

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 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

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):
- 188 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 41 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 50 High schools
 - 5 K-12 schools
- 284 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	53	79	132
10	40	74	114
11	47	58	105
12 or higher	50	67	117
Total Students	190	278	468

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 4 % Asian
 - 15 % Black or African American
 - 76 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 3 % White
 - 2 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 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.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(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	2
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	2
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	468
(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: 2 %
8 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Spanish, French, Urdu, Farsi, Mandarin, Egyptian Arabic

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 49 %
Total number students who qualify: 227

8. Students receiving special education services: 0 %
2 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>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: 7
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	18
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.	5
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 23:1

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

Required Information	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%
High school graduation rate	99%	100%	100%	99%	96%

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.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	99
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	93%
Enrolled in a community college	5%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
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

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2011

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

Graduate confident, ethically responsible, lifelong learners who are prepared to succeed in higher education and be productive citizens in our world, achieved through a focus on Harvard researcher Tony Wagner's three R's—Relationships, Relevance, and Rigor—which has served as a framework since the school's founding in 2003.

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

As a magnet/school choice campus, we are bound by the guidelines set forth by Houston Independent School District. The application process occurs in phases and starts in the fall for the following school year culminating in selection through a lottery. A student is not considered for the lottery if his or her application is not submitted during the requisite time frame. The next step in the qualification process uses a matrix calculator developed by the school district to score the application. Students must submit academic and demographic information. Points are awarded for grades, test scores, at-risk status, and membership in special populations. Over 90% of applicants meet qualifications at this point, making them eligible for the lottery. Once the lottery is run, an applicant is either offered a seat at the school or placed on a waiting list.

PART III – SUMMARY

Challenge Early College High School (Challenge) is located on the Houston Community College (HCC) Southwest Campus, on the 610 West Loop, near Bellaire, Texas. Challenge gives low-income youth, first-generation college seekers, English language learners, students of color, and other young people underrepresented in higher education, the opportunity to earn a high school diploma, an associate degree or up to two years of credit toward a bachelor's degree—tuition free.

Challenge was built to meet the needs of students from underserved communities as well as those who would flourish in a smaller, more intimate learning environment. A major focus of Challenge is helping students achieve success in high school through rigor and soft skills' development necessary to succeed in college. Being on the college campus contributes to their success. Challenge's philosophy sets high course expectations for all students through a curriculum of: Pre-Advanced Placement (Pre-AP), Advanced Placement (AP), Honors, or Dual-credit. Students are mainstreamed into AP courses so there is no special selection of students. Once enrolled in an AP course they are required to take the test for placement. The Challenge belief is: all students should have the opportunity for a rigorous education and multiple pathways to earn college credits.

Another aspect of the Challenge philosophy is creating an individualized learning experience for students, based upon need. Classes and advisory groups are purposefully small enough to provide students with this personalized learning experience. Advisory groups meet Monday through Thursday and consist of a group of students and a teacher that develop a unique bond. A clinical licensed psychologist is on campus two days per week for additional social and emotional support. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) set goals and interventions appropriate for each student. This ensures students are afforded the resources they need to be successful academically, socially, and emotionally. As an advanced curriculum program, we do not modify curriculum and grades. Therefore, strong supports are in place for students that have special needs and accommodations. The individual student needs are addressed through 504 meetings, ASSIST intervention team meetings, and horizontal teams. Tutorial and study-halls are available to these students and many are double-blocked if necessary. In its 15 years, Challenge has fostered a culture where student success is celebrated. One of the most celebrated traditions, is the advisory program. Advisories "check-in" each week to see what struggles students are having, study together and work on various team building activities and competitions. Other strong traditions that continue every year are: Senior Leadership, school-wide book selection, school-wide "Relax before TAKS" field trip, campus-wide volunteer opportunities, Eagle Camp (Freshman Summer Bridge), town hall meetings, Parent Teacher Organization International Festival, Campus Discovery Tours, and Senior Week. We offer approximately 18 student interest clubs varying from: Community Service and Campus Ambassadors, to Name that Book and engineering, to soccer and dance.

