

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):
- 30 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 9 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 8 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 47 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	44	96	140
10	27	78	105
11	41	78	119
12 or higher	46	60	106
Total Students	158	312	470

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 96 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 2 % White
 - 0 % 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: 1%

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	5
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	5
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	459
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 71 %
Total number students who qualify: 334

8. Students receiving special education services: 1 %
3 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>2</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>1</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:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	25
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.	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 19:1

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	100%	100%	100%	100%	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.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	109
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	79%
Enrolled in a community college	21%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

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

Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2012

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

Provide a unique educational opportunity in a college campus setting that challenges students to excel in their academic and personal endeavors.

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

Mission Early College High School's admission process meets the Texas Early College High School Blueprint guidelines. Currently, Mission Early College utilizes a performance-blind, open-access lottery system that considers all applicants. The use of this system allows an equal opportunity to all students regardless of their background or academic performance.

PART III – SUMMARY

Mission Early College High School (MECHS) strives to promote a highly rigorous and flexible environment that ensures students earn an associate’s degree along with their high school diploma. MECHS was founded on and continues to believe that motivated high school students are ready, willing, and able to tackle college coursework. Through a partnership with El Paso Community College (EPCC), MECHS maintains a unique vision enabling students to move from freshman year through the first two years of college in only four years. After earning their associate’s degree, seniors have the opportunity to take upper level courses through a partnership with the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP).

A campus goal is to ensure student success at an accelerated level for a population of low-economic, first generation students. MECHS was the first of its kind in El Paso and as a result of its success, there are now 12 other Early College High Schools (ECHS) in the city. MECHS has been honored by numerous entities such as Newsweek (2014), National Center for Urban School Transformation (2016), U.S. News & World Report (both in Texas and nationally), Texas Education Agency (yearly), and Educational Results Partnership & Institute for Educational Productivity (2016), to name a few. Above all, the campus is proud of the fact that it is a 2012 National Blue Ribbon School.

In its 12 years, MECHS has established numerous traditions including Autumn Festival, intramural lunch sports, Mr. & Miss Mission, Talent Show, Club & Organization Fair, and Stoling Ceremonies. MECHS is dedicated to providing full and fulfilling high school and college experiences, with such activities as Prom, Homecoming, and Pep Rallies. Much of what makes MECHS successful is a result of countless extra hours provided by the faculty, student leaders, and administrators because they are passionate about the accomplishments and experiences of MECHS students.

MECHS innovated and continues the creative use of “Flexible Friday.” Flex Friday allows sophomores - seniors to set their own schedule from a list of provided curriculum and enrichment sessions. Teachers offer engaging activities, guest speakers, art, theater, tutoring, opportunities for advancement on college courses, group project meetings, and participation in clubs and organizations. Students choose a schedule that works for them focused on areas of reinforcement, enhancement, and interest. MECHS has been praised for pioneering this creative and flexible model, which allows the students to further their academic and campus/community experiences.

There are many strengths contributing to the successful campus model. The campus provides rigor, depth of knowledge, and intense college level work in high school. The students are treated as college students, with care and compassion. The campus focuses on its smaller campus atmosphere, where the highly educated faculty and staff know the students by name and background. Doing more with less is central to MECHS’ success. MECHS offers students comprehensive core, fine arts, and technology programs, with major emphasis on clubs, organizations, and community involvement. The more positive experiences students have on campus, the more successful they will be. Student success in college courses does not happen by chance; a safe, supportive, and enriching environment to facilitate these complex transitions is vital. All staff members mentor and guide students through high school, college, and beyond.

Upon graduation, MECHS alumni do not disappear. MECHS stays in contact with many of the graduates, following their triumphs, and supporting them. The campus is a safe haven for students, where they feel comfortable to attend and to return. MECHS instills a passion for giving back to the community, and the students, faculty, and staff make every day count as a home-away-from-home.

