



## **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):
- 6 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 2 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 10 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	31	69	100
10	33	47	80
11	47	49	96
12 or higher	35	45	80
<b>Total Students</b>	146	210	356

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 1 % Asian
  - 3 % Black or African American
  - 85 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 9 % White
  - 1 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2016 – 2017 school year: 3%

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	3
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	6
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	9
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	336
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.03
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 3%  
11 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 53%  
Total number students who qualify: 189

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

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

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>0</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>2</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>1</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>1</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>1</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: 4
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.	19
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	0
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.	2

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 17:1

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%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	100%	94%	100%	95%	95%

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	62
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	96%
Enrolled in a community college	1%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	2%
Joined the military or other public service	1%
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.

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

Promote a highly rigorous environment to ensure that students earn a high school diploma as well as a two year degree from El Paso Community College.

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

For two months, we actively promote our school within our district. This includes visits to our middle schools and parent educational events, held in both English and Spanish. Current Northwest Early College students lead our recruitment events. Students apply online at their respective middle schools. Students participate in a 10 minute interview, held at the early college, where they are asked to describe their reasons for coming to Northwest Early College High School. Students who are Hispanic, at-risk, economically disadvantaged, male, and/or English language learners are automatically accepted. We do not review grades, attendance, discipline, or state test scores at any time during the process.

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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El Paso County is situated in far west Texas and is the second largest metro area on the United States-Mexico border. El Paso (Texas), Las Cruces (New Mexico) and Juarez (Chihuahua, Mexico) form “the largest bilingual, binational workforce in the western hemisphere.” Canutillo, Texas, is a small desert community of approximately 6,000 that is part of El Paso County. Canutillo is near the Santa Fe Railway, nestled between the Franklin Mountains and the Rio Grande. Agriculture was the primary form of work in this rural community until land development encouraged economic growth. Despite growth, one-third of the community members live below the poverty level. The community is 90% Hispanic, and Spanish is the language spoken in most homes. Only 60% of the community has earned a high-school diploma and 13% have earned a postsecondary credential. Work, not education, has been a priority in Canutillo. This is the community that Northwest Early College High School (NWECHS) is proud to serve.

NWECHS recruits first-generation college students, economically disadvantaged students, students at risk of dropping out of high school, and students who are not routinely represented in universities. There are typically 400 students enrolled in 8th grade in Canutillo Independent School District. By targeting 100 students who would most benefit from the program, NWECHS has a measurable impact on our community. Students who attend NWECHS will earn a high-school diploma and at least two years of college. But most importantly, students and their families will experience the life-altering value of an education.

There are two unique traditions at this school that staff and students look forward to every year: Spirit Week and Open Trick or Treat. These events are connected to NWECHS school values. For example, Spirit Week builds school pride as students compete in various games, from a three-legged race to a marshmallow toss to win the “Spirit Stick.” Open Trick or Treat is a community-wide event for children under age 10. Every NWECHS student participates in this event in some way. Students decorate all the portables and transform the cafeteria into a children’s activity area. This year, over 800 community members attended. These traditions are important to NWECHS because they compel students to work together toward a common goal. Students have fun, and they build lasting friendships.

There is a long history of collaboration with El Paso Community College (EPCC) in this region. Like NWECHS, EPCC is determined to impact the community. As such, it focuses on college access for all. Two years of pre-planning with EPCC occurred before the NWECHS doors opened in 2008. At that time, 50 students were housed in a vacated elementary school with minimal staff. Today, enrollment has grown to nearly 400 students. NWECHS employs a staff of 40 and occupies 26 portables on the campus of EPCC. Students attend classes with traditional college students taught by full-time EPCC professors. In every way possible, NWECHS is organized to align with EPCC. Furthermore, EPCC supports this school’s work with students’ families by celebrating their successes; for example, NWECHS and EPCC co-host a graduation dinner when students complete their associate’s degree. Together both institutions continue to evolve to fulfill the needs of this community.

