an increasingly valuable skill. Additionally, it reinforces our belief that students should have a greater role and ownership over their education.

We do, however, offer direct instruction for test performance on our AP scores. Since every passing AP score potentially earns our students advanced standing, we maximize every opportunity we have to make sure that the students are successful. We offer additional review sessions after school and on Saturdays. We provide opportunities for students to take 'mock' AP exams to help them gauge which areas they need to

strengthen before the actual test day arrives. And, most importantly, we align our instructional materials and assessment practices with those of each AP exam. Our students enroll in AP courses because they want to do well. Our teachers work hard to make sure that they do.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### **1. School Climate/Culture:**

At McNair Academic, our three goals are Intellectual Excellence, Personal Responsibility, and Civic Responsibility. We pursue those goals through concerted and deliberate effort. We foster an environment in which students are free to pursue their goals and they are celebrated for who they are. Our students refer to themselves as “McNerds” and to our community as the “McNair Family.” Whatever the students enjoy, we encourage them to pursue. We have everything from a Humanitarian Fair to an Improv Club to an Anime Club to a chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers. If our students don’t see an opportunity they would like, they create it. As a faculty, we encourage and champion their efforts and we reduce the obstacles preventing them from pursuing their passions. To that end, for example, we hold regular Town Hall Meetings at which students are encouraged to share their views on school practices and procedures as well as school culture and climate.

In order to foster and develop a school culture in which teachers feel valued and supported, we make sure that teachers have a seat at the table whenever any decisions are made. We foster teacher leadership through inclusion on committees like the Intervention and Referral Services committee, the School Safety Team, the School Improvement Panel, and numerous Professional Learning Communities. Teachers are encouraged to provide input regarding school-wide decisions affecting facilities, scheduling, and discipline.

One of our major areas of focus this year has been the Growth Mindset. We have dedicated time in our faculty meetings, our professional development sessions as well as our department meetings to infusing the growth mindset into our grading and feedback practices. Since, thankfully, we do not have any appreciable disciplinary concerns, our Crisis Intervention Teacher is able to function as an academic coach, working with children to help them develop metacognitive strategies that will help them develop resiliency and confidence.

McNair Academic is a magnet school for academically motivated students and our students come from over thirty different middle schools. Some of our students were, hands down, the best student in their middle school, yet, when they enter McNair, they are in the middle of the pack. Excellent students can develop the habit of externalizing the locus of their self-worth, depending upon praise and grades to determine their self-esteem. We help our students to cultivate a sense of their ability to solve any problem and overcome any obstacle as long as they are persistent and open to learning from their missteps.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

One of our major initiatives this year has been improving our communication with parents and caregivers. To that end, we host a monthly meeting with parents during which we discuss topics such as school security, college application tips & tricks, and curricular initiatives. We also created the McNair Academic Family Newsletter. We send the newsletter home at least once a month to let the parents know about recent events, the accomplishments of students and staff, as well as upcoming games, concerts, and extracurricular activities. In addition, we have created a social media presence this year via Instagram.

We include parents in our School Safety Team committee - a group tasked with monitoring the culture, climate, and facilities of McNair Academic High School. We also include parents in our Middle States Accreditation process, soliciting their feedback as well as their insight about our survey results.

The Board of Education also does a considerable amount of outreach to the families. We contribute items to the Liberty Lines newsletter that the district sends out bi-weekly and we recognize and congratulate parents, students, and staff at Board of Education meetings.

All of this outreach is an addition to the daily updates we provide to the parents via our student information portal, Infinite Campus. While we hope that parents monitor their child’s progress via Infinite Campus, we know that not every parent has the opportunity to be attentive on a regular basis, so we call parents of

students who are failing, and we meet with every parent whose child is in danger of failing any course for the year.

We draw upon the resources of the community as we enjoy the support of local schools such as New Jersey City University and Rutgers Newark. Our partnership with those schools provides teachers with opportunities for professional development and provides students with the opportunity to enroll in courses for college credit. Working with the Confucian Institute at NJCU, three of our students will be traveling to China in April and four principals from our district, including myself, will be traveling to China in May as part of a cultural and educational exchange program. We also participate in the district's "Principal for a Day" program during which a member of the community is able to shadow the principal during the entire school day to learn more about our school.

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

The Jersey City Public Schools have department supervisors who oversee curriculum and instruction across the 40 schools. In order to maintain consistency across the multiple schools, most of our professional development days are dedicated to bringing teachers together according to their areas of expertise. One of the district's goals is to increase the number of students in Advanced Placement classes. Since we administer approximately 1000 AP tests each year, the McNair Academic teachers are able to provide leadership to teachers across the district. Often, teachers from other buildings visit McNair to learn more about the AP curriculum and our approach to helping students succeed at that level.