MECHS prides itself as the First and Best ECHS. MECHS leads in ECHS education and promotes innovative small-campus learning. Since receiving a Blue Ribbon Award in 2012, MECHS has become a model campus and program for early college campuses in the district, city, across the nation, and internationally. As a past Blue Ribbon School, the award has positively impacted MECHS’ curriculum and instruction as well as its climate and culture. MECHS faculty, staff, and administrators continue to use the Blue Ribbon Award as motivation for providing exemplary instruction while maintaining a positive climate and culture. For example, teachers continuously reflect on their teaching styles and constantly tailor their

educational approach to fit the needs of every student. MECHS continues to reevaluate its success as a Blue Ribbon School and incorporates data analysis to identify campus needs and guide its professional development choices. The campus' reputation has allowed it to host national and international visitors and showcase the groundbreaking and effective methods used for reaching at-risk students.

The campus mascot, the Phoenix, symbolizes immortality and renewal. The vision for the campus is one of rebirth and rejuvenation. Students move beyond the limited experiences with which they enter, expanding on their successes. The campus culture embraces new methods, talents, and education that extend beyond the classroom. Dreams become reality through hard work, perseverance, and character building. As the students rise from the ashes of disadvantages, they undergo a meteoric transformation of endless possibilities.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

MECHS' core curriculum is characterized by adherence to common standards for high-quality instructional practice. While the core curriculum is directly aligned to the Texas Essentials of Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), it effectively integrates the Knowledge and Skills for University Success (KSUS) and Advanced Placement (AP), promoting a rigorous and challenging curriculum which allows students to evaluate and synthesize their learning. Best practices such as collaborative group work, writing to learn, inquiry-based lessons, scaffolding, and literacy groups are integrated into all disciplines and enable students of diverse skill levels and backgrounds to access challenging material successfully. The curriculum exemplifies flexibility and adaptability to meet the needs of students while raising the level of teaching.

Incoming freshmen attend a one-week intensive Bridge Camp in which students focus on the academic skills necessary to achieve success at the college level. At the end of the week, the students take the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) test to determine placement for college classes. Students who pass their reading TSI before their freshman year are placed in three college courses: Biology Lecture, Biology Lab, and Education 1300, which introduces students to learning strategies such as note-taking, research skills, and ethical and critical thinking; it is the cornerstone to success in all disciplines.

The goal of the English department is to produce individuals capable of understanding and communicating language at a level of sophistication that allows them to be savvy consumers of information in a variety of formats. It offers a rigorous program of study connecting reading, writing, critical thinking, and research skills with other disciplines. To prepare students for college-level English classes, freshmen and sophomores are enrolled in Pre-AP courses, which integrate TEKS, Pre-AP, and KSUS standards. Juniors take Dual Credit English, earning credits for college freshman English, while seniors take college British Literature. Being vertically aligned allows students to learn how to analyze a variety of texts and create projects to showcase their insight and understanding. The progression of sophistication and knowledge in student projects such as storyboards, posters, and skits can be seen throughout the campus and grade levels. All English courses also require students to write research papers using the Modern Language Association (MLA) format, text analyses, and reflective essays to synthesize their learning within and across the curriculum.

The math department has an accelerated curriculum allowing many MECHS students to achieve college level Calculus II while still in high school. The math curriculum integrates high school, Pre-AP, and KSUS standards in order to prepare students for the rigors of college level math. Freshmen and sophomores take Pre-AP Algebra I, Pre-AP Algebra II, or Pre-AP Geometry to help build a solid foundation. By the end of their sophomore year, qualifying students are enrolled in Dual Credit Pre-Calculus or Dual Credit Business Math. Writing and project-based learning are integrated into the curriculum, which helps students solidify their knowledge of math and learn how to apply it to the world around them.