Challenge programs and traditions are essential in relationship building. It is through relationships that students gain the confidence and self-efficacy to thrive in their academic and social achievement. In the face of a national focus that measures achievement based on standardized tests, Challenge has maintained a focus on the whole student. This attention to relationships, relevance, and rigor results in high achievement on those instruments. Given this on-going work, the school has been identified by local and national organizations such U.S. News and World Report's Best High Schools in the nation, the top 100 most rigorous high schools in the nation by the Washington Post and number two in the Houston area by Children at Risk. Challenge has also earned all seven Texas Education Agency distinctions and all state accountability indexes for the past three years, since the current accountability system has been in existence.

In 2011, Challenge was awarded the United States Department of Education National Blue Ribbon Schools award. This made a difference in campus perception within the community given the Blue Ribbon Schools' program purpose of honoring schools that achieve high levels of student achievement or make significant improvements in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups, Challenge has been, and remains, a campus that is mindful of this distinction. The award validated what the campus strives for. In marketing and recruitment, parents and students are educated on how Challenge aligns with this recognition. Challenge welcomes students of all academic levels, stressing that each student is guided and mentored to reach their

potential. Being a National Blue Ribbon School keeps us mindful of serving all demographics and creating a climate and culture that is supportive of all students. Our students, far more often than not, rise to the challenge of the rigorous program. Most importantly, they recognize that the relationships on campus support them in their academic success. Being a previous recipient has kept us consistent in being an example of what it means to be a National Blue Ribbon School.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The Challenge curriculum is aligned with state and national requirements. Additionally, students have the opportunity to receive 60 college credit hours and obtain their associate degree with their high school diploma.

Math courses offered are Pre-Advanced Placement (Pre-AP) Algebra 1, Pre-AP Geometry, Pre-AP Algebra 2, Pre-AP Pre-Calculus, AP Statistics, and AP Calculus. Even though many students enroll in high school Algebra 1 credit, students are required to take math every year to ensure they are better prepared for post-secondary education. The math team works on vertical alignment, ensuring students progress successfully. Project-based learning opportunities are offered throughout the year, allowing students to demonstrate learning through multiple forms of assessment. Various hands-on and real-world opportunities are offered through which students apply their learning and retention through application and discovery. Students participate in different math and engineering competitions through Universal Interscholastic League as well as events at colleges and universities in Texas, including Texas Alliance for Minorities in Engineering and Southeastern Consortium for Minorities in Engineering events.

The Social Studies department currently offers AP Human Geography, AP World History, AP United States history, AP Economics, and AP United States Government. Each student creates an interactive notebook including class notes, reading notes, graphic organizers, writing samples, AP rubrics, and other supplemental material. The notebook, created throughout the year, is designed so the student will have a self-created study guide for the AP exam. Secondly, as writing is a major component in each AP class, all social studies students learn to parse essay prompts and identify a pattern they can use throughout their academic careers to respond concisely and accurately to any prompt they will encounter. Finally, the use of high level questioning strategies encourages students to think beyond foundational knowledge and typical questioning strategies. Each class has a different focus, but civic practices are intertwined to teach responsibility and good citizenship. The civics is especially emphasized during the senior year AP US Government class, where there is a focus on voter registration and engagement with the political community and process. Activities such as voter registration drives, and political speaker opportunities are also provided via Houston Community College. In addition, teachers highlight civic engagement and participation in the entire department. Beginning with AP Human Geography in the 9th grade, students learn about voting districts, and domestic and foreign political issues, and are required to relate current events to their learning targets.

The English program is accelerated, offering Advanced Placement and Dual Credit Courses at every grade level. The English department leads the campus-wide Literacy Initiative, working to ensure that literacy is embedded across subject areas. Students must engage in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in every class, every day. English teachers use Literacy Circles, Classroom Talk, Collaborative Group Work, Questioning, Scaffolding, and Writing to Learn strategies so that all students may effectively read, understand, and write a wide variety of literary and informational texts. These strategies help to strengthen students' ability to research, listen, and speak in a high school and college setting. Literacy is the foundation of the campus and helps drive student achievement.

The Science department offers Pre-AP Biology, AP Biology, Pre-AP Chemistry, AP Chemistry, Pre-AP Physics, AP Physics, and Biology 1318. Pre-AP courses follow the state Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and focus on acquisition of science foundation skills, and prepares students for the AP and college sciences. The science and math teams plan together to ensure alignment in curriculum and a smooth vertical transition for the student. The Science department also creates hands-on experiences in and out of class through labs, competitions, and field experiences to further address TEKS and AP learning objectives. Students elect to take at least one college level science course with a lab to obtain their Associate degree in Arts and additional science courses if a student pursues an Associate of Science degree.

