

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. 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, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2019 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.
3. 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.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2013 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, or 2018.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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 (2018-2019) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 19 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 6 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 5 High schools
 - 1 K-12 schools
- 31 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, 2018 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	28	20	48
K	24	37	61
1	51	32	83
2	41	40	81
3	42	33	75
4	30	27	57
5	41	39	80
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	257	228	485

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 99 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 0 % 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 2017 – 2018 school year: 11%

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, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	23
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	30
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	53
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	484
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.11
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	11

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 65 %
317 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: 58 %
Total number students who qualify: 281

8. Students receiving special education services: 9 %
45 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>8</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> Developmental Delay | <u>4</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>35</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>4</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: 9
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.	23
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

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 21:1

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

Required Information	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	97%	96%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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 2018.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
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.

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

The mission at Sam Houston Elementary is to educate all students to become lifelong learners and productive citizens in a global society through a program of educational excellence utilizing technology and actively involving parents and the community.

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

We are an open enrollment district.

PART III – SUMMARY

Constructed in 1927, Sam Houston Elementary sat in the heart of downtown McAllen—a border town on the southernmost tip of Texas. After sixty years of worsening building conditions, the original site became a community center and a new school was constructed as the focal point of a new massive city, school, and county development. It was built for low-to-moderate income families and that partnership led to an “All-America City” designation in 1996. Located just seven miles from the Texas-Mexico border, this proximity allows for an infusion of Mexican and Mexican-American cultures—blending families, food, and customs.

Regarded as a high performing school that excels regardless of demographics, Sam Houston is a Federal Title I school. Eighty-six percent of its families are economically-disadvantaged, and the English Learner population is at 65 percent. Federal Community Eligibility Provisions identify this as a 100 percent Free/Reduced Meals Campus. Despite that, Sam Houston earned an average overall scale score of 94 (maximum score: 100) through the Texas Education Agency’s (TEA) Accountability measures in 2018. Sam Houston met all standards across the board in Student Achievement and School Progress and it earned a perfect score in Closing the Gaps. Moreover, Sam Houston received three Distinction Designations: Academic Achievement in Science, Top 25 Percent-Comparative Closing the Gaps, and Post-Secondary Readiness.

Sam Houston has a record of being an exemplary campus under TEA. Its essential practices include giving teachers ample opportunities to plan lessons based on informative data. To ensure student success, Sam Houston’s educational leaders—Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), intervention teams, grade level planning teams, and data analysis teams, meet regularly.

All schools in Texas deliver the state curriculum, known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), but here, the mindset is to go beyond the TEKS. McAllen Independent School District has developed a framework for student learning which realizes the effort to help students develop their potential academically, emotionally, physically, socially, and culturally. Sam Houston has embraced this framework for student success—STEAM-Plus (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics). The “Plus” refers to an emphasis on a child’s emotional intelligence, which is woven into the fabric of teacher lesson plans.

This framework is rich in depth, complexity, and rigor. It cultivates a student’s emotional intelligence when teachers tie their lessons to creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and problem solving with a strong emphasis on technology. All children are provided with a personal electronic learning tablet.

At Sam Houston, educators integrate the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) so that English Learners can gain second language acquisition via listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities at their level of English development.

The biggest goal is to cultivate students who are engaged thinkers while being ethical citizens with entrepreneurial spirits. At Sam Houston, it is essential to develop a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy. There is focus on these competencies: critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making, creativity, innovation, social/cultural/global/environmental responsibility, communication, digital/technological fluency, lifelong learning, personal management, well-being, collaboration and leadership.

In addition, teacher instruction ensures students understand the five domains of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Sam Houston embraces students’ emotional needs every day. Students are welcomed warmly with encouraging words by teachers and administrators. Students are nurtured with love and warmth.

Each day, Sam Houston models the ideals of respect by addressing the social needs of the students and their families. In return, students develop high self-esteem while building respect with everyone in their world. As this attitude permeates their homes, parents have felt empowered to call Sam Houston a welcoming, safe

place resulting in strong parental involvement.

To promote a healthy lifestyle, Sam Houston partners with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, attaining Silver Medal status making it one of “America’s Healthiest Schools.” Sam Houston has set higher standards, encouraging students to continue being active on and off campus. Physical interactive learning stations have been implemented such as weight and strength training, cardio-fitness, and interactive video dancing.

Health lessons address hygiene, dental care, disease prevention, nutrition, and emotional well-being. Students can also be active through the Cougarettes dance team, cross country and track team’s marathon participation.

Sam Houston’s Minitropolis—a “city” within this campus—is operated by its students. As the flagship campus, Houstonville has offered real world employment experiences for more than 22 years, making it the longest running Minitropolis in the region. Complete with its own mayor, city council and more than twenty businesses, this program allows for students to become ethical, financially literate citizens.