Science at MECHS consists of courses that integrate TEKS, Pre-AP, AP, and KSUS standards. After taking Dual Credit Biology Lecture and Lab at the freshman level, students take either Pre-AP or Dual Credit Chemistry their sophomore year and Pre-AP Physics their junior year. Seniors have a choice of taking Dual Credit Anatomy and Physiology, AP Environmental Science, Astronomy, or Scientific Research and Design. The science curriculum integrates the scientific method and contextual understanding with hands-on learning. Inquiry-based labs are conducted in all science classrooms at least twice a week to help students grasp and master difficult concepts. From dissecting organisms to finding solutions to environmental issues, students are fully immersed in the scientific world. Because of this, MECHS' success at the district, city, and state science fairs grows each year. Finally, science classes often give back to the community by cleaning surrounding areas and re-establishing the nearby Rio Grande Bosque.

Integrating TEKS, AP, and KSUS standards, the Social Studies curriculum offers an intensive study of analytical thinking skills applicable to other disciplines with particular focus in writing and research. Freshman take AP Human Geography, which allows students to build a solid foundation on the evolution of

human, social, political, and economic interactions with each other, their environment, and their world. Sophomores are enrolled in both AP World History and Dual Credit Government, which allows students to understand world events through a political lens. Finally, juniors take Dual Credit U.S. History, in which students learn about significant events and figures that helped shape the country.

With the entire faculty holding Master's degrees, MECHS is able to offer 49 sections of dual credit courses to its students. Courses that are not coded dual credit are offered at either the AP or Pre-AP level. The curriculum offered at MECHS holds the appropriate foundational knowledge and skills necessary to begin studies in any career path. In addition, the curriculum is directly linked to college and career readiness, which has enabled MECHS students to secure both paid and unpaid internships at a wide variety of industries, such as the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the office of Texas State Representative, Cesar Blanco.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

MECHS offers a wide range of courses and activities which center on the goal of ensuring students have access to a diverse and well-rounded education that focuses on the whole student. MECHS is proud of the curriculum it offers outside of the core contents and the opportunities provided for students.

All MECHS students have the opportunity to become participants in the campus' performing arts programs: music and dance. Both programs are aligned to the TEKS to provide a strong foundation in the performing arts. The campus' music program offers four disciplines: guitar, piano, orchestra, and choir. Campus musicians attend music class during the school day, and the members utilize both lunch and after school to practice and receive extra tutelage from the campus music teacher. MECHS students perform in concerts and participate in both regional and state contests. In addition to the MECHS music program, the campus has an award-winning dance group, The Flames. Open to all grade levels, The Flames are a competitive dance group, which focuses on a variety of dance styles. Students who have been chosen to be members of The Flames practice during the school day, and they utilize after school and Flex Friday to perfect their routines and ensure they are ready for the various competitions they enter.

The campus physical education (PE) program works closely with the health course to ensure students are not only engaged in an active lifestyle, but also have the knowledge regarding nutrition to ensure they maintain their health. Both programs are guided by the TEKS. MECHS' PE program is available to all grade levels, and many students decide to enroll beyond the state requirements and continue their active lifestyle. The PE program incorporates a variety of classes: foundations, weights and conditioning, aerobics, and yoga. The goal of the PE program is to ensure students have been introduced to a variety of activities which garner enough interest for them to continue an active lifestyle beyond their time at MECHS. In addition to the PE program, MECHS' health course focuses on educating the students about a healthy lifestyle. The health course at MECHS consists of sophomores who are given instruction into not only what encompasses a healthy lifestyle but also risk factors which can endanger a healthy lifestyle. MECHS prides itself on its ability to foster students to become active and healthy participants of society.

MECHS' foreign language focuses on the acquisition of Spanish. All students are required to enroll and complete two credits of Spanish, which incorporate the TEKS in its planning and structure. The campus offers Dual Credit Spanish, AP Spanish, and Spanish I-III. Students are taught foundational skills, verb tense, conjugation, conversational language, culture, writing, and literature. MECHS has chosen to offer Spanish courses which go beyond the state requirement so all students have the ability to pursue courses in which they may gain college credit and a stronger foundation of the Spanish language and its components. The foreign language program at MECHS ensures all its students not only know the language but the importance of traditions and customs as well.