As its 10-year anniversary approaches, NWECHS notes many important milestones. The percentage of students earning two years of college credit prior to high-school graduation has steadily increased—from 55% in 2015 to 95% in 2018. The graduating class of 2017 earned 6.3 million dollars in scholarship offers. PSAT and ACT scores outperform the region and the state. Out of 250,000 students in El Paso County, NWECHS had the only National Merit Scholarship winner. NWECHS graduates receive National Hispanic Recognition. Newsweek and US News and World Report have recognized this school’s work with students “closing the gap.” These milestones illuminate a fundamental NWECHS belief: education is the key to ending inequality.

NWECHS relies on two key strategies to achieve its vision. First, staff are carefully selected to match the population makeup of students. For example, approximately 80% of NWECHS faculty are bilingual. Many are first-generation college graduates, are Hispanic, were once English-language learners, and are citizens of the community they serve. This value begins at the top; the principal and school counselor are first-generation college graduates. In this way, NWECHS employees have a vested interest in seeing their students succeed, and recognize their need for encouragement as well as academic preparation. Second,

NWECHS cultivates a family community. Administration studies the yearbook to memorize every student's name and then works to learn something about each student. Teachers interact with parents in the community, visit student homes, and learn all that they can about the students seated in their classes. Families are built on relationships, and NWECHS regards every stakeholder as a member of the family.



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

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

Northwest Early College High School (NWECHS) graduates enter the university setting ready to tackle college-level course work. Most begin college with 60 credits already complete. To accomplish this goal, the core curriculum is carefully organized to build college readiness and to provide personalized support for each student's career path. NWECHS curricula follow state graduation requirements, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS). Many NWECHS students are seeking careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math); therefore, this school requires a strong foundation in math, science and verbal and written communication skills.

NWECHS requires all students to complete five years of math. One year must be a college-level math course. Common assessments are used district-wide to ensure alignment with the TEKS, identify students who are in need of intervention, and identify students who are in need of enrichment. Entering students are enrolled in either Algebra I or Algebra II, depending on credit earned from middle school. Instructional time is doubled, which allows teachers to emphasize foundational skills like linear algebra and functions. Freshmen who start in Algebra I in ninth grade must take Algebra II and Geometry at the same time during their sophomore year if they are pursuing a STEM major. Juniors enroll in Dual Credit PreCalculus. STEM students will go on to take Calculus I and II at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) during their senior year. Non-STEM majors will choose a fifth-year math course that aligns with their major.

NWECHS requires all students to complete four years of science. At least one year must comprise a college-level course. To provide stronger foundational skills for the dual-credit Chemistry and Physics courses, all freshmen take Integrated Physics and Chemistry, an introductory course covering basic chemistry and physics concepts. A TEKS-based common assessment is used in this course to ensure that students are well-prepared. All students then complete one year of dual-credit Biology during tenth grade. This course teaches all of the state-required TEKS as well as the college curriculum. Different assessments are used throughout the year to determine student mastery of TEKS and the college curriculum. As juniors and seniors, students are counseled to pursue EPCC science courses that fit their intended majors. For example, a student wishing to major in Mechanical Engineering will be advised differently from a student wishing to major in Biology.

NWECHS requires all students to take four years of English, with a minimum of one year of dual-credit English coursework. District-wide common assessments are given to measure student progress and develop personalized interventions. Given that the home language of many students is Spanish, instructional time is doubled in English I and II. This allows teachers to address foundational skills and is particularly helpful to our English-language learners. This department also offers intervention courses, one-one-one tutoring, and small-group tutoring. This ensures that students pass all required state exams before graduation as well as the Reading and Writing Texas Success Initiative (TSI) exam. Courses are delivered at an advanced level, with emphasis on writing, critical thinking, and interpretation.

NWECHS requires all students to take six years of Social Studies, with at least six semesters of dual-credit coursework. All courses are aligned with the TEKS and CCRS. Students begin with AP Human Geography as freshmen and then take AP World History and Dual Credit United States Government and Dual Credit State and Local Government as sophomores. In their junior year, students take Dual Credit United States History. As seniors, students take AP European History and Economics. In addition, students select from a menu of courses at EPCC to fulfill the Social and Behavioral Sciences Block of their degree plan; this includes coursework in Philosophy, Sociology, and/or Psychology at the college level. Emphasis is placed on developing students' critical thinking skills, their writing, their ability to make connections across time periods, and to current events. NWECHS also recognizes that fewer than half of all El Paso residents vote; therefore, students participate in mock-debates, voter polling, and voter-registration activities.