Sam Houston provides an ideal foundation, where students become empowered to succeed at any middle school and beyond. Staff is committed to ensuring every child has an opportunity to accomplish his or her dream.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

1a. Reading/English language arts:

Teachers use the District’s scope-and-sequence and year-at-a-glance documents in every core subject to facilitate the teaching of state-aligned standards–TEKS. To meet the language acquisition and vocabulary development needs of specific demographic populations, teachers embed ELPS into lessons across all content. Staff follows all District-provided curriculum timelines, but what sets Sam Houston apart is its specific grade-level organization and unique teacher delivery of instruction.

Guided reading is the main instructional approach for English/Spanish language arts and reading curriculum in kindergarten through second grade. Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing are structured to provide foundational skills, building from grade level to grade level. Teachers differentiate instruction by working in small groups with students who demonstrate similar reading behaviors and levels. Students are grouped heterogeneously in literacy centers targeting literacy components. Teachers take meticulous notes, monitor each student’s daily/weekly progress, and restructure groups as-needed. Staff uses an assessment benchmark system to assess each student’s comprehension levels three times a year. Teachers analyze beginning-of-year data to create initial guided-reading groups. Middle-of-year data is analyzed by teachers and administration to create prescriptive action plans targeting below-level students. In third through fifth grades, a departmentalized model allows teachers to develop rigorous, relevant, and exciting student-centered lessons that encourage students to collaborate with peers. Engaging research-based strategies and hands-on activities offer multiple learning opportunities for all students. In writing, the gradual-release model of “I do, we do, you do” develops concepts, skills, and self-confidence. Visuals and vocabulary strategies support overall comprehension and critical-thinking. Collaboration through structured conversations enhances listening and speaking skills. Structured reading and writing promote deeper comprehension and critical thinking, connecting content across curricula. Teachers use assessment data to scaffold instruction to create reteach and enrichment groups. Lessons are formatted based on TEKS mastery level with different learning experiences to further enhance comprehension.

1b. Mathematics:

The mathematics program focuses on the use of hands-on materials in a problem-solving format to teach content knowledge, algebraic reasoning, strategies, data analysis, basic facts, and systematic concept lessons. By applying a manipulative-driven, conceptual approach from kindergarten through fifth grade, teachers can focus on differentiated instruction tailored to the needs of their students. Weekly assessments provide valuable data that is used to determine student mastery of concepts or needed interventions. Through these experiences, students use manipulatives to assist in vocabulary development. These activities facilitate the understanding of each math term in specific content problems. Students also use graphic organizers, like thinking maps, to facilitate a deeper understanding of math objectives such as geometry and measurement concepts. These types of graphic organizers assist students in making connections between the vocabulary term, the definition, and its picture representation. Teachers and students also use anchor charts to support instruction and move students toward success. These charts help students dissect math concepts being taught, and therefore internalize the information better. In math alone, there are more than thirty concepts students must learn. So, the use of these anchor charts creates a deeper understanding, which clarifies student misconceptions. The District uses an online data management system to manage assessment data. Using this tool, data can be disaggregated in many different ways. Sam Houston uses it to tier instruction via a quintile report. This report provides five tiered levels and helps teachers appropriately identify and group students based on their needs in order to provide the differentiated instruction specific to meet the math goals. Students are then provided with intentional, prescriptive, and hands-on activities with which to master each student expectation.

1c. Science:

Teachers use the District-created TEKS-based science program that organizes detailed lesson plans to ensure teachers provide students with authentic, engaging activities that promote comprehension of science concepts. Each lesson plan follows the 5E model: engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate. It incorporates the use of scientific tools and the scientific method. Through these lessons, students are given ample opportunity to collaborate, investigate, explore, question, experiment, and problem solve. These highly engaging lessons promote a deeper level of discussion and expand on critical thinking. Teachers have access to all resources needed for these lessons. To enrich and provide specialized grade level specific instruction, third and fifth grade students travel to a local wildlife and birding center to examine and study up-close flora and fauna native to this region. Tiered instruction is provided through an online resource that is aligned to state standards, providing both TEKS intervention for each grade level and acceleration via project-based learning activities. Differentiated instructional strategies are embedded throughout lessons to provide meaningful delivery of instruction targeting all learning modalities. In partnership with the local arts and science museum, Sam Houston has incorporated an intensive, hands-on, fast-paced content review in fifth grade. To showcase learning, all students (pre-kinder-fifth grades) participate in Sam Houston's annual Science Fair to apply their knowledge of the scientific method and solve a meaningful problem. Teachers use assessment data to scaffold instruction as needed and to create reteach and enrichment groups where lessons are formatted based on the level of mastery of the TEKS. Teachers focus on providing different learning experiences for students to aid in developing additional comprehension. Fifth grade science instruction includes five centers organized in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and lowest performing student expectations. This is spiraled in, based on the previous week's formative assessment data.