All freshmen take Business Information Management (BIM) as their technology course. This rigorous course focuses on obtaining certifications in different software programs. Students learn critical thinking, problem solving, digital platforms, and basic programming skills. With a focus on marketable computer skills, students share their knowledge with teachers and the community through computer workshops. While BIM uses the TEKS to help foster instruction, the program focuses on areas such as creativity, innovation,

communication, collaboration, research, and digital citizenship to prepare students to incorporate technology in a real-world setting. Sophomores are required to take a half credit of Financial Literacy, which focuses on consumer practices and responsibilities, the money management process, decision making skills, the impact of technology, and preparation for different careers. Guided by the TEKS, the course prepares students to make conscientious decisions about finances and helps prepare them to become self-sufficient and contributing members of society.

Commercial Photography and Graphic Design courses continue a Career and Technical Education (CTE) Pathway and are offered predominantly to sophomores - seniors. Students learn real-world technology skills in the creation of various products: the yearbook, newsletter, broadcast, school portraits, flyers/posters, videos, clothing, multimedia projects, and more. Project Lead the Way and an afterschool Robotics Club are CTE options for our students interested in engineering.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

MECHS' instructional approach revolves around the development and support of a college-ready focus in the classroom. Teachers use a variety of instructional methods to help the students learn and master the curriculum. Teachers use lesson scaffolding to ensure each student has a strong foundation in each respective curriculum. As students develop a solid curricular foundation, student learning progresses through the incorporation of differentiated instructional methods. Differentiated instruction at MECHS includes the use of the six components of the Common Instructional Frameworks provided for early college design. These strategies include writing to learn, cooperative group work, scaffolding, questioning, frequent small group purposeful talk, and literacy groups. For example, writing to learn is a campus initiative expecting all teachers to incorporate writing in their lessons on a daily basis. Even the elective classes, such as P.E. and Music, integrate writing with prompts such as, "Describe which muscles are used in burpees." In regard to cooperative group work, teachers are strategic in grouping their students. Groups are based on academic and behavioral needs, and are constantly monitored and adjusted throughout the year. In addition, teachers incorporate the Fundamental Five strategies of recognizing and reinforcing learning, framing the lesson, and actively monitoring in the power zone. To be specific, teachers frame their lessons in student-friendly terms in order for students to preview the day's objective and goals, which allows them to monitor their own learning. The purpose of these differentiated instructional techniques is to provide students of all skill levels access to complex information needed to meet state and college readiness standards.

MECHS also prides itself in the inclusion of technology in the classroom. Through a 1:1 initiative, all MECHS students are given a laptop allowing both teachers and students to use a variety of interactive technological programs. Technology allows students to take ownership of their learning and acquire the content. Through a large variety of instructional methods, MECHS students build the necessary skills to become global learners.

MECHS is proud of its instructional approach and is also proactive in providing interventions to ensure success for all students in all facets of their instruction. The campus has a specific plan for identifying students who need extra help and for providing that help on a week-by-week basis. Core subjects provide morning tutoring on different days in order to avoid conflict. Teachers identify students who need tutoring and parents are informed via phone calls, email, and text messages. Students have access to additional tutoring in both their classrooms and in a tutoring lab before school, during lunch, and after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The tutoring lab includes a certified teacher, former students who have returned as tutors, and current student-tutors who provide any assistance struggling students might need. In addition to onsite support, students also have access to EPCC and UTEP tutoring and writing labs. This collaboration between the three academic institutions allows MECHS students to receive interventions at any level of their academic needs.

Students who are having difficulty passing the TSI exam are placed in mandatory tutoring sessions. These small group settings consist of either teacher-led interventions or software-guided tutorials based on student needs. Ultimately, the goal of these interventions is to provide support for students so they may be successful at both the secondary and post-secondary levels.