NWECHS classes are strategically arranged to prepare students for college readiness. The math and English departments must meet specific college-readiness benchmarks. Students enrolled in Algebra II must pass the

Math TSI during the spring semester. In English, students must pass the Reading TSI during freshman year, and the writing TSI during fall semester of sophomore year. Students are provided with constant intervention until these goals are met. Finally, all juniors are enrolled in a semester-long ACT preparation course to ensure that they meet the college- and career-readiness benchmark of 22.

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

NWECHS believes in creating a variety of experiences in all areas of study to support a well-rounded education. This school recognizes that students need workforce and lifetime skills as well as support overcoming various educational hurdles. Electives are thoughtfully chosen with these goals in mind. In addition, students may select from a full menu of courses from EPCC.

All students are required to take one year of fine-art credit to graduate, with at least one semester being a college-level course. Most take Art I in ninth or tenth grade and take either Art Appreciation or Music Appreciation at EPCC in the summer. In Art I, students express themselves through various media such as drawing, painting, and sculpture, as prescribed in the TEKS. Most importantly, art emphasizes the “soft skills” necessary for their work lives; it requires students to be self-directed, challenges their beliefs and abilities, and requires problem-solving skills.

All students are required to take one year of Physical Education credit and one semester of Health to graduate. Typically, this is done in ninth and tenth grade. Courses follow the TEKS and also emphasize lifetime wellness (because the El Paso community struggles with obesity and diabetes). Students learn to make healthy food choices and enjoy cooking demonstrations. Students set personal fitness goals and use mobile apps to track their own fitness journey. Physical education focuses on lifetime activities that require minimal equipment, such as walking, running, and hiking. Fitness trackers are given as incentives. The Fitness Gram is used to measure students’ physical fitness.

Spanish is the only foreign language offered at NWECHS; this fits the needs of the Spanish-speaking community and the goals of the school. Students must be fully biliterate, i.e., able to speak, read, and write in Spanish. NWECHS offers Spanish I, II, III, and IV for native and non-native speakers. Performance expectations are based on the TEKS and AP Spanish Language and Culture curricular requirements. The program encourages all students to take Spanish in ninth grade and complete at least three years, with at least one year resulting in college credit.

In addition to second-language fluency, students need “soft skills” to enter the global job market. This is the role of NWECHS Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses, which follow the state TEKS. Nearly all NWECHS students earn their Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification as freshmen in Business Information Management. Students are required to take additional CTE courses as sophomores, juniors, and seniors to complete a coherent sequence toward a career path. Through these courses, students practice good communication skills, time management, problem-solving, and collaboration. Students select from business, robotics, computer programming, and broadcasting to continue their CTE studies. As juniors, students participate in at least one required job-shadowing experience of at least 10 hours in their chosen field of study. This experience helps students network with professionals in the field who often become mentors. Finally, select students participate in a paid Practicum experience; for example, three current seniors are employed by the district’s technology department and are seen as indispensable.

Freshmen and selected sophomores and juniors take AVID as part of their preparation for college. AVID courses follow the AVID curriculum. Furthermore, the entire faculty is AVID-trained, and AVID methodologies are employed campus-wide. AVID teaches students the behavioral skills necessary to be successful in college, such as organization, interpersonal skills, goal-setting, and commitment.

Juniors take an ACT Preparation course to improve their score. Students learn specific strategies for each ACT test, receiving course workbooks and practice tests for use in the classroom and at home. Saturday practice tests simulate the rigors of test-taking day. Students receive lessons on the college-application components, including essays, financial aid, and scholarships. NWECHS offers a PSAT Prep class the first semester of junior year for students to do well on the PSAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.

These students include potential National Merit Scholarship qualifiers, National Hispanic Scholars, and/or National Achievement Scholars. These supports are built into the system of our school. Without them, our students could not afford to participate.