To prepare students for college, college courses and college level curriculum are offered beginning in the

9th grade. Students learn the necessary soft skills and responsibilities, such as being organized and meeting professor expectations, along with the high-level content. Students are also taught how to register for classes, apply fee waivers, and navigate the various college offices. Additionally, we created a College Guidance course for 11th and 12th grade students that support college readiness. Students research and apply for scholarships as well as work on their college essays and prepare for the SAT. The success of these initiatives is reflected in the number of acceptances to post-secondary schools, scholarship offers, SAT scores, and the state accountability college readiness indicator.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Fine Arts:

The school offers Theater Production 1A/1B (grades 9-12) and Theater Arts 1A (grades 10-12). Both courses are offered during the fall and spring semesters for a minimum of 45 minutes, twice a week. Theatre Production 1 is a full year course and Theatre Arts 1A is a one-semester course. Theatre Production provides practical hands-on experiences in acting and stagecraft through the preparation and public performances of plays. Theatre Arts provides study of the role of the actor, literature, performance theory and techniques, historical evolution, and cultural contributions of theatre. The school supports students' acquisition of the TEKS knowledge and skills by exposing students to city and state competitions as well as promoting student creativity through acting, poetry, and one-act play productions. The school has received several city and state championships over the past five years.

Physical Education and Health:

The school offers all students, grades 9-12, one full year of physical education and one-half year health education. Each course is offered during fall and spring semesters for a minimum of 45 minutes, twice a week. In health education, students develop skills that will make them health-literate adults. In physical education, students are motivated to strive for lifetime personal fitness with an emphasis on the health-related components of physical fitness. Students are given lesson activities, in alignment with the TEKS objectives that instruct them in how to use problem-solving, research, goal-setting, and communication skills to protect their health and maintain some degree of fitness. All students are required to complete an overall health and fitness assessment at the end of each year.

Foreign Language:

All students, grades 9-12, are required to take a language course for a minimum of two years. For example, the school offers AP Spanish Language, Spanish I-III and Spanish for Native Speakers during the fall and spring semesters for a minimum of 45 minutes, twice a week. Students learn to speak, read and write Spanish. Activities include creating a menu for a restaurant and presenting on a Spanish speaking country and their cultural aspects. The goal is for students to gain a variety of skills and an appreciation for different cultures. As outlined in the TEKS objectives, students engage in oral and written exchanges, as well as connect with other cultures and communities around them. The student also learns to understand the nature of a language by comparing their own language, culture and influence with the one they are learning.

English Language Arts Electives: The school offers one-semester courses for Creative Writing and Analysis of Visual Media during the fall and spring semester. The courses are available to students in grades 9-12, for a minimum of 45 minutes, twice a week. Creative Writing allows students to gain experiences of expressing themselves verbally, visually, and emotionally. Lesson activities include creating poetry, short stories, and manuscripts that make up a working portfolio in preparation for the work force. Students present these works publicly which supports the TEKS standards of oral communication and public speaking. Analysis of Visual Media helps students learn how to think independently and critically about matters inside themselves and throughout society by recognizing how visual techniques convey messages through several types of media. Lesson activities include creating a media text, reflecting critically on the work produced, and studying the relationship between subject matter and choice of media for presenting that subject. This helps to reinforce the TEKS objectives by producing visual representations to communicate specific messages.

Career and Technical Education (CTE):

Career Technology Education (CTE) courses are designed to provide students, grades 9-12, with the knowledge, skills, and career training that are necessary for employment and professional growth in many

business settings. There are two course offerings: Business Information Technology (BIM) and Principles of Information Technology (PIT). Each course is offered during the fall and spring semester of each year. The curriculum for both courses addresses the TEKS by preparing the students to acquire the essential skills in the most popular applications software as well as additional software skills that are critical to the successful day-to-day usage, sharing, and management of information for many enterprises. The program enables a student to pursue a variety of career pathways, including project management, desktop publishing, business graphics, web design, database management, sales/customer service support, business schematics, and more.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

At Challenge, there are a variety of instructional techniques and support systems that are used methodically and strategically every year. These techniques and supports are implemented with such regularity that they almost go unnoticed. Teachers and administrators at Challenge have high expectations for all students, regardless of subgroups' status, and all students are required to take the most rigorous coursework available. Most of the tiered instruction and differentiation is done by individual teachers in the classrooms. Learning is personalized based on individual student needs.