Students performing above grade level also receive support and interventions to maintain high levels of achievement. Students are given the opportunity to collaborate on open-ended project-based-learning activities, which allow students to delve deeper into concepts through analyzing, creating, synthesizing, and evaluating. Through instructional methods such Socratic Seminars, Philosophical Chairs, and debates, students are able to create their own position, form their own opinions, and critique those of others. By allowing them to explore topics of interest, they are able to bring in real-life experiences, maintaining the engagement needed in order to excel at high levels. Similarly, through the use of a variety of technology tools, students are able to explore ideas such as coding, robotics, and engineering, which motivate students to continue studying and excelling in areas such math and science.

Teachers use a variety of data to adjust instruction and confirm students are successful. Data from formal and informal assessments is gathered to provide insight into specific achievement gaps. Teachers utilize data disaggregating software to analyze four and nine-week assessments to identify low scoring TEKS and KSUS standards. Based on the data analysis, teachers construct interventions to reteach, close achievement gaps, and push students to mastery levels. Teachers also use a heat mapping strategy to provide them with a visual analysis of the data so they have a holistic view to help make instructional adjustments. Teachers use informal assessments such as constant monitoring, instant data from technology programs, and exit tickets for immediate feedback on student learning and possible instructional adjustments. Overall, the routine use of and focus on data analysis allows faculty and administrators to deepen understanding of students' instructional needs.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

A safe and supportive learning environment is MECHS' first priority. Students need to feel comfortable in their surroundings in order to excel in the difficult curriculum often found at an early college. The expectation at MECHS is that all students function as college students. Therefore, students are provided with plenty of opportunities and resources to be academically successful. The faculty members at MECHS help students develop academic self-confidence by preparing them for the rigor of college work and ensuring that they have all the resources needed to persevere through those college courses.

MECHS takes a holistic approach to student support. In addition to the academic support systems in place, students are encouraged to contribute to the campus in a variety of ways. Students are empowered to make decisions that directly impact the culture and climate of the campus. For example, students play a crucial role in recruiting future Phoenixes. They take it upon themselves to promote, present, and answer questions about the uniqueness of the campus. In addition, students gathered input via surveys to create a unified hashtag (#firstandbest) for social media and a name for our mascot's home, Phoenix Kingdom.

MECHS supports student involvement in extra-curricular activities and competitions. The majority of students participate in at least one club or organization. Although MECHS is not a designated business or health academy, Business Professionals of America (BPA) and Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) boast the highest scores and state qualifiers in the region. In fact, even though stipends are not offered for the majority of club/organization sponsors, nearly 100% of MECHS' faculty members dedicate their time and resources to ensure students feel unified and find success in all areas of their life.

As a result of the hard work teachers put into encouraging students to rise above their obstacles, MECHS' faculty are recognized through a variety of events throughout the year. MECHS celebrates different occasions with luncheons at least twice a semester and birthdays are recognized at the end of each month with a sweet treat for all to enjoy. Clubs and organizations regularly treat teachers to lemonade, iced coffee, candy bars, and notes of encouragement. Student Council spotlights one teacher each month, who is rewarded with a designated parking space. In addition, Student Council, Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA), and campus administration collaborate to celebrate the contributions of the teachers with an annual teacher appreciation week filled with surprises, goodies, a luncheon, and breakfast.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

MECHS incorporates several successful strategies for working with family and community members to ensure student success and school improvement. Among the strategies used are partnerships with institutions of higher education (PIHE), newsletters, parent nights, new student orientation, Children's Access to Mentors Promotes Success (CHAMPS), and the Campus Improvement Team, which consists of administration, teachers, parents, and community leaders.