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

On any given day, Northwest Early College High School (NWECHS) students conduct labs, work in groups, edit each other's essays through Google, use laptops for research, engage in whole-class discussions, make presentations, use 3-D printers, and produce videos. Vital to this school's mission are two instructional approaches: creating a highly effective learning environment and classroom differentiation based on academic and social needs of students.

Teachers follow the instructional standards set by National Board for Professional Teacher Certification, emphasizing a highly effective learning environment for their students. They design and implement lessons that are engaging and rigorous. They ask students to collaborate. They provide students opportunities to be self-directed learners. They always incorporate technology. All students on campus are issued a laptop that is theirs to use during the duration of their time here. The goal is to give students access to technology not available to them elsewhere and to require students to use it in ways that will make them marketable in their future careers. As in many workplaces today, teachers use online platforms to communicate deadlines, assignments, and information.

All instruction is differentiated to accommodate diverse learners. To accomplish this, teachers must know their students. A wide-range of student social and emotional challenges must be addressed before teachers and students can attend to academics. Some students may lack basic necessities. Staff can then organize a visit to the food pantry, a visit to the district clothing closet, or provide assistance with the application for food stamps. Other students may not be able to access the internet at home; staff can then schedule a study period for them during the day to eliminate this obstacle. Without personalized knowledge of its students, NWECHS cannot accomplish its academic goals.

Once social and emotional needs are met, teachers and staff then focus on providing an appropriate academic program. When students are performing at or above grade level, they are challenged through teacher-led independent projects and encouraged to take additional college courses that align with their intended major. For example, a gifted math student who began freshman year in Dual Credit PreCalculus is now taking Discrete Math as a sophomore. The NWECHS faculty make every effort to know their students and find ways to advance them, regardless of where they start on the continuum.

NWECHS applies both systemic and personalized approaches to interventions. One such systemic approach is the use of creative scheduling. Knowing that the skill level of entering students varies dramatically, NWECHS staff double the instructional time for all students in English I, English II, Algebra I, and Algebra II. This allows students to receive extended instructional and support time in these areas until achieving the level of mastery needed to succeed.

Another systemic approach is to intervene early. As part of the early-college program, all students in the district take the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) Reading exam in 8th grade. NWECHS faculty visit students at their respective middle schools to tutor them, resulting in 25% of students passing the Reading TSI before entering high school. Students who do not pass after the eight-day summer intervention program are placed in a reading course in ninth grade. Instruction broadens to focus on basic reading skills (not just direct test preparation) such as vocabulary development, comprehension, and fluency. By January of freshman year, 90% of the freshman class has passed the Reading TSI and can begin taking EPCC courses.

Likewise, released state exams are used to identify areas of intervention for students in preparation for end-of-course exams. Tutoring is then designed to set up specific interventions for students wherever needed to work toward the goal of 100% passing. Not all data collected is used for remediation. For example, in English II, 34% of the students scored at the advanced level on a released exam. Students were then moved into another, more challenging course to provide enrichment and encouraged to register for an additional college course at EPCC.

Furthermore, NWECHS staff rely on other college-readiness assessments, such as the Pre-ACT taken in grades 9 and 10 and the PSAT in grade 11, to identify student needs and adjust instruction where needed. The constant cycle of data review drives instruction and improves the campus.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

This school engages and motivates students by creating a culture of acceptance and offering a variety of ways to enrich student lives. NWECHS teachers believe in this vision, and that belief permeates and fuels the school's culture.

Everyone is part of the Griffin family. Students know each other by name and know something noteworthy about each other. For many students, this campus is a safe haven, a place where they fit in. Whether they are conquering cancer, homelessness, gender-identity crises, or academic adversity, NWECHS students are full of potential. Students say, "Our teachers listen to us. They understand that we are trying to balance high school and college. They take our personal experiences into account."

NWECHS students also need experiences to broaden their worldviews. For this reason, NWECHS requires students to participate in extracurricular activities. Students travel to the El Paso Art Museum and History Museum, hike in the Franklin Mountains State Park, attend special lectures at the University of Texas at El Paso, visit colleges across the state, and even take international travel tours. Through Debate, Moot Court, Mock Trial, UIL, FBLA, and many other clubs, students have competed in regional and state competitions, traveling across the state, ultimately helping them to build their confidence and leadership skills.