1d. Social studies/history/civic learning and engagement

At Sam Houston, staff aims to create responsible citizens who understand their relationships to their community and world, while realizing the impact of people's contribution to the school's history. In kindergarten through second grades, teachers follow the district-created lesson plans that provide authentic, engaging activities needed to develop and promote understanding and comprehension. In the upper grades, social studies standards are embedded within their reading class to develop a more rigorous, in-depth comprehension by making connections across contents. In the fall, we have a campus-wide project-based learning activity called "Traditions Around the World" where teachers randomly draw a country and students research it, focusing on the land and population, education system, economy, and customs/traditions. In the spring, a campus-wide problem-based learning research project is introduced. In this way, students research best possible solutions to a real-world problem. For both of these activities, the final projects (digital presentation, display board, skits, flyers, videos, etc.) are exhibited and presented to the parents. Along with an online career program that helps students realize their potential in a specific field, Sam Houston also has a campus-wide annual Career Day. Teachers invite local business and community leaders to come talk to students about their job responsibilities, why they chose that specific field, and what it took to get there. Students are proudly offered the unique experience of being part of a Minitropolis—the City of Houstonville. This is a completely student-run city within school walls. One aspect of Minitropolis is the electoral process that second through fourth grade students go through to become part of the Houstonville City Council. It offers them an unparalleled real-world experience.

1e. For secondary schools:

1f. For schools that offer preschool for three- and four-year old students:

The full-day four-year-old program builds meaningful learning experiences. All instructional practices are aligned to kindergarten TEKS. Within thematic units, students are exposed to rich language development activities via read-alouds, independent literacy centers, and technological exploration. Early learners are screened as they enter pre-kindergarten, through an instrument that measures English/Spanish language proficiency and pre-literacy skills. This instrument is given to students twice per year as a program "entry and exit," student instructional placement, and identification of student academic strengths. As the year transpires, articulation and comprehension of both dominant and second languages are evident. To guide

pre-kindergarten instruction and ascertain preparedness for kindergarten, every student's progress is monitored three times a year using a standardized criterion-referenced progress monitoring system. Students are assessed in rapid letter naming, rapid vocabulary, letter sound correspondence, phonological awareness, book and print awareness, story retell and comprehension, early writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. Another observational instrument measures adaptability and well-being through social/emotional and physical health developments, along with speech production and sentence skills. Comprehensive data gathered through this measure allows each teacher to plan for whole/small group instruction and individual student needs. Teacher's lessons are Plan-full, Play-full, and Purpose-full during this foundational and impactful year.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Beyond academics, curriculum focuses on interpersonal/intrapersonal skills and attitudes, equipping students to develop the best version of themselves as they become productive citizens in a global society.

Introducing young children to song, dance, and musical instruments increases hand/eye coordination and promotes a sense of well-being. First graders are introduced to small percussion instruments and electronic keyboards to learn and apply basic music reading skills, including musical notes, rhythmic patterns, and music terminology. Second grade students learn to connect music to math and science. Students in third and fifth grade participate in District music competition and learn concert etiquette by attending the Valley Symphony Orchestra. Fourth grade students audition and participate in formal musical performances, such as the McAllen Choral Festival. Music curriculum's ultimate goal is to create a lifelong practice and love of music which will build self-confidence and lead the student to become innovative and disciplined.

The daily physical education program teaches students locomotor, non-locomotor, sports, and social skills, as well as health topics such as nutrition, hygiene, diabetes, social and emotional well-being. Sam Houston provides opportunities for students to participate in extra-curricular activities, like track, cross country teams, and the Cougarettes dance team.

All students participate in biweekly health lessons, Texas Ag Life's nutrition education program, and Sam Houston's Student/Parent Wellness Day (including presentations by local hospitals). Third through fifth grade students participate annually in a fitness test, measuring each child's overall physical fitness.

Sam Houston's efforts to improve student and family wellness have been recognized on local, state, and national levels. Houston has earned the Alliance for Healthier Generation's Bronze and Silver Awards and the Let's Move Active Schools Award (two consecutive years). Through these activities, Sam Houston has made a positive impact on the overall wellness of students and raised health awareness for all stakeholders.

This school follows the District's innovative teaching and learning framework for increased student academic achievement, leveraging powerful new technologies, providing new learning opportunities, increasing productivity, and developing authentic learning processes that challenge students to make a difference. Technology TEKS are embedded and delivered throughout the instructional day. In addition, the library utilizes a makerspace where students have access to robots, circuits, and coding. Students have access to 3D printers where they have the ability to design and build an idea to support their science and social studies curricula. Students participate in coding exercises to support problem solving. Virtual reality headsets take students on 3D virtual field trips. Overall, these students have access to a multitude of technologies to enrich their learning.