MECHS believes relationships with parents and community members are critical to students' success. The campus has several initiatives to establish effective lines of communication. MECHS has taken a very active role in promoting the campus, its students, and its activities. Strategies range from distributing monthly newsletters to parents as they pick up their children, monthly Coffee with the Principal meetings, parent-teacher nights, class meetings, a week-long new-student orientation, and grade-level meetings. The principal has established a Principal Advisory Committee (PAC), made up of students interested in improving our campus. PTSA is very active on campus, providing additional support in many ways, such as awarding two scholarships per year to graduating seniors. The campus parent liaison/Communities in Schools (CIS) program coordinator is active in assisting parents and students in a variety of manners, including translating, recommending off-site resources, arranging for transportation, and providing shoes, coats, and snacks as needed. MECHS' newly formed Student Council is intent on making sure every student feels welcome on this campus. Additionally, parents are kept abreast of their child's academic challenges through a variety of means, including parent-teacher conferences, notes home, phone calls, and

emails. However, MECHS teachers also make it a point to make at least two positive contacts to recognize student efforts and successes at least twice a week. Furthermore, academic achievements are promoted for the community through social media, campus and district websites, and billboards.

Students who are members of Key Club, National Honor Society (NHS), Science NHS (SNHS), and National Technical Honor Society (NTHS) tutor elementary students on a regular basis, build playgrounds, gather canned goods for local food pantries, and assist the community in numerous other ways. Many of the students have served as science fair judges for elementary schools and help at district literacy events, raise money for the Salvation Army, and volunteer at local hospitals. Students are always looking for ways in which to become active and provide community service. Each year, students put on two festivals (one fall, one spring) and invite the community to join the campus in celebrating. Students provide activities, entertainment, and food for the public's enjoyment.

MECHS always welcomes former students to come back, visit, and share their new experiences with current students. The campus is proud to showcase the accomplishments of its alumni, just as it shares the successes of its current students. This reinforces the long-term bond that is established from the very first day students enter MECHS.

3. Professional Development:

Faculty members have six full days and four half days in their calendar designated for staff development. The campus professional development is based on campus needs as well as district initiatives. Because many of the teachers at MECHS began their teaching career at the college level, campus professional development focuses on best practices for K-12 instruction and student-centered classrooms. MECHS utilizes data to drive all instruction. Essential TEKS are identified in order to close the achievement gap and have students perform at mastery levels. For districtwide initiatives, such as integrating interactive technology in the classroom, teachers attend trainings either locally or across the state. Teachers who attend these trainings return to MECHS and share the information with the entire faculty to benefit student success.

The district holds content advisory committees for the core content areas. During these advisories, teachers from around the district in the same subject come together to analyze district and campus data and identify trouble TEKS. Teachers review scope and sequence, create district common checkpoints or benchmarks, identify misconceptions, and most importantly, share best practices.

In addition to the content advisory committees, the district's CTE department holds regular trainings for elective subjects. During CTE trainings, faculty members are updated on topics such as certification requirements, endorsements, course sequence, and changes to TEKS. Visits to local business and industry partners also take place. This exposes faculty members to the requirements of the current workforce, which provides them with an idea of what current employers are expecting their employees to know. Most times these employees will be our students.

A districtwide initiative, Digitally Nurturing Academics (DNA), provides a mobile computing device to all MECHS students. As part of this initiative, all students are required to use their computer for their learning throughout the instructional year. As a result, both SISD and MECHS have taken into account the needs of the faculty and have designated time for technology trainings throughout the school year. MECHS' teachers learn from master technology teachers both on campus and districtwide. During these trainings, teachers learn new technologies through effective modeling and hands-on practice. MECHS' teachers have been quick to use interactive technology in the classroom as a way of engaging students and adding a component of fun to the classroom. For example, math teachers have utilized tools to create a flipped classroom approach to learning, science classrooms have brought in the use of virtual labs, and social studies classrooms have utilized virtual field trips.

Teachers and administrators at MECHS are life-long-learners and seek out professional development opportunities to foster a growth mindset. These opportunities allow for reflection on practices and adjustment in order to maintain a culture of high expectations and positivity. Professional development also

provides MECHS faculty the chance to bring new and innovative instructional strategies to the classroom, gearing it towards a 21st century learning environment that engages all students.