Teachers feel valued and supported because they participate in every level of decision-making, enjoy a great deal of autonomy, have their needs met, and are encouraged to be creative and take risks. Teachers recognize that they must adapt what they do for this school's unique students. They see helping students achieve their goals as their calling. It is not uncommon to see teachers' cars parked in the school parking lot long after school ends: they tutor, hold club meetings, and open their rooms as homework centers.

This school is a safe place to grow into the young adult creators and leaders of tomorrow. Everything NWECHS staff does is to encourage students. As each student receives his or her diploma, this campus team knows they have positively impacted the lives of NWECHS graduates, their families, and the Canutillo community.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

The NWECHS staff's relationships with families, the broader community, and with its higher-education partners are key to this school's success.

NWECHS faculty and staff want to ensure that all families feel welcome on campus. All communication is delivered in English and Spanish. NWECHS hosts a variety of informal events at varying times that welcome working families. For example, the school year kicks off with an open house to meet teachers while administration grills hotdogs for everyone. The school staff educates the community about the program and its benefits. This is done in a variety of ways: for example, the annual Open Trick or Treat event brings 800 visitors to the campus. For many children and their parents, this is their first visit to NWECHS, and the staff and faculty strive to make it memorable. NWECHS recognizes that parents need information about college-readiness. Presentations and one-on-one meetings are held with parents to meet this need.

NWECHS stakeholders support one another as well. When a student's trailer home burned down and her family was left with only the clothes they were wearing, the school came together. Teachers, students, and staff flooded the front office with donations for this family who needed help to rebuild. One teacher found them a place to live until they got back on their feet because that is what the NWECHS community does; they give, they support, and they do not let one of their own be without; this campus is family.

Finally, the school could not exist without the support of its higher-education partners. NWECHS students have access to every resource available to a traditional college student, and they are not charged any tuition.

The school works directly with EPCC counselors, registrars, deans, and professors. NWECHS staff participate in the general decision-making and hard work toward common goals for the broader El Paso community: access and opportunity. Furthermore, NWECHS students have a unique opportunity to attend UTEP (University of Texas at El Paso) during their senior year to earn an additional 18 college credit hours after they have finished their associate's degree, free of charge. In the spring of their junior year, NWECHS students attend a two-day orientation at UTEP to prepare for their upcoming senior year, where they and school staff learn about all the resources available to support incoming university students. No other region enjoys such a unique and mutually beneficial partnership with their local four-year university.

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

Almost all NWECHS teachers have a master's degree in their content area and more than five years of teaching experience. Therefore, professional development at Northwest Early College High School (NWECHS) must be very personalized. Teachers are surveyed to determine their areas of need and students are surveyed to see what instructional changes they would like to see. If school-wide patterns emerge, professional development is planned accordingly.

Ten out of 20 teachers are working towards obtaining National Board Professional Certification (NBPC) under the direction and assistance of the campus principal, who holds the same credential. NBPC focuses on teacher content knowledge, differentiation, teaching practice, and learning environment. It requires the teacher to reflect on his/her experiences through writing, and analyzing student work samples and analyzing videos of their classroom instruction. This group of teachers meets every week to discuss each other's videos and read each other's written reflections on teaching and learning. This is likely to be the single most effective professional development strategy NWECHS has employed thus far. The goal is for 100% of NWECHS teachers to obtain this credential.

In response to school-wide patterns, school staff also participate in professional development that will directly benefit students. For example, all staff have attended an AVID summer institute. All teachers must take the TSI (Texas Success Initiative) and the ACT. NWECHS teachers must integrate TSI and ACT test content objectives alongside the TEKS. Teachers also work with each other to support their learning through a common planning period by subject area.

Furthermore, the faculty takes initiative in seeking ways to vertically align with local college partners. This is done primarily through participation in professional development with regional higher-education partners and through College Board. Teachers attend El Paso Community College department meetings, participate in voluntary trainings, and present at conferences hosted by EPCC.