Students receive a district issued laptop beginning their freshmen year. They are required to utilize their laptops to access curriculum, submit assignments, take tests, engage in research, design presentations, and to collaborate with each other. Teachers also allow students to use their personal cell phones for specific in class assignments and social media assignments.

The Common Instructional Framework (CIF) techniques and methods used by Early Colleges and Middle Colleges nationwide, are also used daily at Challenge. All faculty members are trained on the use of Cornell Notes and other note taking techniques. Classroom talk is one of the most powerful practices at Challenge. Students are expected to communicate their thoughts and ideas with teachers and other students several times a day in each class. It is not uncommon to see literacy circles and collaborative group work taking place in classrooms of any subject.

State exams, teacher made tests, and district and national standardized assessments are all used to measure student learning. They not only provide a baseline for differentiated instruction, but they are also used throughout the school year to measure student growth and drive instruction. In addition to state and district required assessments, teachers at Challenge are expected to administer two formative assessments each semester. These tests are teacher made. At the beginning of each school year and after each formative assessment, administrators generate reports for teachers, who then use the data during department professional learning communities to identify students who need assistance, and to identify academic standards that have not been mastered. The results of these data talks generate professional development for teachers and also enable teachers to group students into tiers for differentiated instruction.

Advisory teachers are the first line of intervention. Advisory teachers develop a very close relationship with their students. This relationship enables teachers and students to talk informally about a myriad of issues. Teachers review grades, attendance, and discipline issues. Teachers are also able to quickly identify when students are dealing with non-academic issues that can hinder their school performance.

Based on incoming freshmen data, students may be double-blocked in English or Mathematics. All freshmen have a study hall period. Study halls are also used as interventions for many 10th, 11th, and 12th, graders. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, advisories hold special study sessions where students help one another or seek the help of a teacher. In addition to the interventions built into the school day, we have a strong after school tutorial program. Tutorials are scheduled strategically so that at least one teacher from each core content area and a teacher from each grade level is available each day. All the elective classes at Challenge are Language Arts based. Having a strong foundation and support in Language Arts helps students across the different disciplines.

On Fridays, students go to all eight classes for 45 minutes periods; as opposed to an alternating block schedule Monday – Thursday. Since college classes do not meet on Fridays, students are assigned to study

hall periods in lieu of any college class they might normally attend during one of their eight periods. This provides for more studying time in a classroom environment supervised by a high school faculty member. Students also use these study hall periods for peer to peer tutoring.

The Academic Student Support and Instruction System Team (ASSIST) program is the next level of intervention. Struggling students are identified after about the third week in each semester and given an ASSIST team made up of teachers, administrators, and their parents. Once the team has met and agreed, the interventions are implemented and are monitored over a designated period of time of no less than one grading cycle.

To remain a high performing campus, tutorials and Friday study-halls also target higher performing students. Tutorial sessions target advanced curriculum, including pre and post labs, and advanced writing sessions. Special Friday study halls target higher performing students and allow the teachers to reach levels of depth and complexity with the curricula that result in higher levels of achievement. Campus student achievement data shows a marked increases as a result of the Friday sessions.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Challenge has a campus culture which is readily apparent throughout the building: welcoming, warm, and engaged. Since its inception, Challenge has set the expectation that all people who are a part of the school community represent the campus in a positive way. This is primarily driven by the students as they support one another from freshman bridge camp, known as Eagle Camp, until they pass the leadership of their Advisories to the next generation of leaders on campus.

The Advisory program allows everyone on campus, students and adults, to take off some of the daily stress and encourage positivity throughout the school community through team building activities based upon trust, lowering boundaries, interpersonal sharing about beliefs and experiences, and building a family culture in which students feel safe. This affords them a place and time to develop a social circle in which they can grow socially and emotionally. While some principals focus on maximizing instructional time, the principal and administrators at Challenge understand that developing the entire student and in turn the entire teacher, allows for an overall, positive environment.