4. School Leadership:

The MECHS leadership philosophy strongly revolves around growth, both in students and teachers. Because of this, MECHS' administrators incorporate both a democratic and coaching style. This allows the school to operate as a network of professionals, rather than a hierarchy.

As the first early college high school in the city and region, MECHS recently adopted the slogan "The First and Best." One of the best things about this campus is its continuity of purpose: student achievement. MECHS has implemented several programs to help students succeed. For example, after reflecting on why freshman tended to struggle their first year at MECHS, a mentorship program was introduced to help students succeed and alleviate their anxieties. This program came to fruition after it was voted on by the students in PAC. Relationships with community members and parents are built through events such as Coffee with the Principal. During these meetings, administration provides attendees information regarding state testing, higher education requirements, and students' current challenges. In addition, administration welcomes new ideas and strategies on how to help students succeed. The School Improvement Team (SIT) meets on a monthly basis to review the campus budget and provide resource allocation recommendations to ensure student and program needs are met.

The expectations of school leadership are clear on this campus: the faculty teaches at a college-level while ensuring there are numerous strategies to keep students from falling behind and/or failing. Students react to those high expectations by upholding their part of the bargain and acting/behaving as the young college students they are. Administration serves as a support system. It is clear that the protocol on this campus is so well-established that it operates at peak performance. Everyone at MECHS, from the principal to the attendance clerk to PTSA parents, is aimed at making the school a success. Although campus leadership is small in number, it is big in action. The principal's first goal is to ensure all students achieve at their highest level, and the assistant principal and instructional coach play a key partnership role in this goal. The counselor not only has to work to get students to graduate from high school, but to also graduate with their associate's degree. The counselor then assists students in enrolling in up to 18 hours at UTEP as they work on pursuing their bachelor's degree.

Although MECHS is small in numbers, it has big intentions. Everyone at MECHS steps up to do what is needed to help students succeed. PTSA provides faculty meals, encouragement gifts for students, and copying services for teachers. Administrators make sure all teachers have the supplies they need to be effective. Students help the small custodial staff by bussing their own tables at lunch. From attendance clerk to security guard, from student to parent, everyone works to make this campus a success.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The single best practice that has been instrumental to MECHS' success has been the small school environment. Because of this, MECHS' culture is such that students are known and they feel at home. What they "miss" in the way of extracurricular activities and anonymity at a larger campus is more than made up for by a strong family atmosphere at this smaller campus.

One of the misconceptions about an early college is that students are the cream of the crop. However, this is not the case as MECHS is geared toward at-risk students who may not otherwise go to college. While many students are highly motivated, there are always those who struggle with the coursework, who are not self-disciplined, or who suffer from outside influences that affect their work. Yet MECHS has never graduated fewer than 100% of students, and more than three-fourths obtain an associate's degrees by the time they graduate high school. Those numbers are the result of MECHS' small campus environment, which truly allows the faculty and administration to know each student individually and set high expectations. Students greatly benefit from attending MECHS and receiving the up-close and personal attention that is given each and every day; at MECHS, no student is allowed to fall through the cracks.

The small campus environment at MECHS lends itself to forming multi-directional relationships: teacher/staff to student, student to student, teacher/staff to teacher/staff, and school to community. This is especially important when students need to understand how to manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, establish and maintain positive relationships, feel and show empathy for others, and make responsible decisions. While students make mistakes, poor choices, or suffer from all the normal teenage angst, MECHS' small environment allows for constant support through mentoring, consoling, and advising.

The small school environment at MECHS makes each success a little sweeter and is celebrated by all campus stakeholders. However, because MECHS only has 25 teachers, this also means that they all need to work even harder than on a regular campus. Most teachers sponsor at least two extra-curricular activities; yet, as busy as they are, the satisfaction level is also high. Teachers know that their willingness to go the extra mile results in students who are happier, better adjusted, and more likely to graduate from college and become stellar community members.