There is also rich tradition of working collaboratively with other early-college administrators. Together we attend EPCC and UTEP professional development which focuses on vertical alignment, credit equivalents, and degree plans. In this group, there is continuous discussion of school improvement. Finally, administration meets regularly with a state-assigned early-college coach and also attends statewide training that pertains to Early College High School best practices. These activities help administration fine-tune schoolwide processes that support students and prompt administration, like teachers, to be creative in seeking strategies to support the unique learner population.

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

In 2012, Northwest Early College High School (NWECHS) did not meet state standards in mathematics. The campus was featured in the El Paso Times as an example of a school that didn't "measure up." This humiliation forced NWECHS to reexamine everything they do. Since that time, the leadership philosophy at NWECHS has focused on creating a positive school culture to achieve academic goals. To do this, a shared leadership model has been employed. Teacher, student, and community feedback and empowerment are essential to NWECHS.

The principal acts as campus leader and is assisted by a dean of students, a counselor, a nurse, and an administrative staff of three, all of whom take on multiple roles to make sure that the school runs smoothly

and efficiently. Each content area has a department chair who acts as liaison between administration and faculty. The department chair is also tasked with the organization and facilitation of the Professional Learning Community (PLC), which focuses on data-driven instruction, planning, and vertical alignment. In addition, there are also several teacher-run committees that focus on other student needs, such as PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention System), and each teacher holds a leadership position as the sponsor of a club or competition team, with many acting as mentors to more than one. All teachers provide feedback through a variety of methods such as anonymous surveys and small-group discussions. All teachers have a voice in how the school works and are encouraged to problem-solve and innovate.

Students and parents are also an integral part of the leadership team. Through the Student Advisory Council (SAC), community surveys, and principal coffees, students and community stakeholders are consulted about decisions likely to impact them. Students and other community members have been involved in such activities as determining the bell schedule and the lunch menus. Students and community members even participate in writing and editing important school documents such as this one.

NWECHS, a school unlike any other, requires a leadership team unlike any other, and the results are commendable. NWECHS currently boasts a 98% passing rate in Mathematics, and approximately 95% of students receive an Associate's degree prior to high-school graduation, with the remaining 15% having typically completed 10 or more Dual Credit courses. Without the vision and positive school culture that this leadership team has cultivated, these achievements would not be possible.

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

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The one strategy most instrumental to this school's success is this: if something is not working, the NWECHS learning community adapts and adjusts. It sets high expectations. It finds ways to support students so they meet those expectations. It cultivates fantastic teachers who care about students. The staff knows every student's name and something about them. NWECHS is a family; families pull together when a problem arises, and most importantly, families do not give up on each other.

The NWECHS staff are highly-adaptive, creative problem solvers, and they transfer this culture to students, who then pass these values on to their peers. No matter the problem, the NWECHS community solves it together. Students learn to focus on solutions, not problems. For example, no gymnasium for physical education classes? No problem: physical education can happen at a nearby park. Air conditioning broken for the 100th time in one of the classroom portables? No problem: call El Paso Community College and ask to meet there. Teacher sprayed by skunk while outside of her portable? Principal covers her classes so she can go home. Custodians set skunk traps. Not enough bathrooms for students and teachers? Share. Students miss sports? Start intramural competitions, to include Quidditch – the winning team can play a team of teachers. Have to walk outside to reach a classroom? Dress appropriately for the weather. College bookstore is out of textbooks? The office manager will drive to another campus to pick up what's needed. Eighth-graders seem a bit unprepared? Launch a massive tutoring campaign. A student is placed in a children's home. Faculty provides school supplies and transportation so he doesn't miss a beat. A student wants to take a college class at another college campus? Staff will find you a ride there. Simply put, if something is not working, NWECHS finds a way to make it work.

Since opening in 2008, NWECHS has encountered a variety of major and minor obstacles, and has adapted to solve them. As a problem-solving team, the staff finds solutions expeditiously, and everyone is part of that team, from custodians to the principal.

As for those skunks, that's the one problem they just can't seem to solve....