The culture formed for the students by the faculty is due to the fact that they are treated as professionals with a great deal of autonomy under clear expectations. Challenge is aptly named as it pushes students through the inclusion of 15 Advanced Placement courses in addition to taking enough coursework at Houston Community College to earn an associate degree. This challenges teachers to place a premium on relationships as a driving force behind the rigorous curriculum. Teachers are charged with meeting all student needs. While the expectations are high, there is an inherent trust that comes from the principal. Campus administration allows teachers creative freedom in their classroom, so long as the results match the standards that have been set as a faculty. This comes with an understanding that teachers may require assistance or training and all teachers are part of collaborative cohorts in which curriculum and pedagogical practices are discussed. Teachers also have a wealth of offerings, particularly in AP, for outside training. This sense of autonomy leads to a feeling of ownership over the campus by the entire faculty and everyone is responsible for maintaining campus standards. Additionally, time is blocked out at every faculty meeting to begin with shout-outs from peer to peer. During this time, campus administration also takes time to present teachers with awards and recognitions.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

At the beginning of every school year, Challenge parents are invited to attend an Open House. During this event, the importance of parent involvement and of parent presence is stressed. Academic Nights are also sponsored to give parents an opportunity to witness student learning in a classroom environment. Parents get to see firsthand the expectations set forth by teachers and the accomplishments of students. Also, the campus is open to prospective students and parents in the way of Magnet Discovery Tours. The benefits of the program are highlighted, and these tours are the initial contact with prospective parents and students. Administrators and staff also participate in these tours.

Challenge has two main parent led organizations: Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and the Critical Parent Group (CPG). These groups meet regularly to promote connectivity, an awareness of resources and school events, and to discuss student achievement. The PTO focuses on parental involvement and building relationships between parents and teachers whereas the CPG focuses on building relationships between parents for the betterment of student achievement. The CPG holds meetings throughout the school year on topics of concern brought up by parents. Some topics have been adolescents and organization, scheduling, navigating the Houston Community College experience, and college acceptance. Every year, teachers and administrators collaborate with the PTO to sponsor an International Festival. This festival showcases the diversity of the campus by encouraging families to bring prepared dishes that are representative of culinary cultures and traditions. Local businesses also contribute by volunteering goods and services. Student talents are highlighted in the way of art projects and performances. The event truly recognizes and celebrates the diversity of Challenge's student population. It also provides an opportunity to engage with external

stakeholders.

Other events throughout the school year include an Ice Cream Social, a Halloween Safe Trick or Treat event, and Spring Open House; all bringing together teachers, students, and family members for relationship building and to create a safe space to learn from one another.

Most important, student achievement is regularly reported to families in the form of four report cards, 8 interim grade reports, benchmark data, and reading Lexile scores. Students speak frequently with the grading teacher, the advisory teacher, and their parents about all of the aforementioned data points. Release of this data is conveyed through social media, mass emails, phone calls, and through the online student portal, The HUB.

With a strong college access system in place, college fairs are sponsored in the spring semester, inviting college and universities from all around the country. Houston Community College is one of the campuses' strongest alliance to foster community involvement and student success. Having HCC next door allows Challenge to give students exposure to college success early on in his or her academic endeavors.

With all of these strategies in place, Challenge continues to be on the forefront of working with family and community members, ensuring and contributing to student success.

3. Professional Development:

At Challenge Early College High School, teachers and administrators engage in multi-faceted professional development.

All teachers engage in at least four types of professional development on campus. Teachers engage in two kinds of Professional Learning Community meetings during the school day: grade level and departmental. In grade level meetings either an administrator or a teacher facilitates the process of tracking student achievement, challenges, attendance, behavior, and other pertinent data. The team charges themselves with narrowing gaps in data and ensuring success for all students. In departmental meetings, an instructional coach or teacher leads the group in collaborative work focusing on assessments, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills alignment, peer observations and feedback, calibrations to improve consistency in expectations, and best practices. In a large group setting, teachers engage in monthly professional development in which the focus is usually the Early College Common Instructional Framework, Instructional Rounds, or a highlighted strategy of the month. The staff usually discusses an issue or data sometimes as a large group, but more frequently in cross-content and varied grade level groups. Teachers also engage in professional development at the beginning, middle, and end of the year that focusses on the mission and vision of the school, assessment data, and soft reflection questions that allow the teacher to think of their experiences outside of data. Though only a few, these sessions are just as significant because they provide big goals and challenges and allow teachers to discuss pedagogy in its purest form.

Home grown professional development, like the aforementioned, is important because it meets teachers' unique needs. Also, the professional development is teacher led which increases engagement and builds stake. If teachers have intrinsic motivation, their stamina is increased and they are more likely to transfer that increased energy to students. It is important for teachers to facilitate their own growth because they are most familiar with their Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills and can easily relate this information to each other's needs. Protocols used in Professional Learning Communities ensure academic goals are met and participants have a voice through the use of structured, purposeful routines.