During the summers, our teachers frequently attend AP/College Board workshops at which they can learn about any changes to the tests and course content. During the year, they engage with colleagues and align their assessment practices to the rubrics from the tests so that their students know what to expect on the exams themselves. Our 71% passing rate on the AP tests surpasses the national average and is exceptionally impressive given the fact that all of our students are required to take the test, regardless of their performance in class.

When the teachers are able to remain in the building for professional development, we tailor our workshops to the specific needs of our building. To wit, there are two main areas of focus. First, we have provided workshops on the growth mindset and how it can inform feedback strategies in class. Second, we have attempted to help teachers acquire strategies for involving every student in each lesson. We have students who tend to let their more vocal classmates take the lead and we are striving to involve every student in every lesson so that we can align our instruction with their specific level of performance.

While we will administer over 1100 AP tests this year, we have some students who take the bare minimum of the one exam they must take to graduate. We have raised our sights this year and we are now hoping to send every one of our seniors off to college with passing scores on three AP tests. We know our students can achieve that goal and we expect that they will.

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

The basic philosophy of the school leadership is to Always Do What's Best for Kids. That means, we work to provide a clean and safe educational environment in which talented teachers deliver high-quality instruction for students who are appropriately placed in challenging, engaging courses aligned to relevant state and national standards. We strive to maintain an environment in which they are able to freely engage in the intellectual pursuits that will both delight their minds and be an investment in their potential for success in later endeavors.

We do not have a very deep roster of administrators at McNair Academic. Apart from the principal, there is one vice-principal. Her primary responsibilities include teacher supervision, student discipline, staff development, and supervision of testing, grading, and the guidance department. She is PhD candidate focusing on teacher development and a former science teacher, so she works most directly with the teachers in the math and science departments. One additional staff member, the Crisis Intervention Teacher, functions as an academic coach as well as the Coordinator of the 504/Intervention & Referral Services

Committee. He also serves as the school's Anti-Bullying Specialist. Department coordinators facilitate the communication with district-level supervisors and hold weekly department meetings, but they have no supervisory capacity.

The principal and vice-principal hold regular meetings with the head custodian and the clerical staff to ensure that proper planning is in place for all school functions. This includes staffing, budgeting, coordination with central office administration, and all communication.

One of the central vehicles through which the school focuses on instruction is the Instructional Rounds process which is orchestrated by the central office administration. Guided by data from observations as well as staff and student input, the school has compiled a list of "Look-Fors" that should be observable to administrative visitors to the classroom. Feedback from the Instructional Rounds is provided to the teachers and school leadership and serves to guide professional development activities. For McNair Academic, the Look-Fors identify instructional practices that promote and amplify student voice, align with national standards around critical thinking and intertextual analysis, and incorporate the growth mindset into feedback strategies.

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

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One might be inclined to say that our success at McNair Academic is most directly related to our focus on Advanced Placement testing. Our teachers align their curriculum and assessment with the national tests and they keep abreast of the changes in each exam so as to ensure student success. However, it would be more accurate to say that our success is a result of our diversity.

Dr. Ronald E. McNair Academic High School is an intentionally diverse community of scholars. Most of the students speak another language at home and are either immigrants themselves or they are the children of immigrants. At McNair, everyone is free to be exactly who they want to be. There is no limitation on self-expression because there is no one standard to which students feel pressure to conform. They are able to explore whatever topic they wish and their days are spent pursuing activities that help them to fully actualize their aspirations. One of our current juniors used the 3-D printer to design a decorative case for the 24-hour home radon monitoring system she designed and built while another one of our seniors devised an app that encourages young girls to explore fashion as a form of self-expression in order to help them build their confidence. Each student is exceptional and each brings to McNair his or her own particular brilliance.

Our teachers say that they feel that their success is due to the fact that there was no one way to teach at McNair, that respect for diversity extended to the teaching staff. They feel that the trust they are accorded as talented professionals has led them to be able, in their classrooms, to craft the educational environment in which they feel autonomous, respected, and successful.

Teaching is both an art and a science. Through our use of data and the alignment of our curricula with the expectations of state and national assessments, we can provide a challenging and rich educational experience for our students. That's the science part. The art is found in the freedom the teachers have to approach their craft in their own unique way. In the culturally and intellectually diverse environment of McNair Academic, the deliberate and intentional way in which both teachers and students pursue their goals is the foundation of our success.