Challenge administration benefits from attending conferences including, the Early College Regional Leadership Conference, and Texas Association for Secondary Administrators. Campus administration also visits other campuses to see best practices in action and takes advantage of targeted professional developments, such as recent HISD Literacy Walks, which will help us lead our literacy initiatives. Administration also frequently calibrates with each other on the teacher appraisal observation and walkthrough scores to strengthen feedback skills.

We encourage teachers to attend the Advanced Placement Summer Institute at Rice University or the National Math and Science Institute. These professional development sessions focus on the rigor that is necessary in an Early College High School. They also provide teachers with a platform to collaborate with likeminded educators. The varied options in professional development creates teacher leaders who recognize the value of collaboration and teamwork.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership philosophy at Challenge is very concrete and the vision is clear to everyone on campus. It is evident not only for teachers and students, but also for parents and visitors who step onto the campus, that Challenge is not a traditional school in any sense, and that things are done in a different manner. The school leadership believes in relationships, fairness, knowledge, and trust. These four values drive everything that happens at Challenge. Students need to have a sense of belonging; there is a direct relation between student relationships and academic performance. Challenge provides multiple pathways for success because everyone deserves the same treatment and opportunities. The school uses both qualitative and quantitative data formally and informally to stay abreast of what is happening at the school near and far. Lastly, the leadership team trusts that everyone is doing the work that it takes, and that everyone is acting with good hearts.

Challenge is a very small campus. It has one principal, two student deans, one registrar, one college access coordinator, a magnet coordinator, and a faculty and staff of 25. The school principal is a liaison between the school district and the school. The principal collaborates with deans and department heads to ensure the school is in compliance with district and state requirements, and is supporting the varied initiatives while staying true to the Challenge beliefs. The two deans monitor instruction, testing, and the implementations of programs. They also work closely with students to ensure they stay on track to graduate from high school and also fulfill all the requirements needed in order to obtain an associate degree from a community college or enter a four-year university.

Policies implemented at Challenge are with the purpose of ensuring that students spend more time in classrooms, and teachers have more collaboration and planning time. Challenge leadership is not a big proponent of new programs unless there is significant research behind them to justify their implementation, but the leadership and faculty always support any district led programs and ensure their implementation through continuous monitoring and assessment. Relationships are a pillar of Challenge and the school ensures strong student to student and teacher to student relationships through an advisory program that is facilitated by senior students and led by a faculty member. All the limited school resources are spent on student safety and interventions in the form of after hour tutoring, summer school, and bridge programs.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The Advisory Program at Challenge Early College High School is the cornerstone on which the campus was built and is an indispensable tool in maintaining the academically rigorous, yet emotionally positive climate. From affording each senior an opportunity to discover and develop as leaders of their younger peers, to fostering strong relationships between faculty members and the students for whom they serve as a part of their Advisory, everyone on campus is afforded the opportunity to reinforce the expectations of academic performance and each student's socio-emotional development. The Advisory program follows a "family" model in which students who are placed within a particular Advisory are a member of that micro-community for the entirety of their high school years. This is done in particular to offer the students an opportunity to grow within the culture of that Advisory, moving up from participant to leader over the course of their high school years. Their senior year involves formal training in leadership development strategies through a course entitled: *G/T Independent Study*, where amongst other learning objectives they are also given the opportunity and autonomy to find the particular style of leadership which fits both their own personality and serves the needs of the students in their particular Advisory. This autonomous approach to training the leaders grants each of the 20 Advisories on campus the opportunity to be similar in activities in which they are participating but unique in culture. Walking the hallways of Challenge shows what the Advisory program means to the students and faculty members as there are multiple flags and signs posted of each Advisory and students wearing shirts and hoodies with their Advisory names emblazoned on them, all expressing their distinct personalities but all showing their pride. While we are a school which does not have many of the traditional modalities of developing school spirit (e.g. pep rallies and football games), our school spirit develops from Advisory and spreads outward. Students represent their Advisory each day they are on campus which develops into an overall sense of school pride as we know only Challenge Early College High School has an Advisory program exactly like it: more than building leaders and followers, we build families which last long beyond the students' time in high school – they are a continuous part of Challenge culture even as alumni. It is through this Advisory program that the school's success is founded and continued.