Since 2011, all elementary students have access to an electronic device. All teachers are required to have an online classroom to drive the learning for both students and parents and open lines of communication. Administration and staff measure the level of technology implementation by using instructional rounds.

Introducing students to robotics has created excitement while learning in-depth computer programming skills. Using lunar rovers built by high school students, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students learn about coding and then expand upon that in second grade. Third graders build rockets, while fourth and fifth graders develop robotic teams that can compete at the local, state, and national levels.

Sam Houston uses character-building anecdotes to start off each school day. Lesson plans target the development of character and social-emotional abilities. An education role-playing game enables students to learn about careers, life-planning, and social skills.

At least once every week, use of the library by each class is built into Sam Houston's master schedule. Utilizing students' library time, the librarian interacts with students through reading books, educational games and embracing the library as a learning tool to enhance reading skills and character development.

By continuing to offer intriguing additions to the curriculum, staff advances their creative skills, increase each child's curiosity of the world they live in, as well as develop physical and mental prowess.

3. Special Populations:

Sam Houston tailors instruction to meet the diverse needs of all learners using a tiered instructional approach. District identified GT students clustered with high achievers benefit from strategies that amplify the content and add depth and complexity to the core curriculum. Trained Gifted and Talented (GT) teachers modify the academic content and the process by which students learn. They adjust the pace of the instructional timeline allowing flexibility for research which leads to the development of independent projects, products, and/or performances.

Students who require tier two instructional interventions are monitored through the Response to Intervention (RTI) program. The campus RTI committee meets every three weeks to monitor and determine individualized instructional plans for each student requiring this level of support. Teachers work with these struggling students in small groups and provide research-based interventions to close the achievement gap. Ongoing progress monitoring ensures mastery of interventions and provides vital data for measuring student growth.

Should data indicate a need, students receive tier three interventions, and/or are referred to Special Education/Section 504 for modifications and accommodations via prescribed educational plans. Students are always provided with the least restrictive environment to meet their individual needs.

Inclusion and mainstream support are provided to those students who take part in general education curriculum. Primary instruction is provided by a general education teacher while a special education teacher or instructional paraprofessional provides support within the general education classroom. Resource support is provided to those students who require instructional support separate from the general education setting. Self-contained support is provided to students who require intense instructional support in a smaller classroom setting due to deficits in cognitive and adaptive abilities. Students in this setting receive accommodations and modifications to the general educational curriculum based on individual needs. Students are also supported through adaptive physical education. This diversified and systematic program of developmental activities, exercises, games, sports, and rhythms is designed in the psychomotor domain. The program is organized and presented in a sequential and developmental manner that is geared to the abilities, limitations, and needs of each individual student. Assistive technology supports are also considered and administered to students with communication, learning, and self-help needs through the use of modifications and adaptive aids. It provides special education students with appropriate technology and devices to accomplish Individual Education Program (IEP) goals.

For students who may have dyslexia, Sam Houston uses a small-group reading intervention program that provides instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Its multisensory-based approach has proved successful with English learners and students with learning disabilities.

Nearly two-thirds of Sam Houston's students are English Learners. Sam Houston utilizes a collection of research-based sheltered instruction strategies to create a rich learning environment. Teachers have been thoroughly trained in attaining an environment where all students flourish through the use of content/language objectives, visual/vocabulary strategies, randomization, rotation, structured conversations,

and writing opportunities to enhance language and interaction. This allows for content to be comprehensible while increasing academic language. Teachers incorporate the District's time and treatment model across the curriculum to linguistically accommodate the instruction of all English Learners. Learners commensurate to their English language proficiency levels in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

The primary goal at Sam Houston is to promote student academic growth. Staff works tirelessly to create an atmosphere conducive to love, trust, and determination. Every teacher strives to ensure that students master concepts taught. Their “first teach” is planned to engage and ensure that students meet mastery of the concept. Students who are not successful, are provided with reteach/enrich sessions, tutoring, and/or Saturday school.

Because teachers are so diligently vested in ensuring the academic growth of their students, it is important to note that teachers are valued and supported. Teachers are often served lunch in a family environment where they can break bread together. Words of encouragement are often given through simple notes and face-to-face feedback on their progress.

Sam Houston embraces the surrounding area’s family culture, recreating that love and respect as they walk into a positive and engaging learning environment. Believing every moment counts, each morning, school leaders greet students by name with a smile so students truly know they are valued. During breakfast, they reflect on the words of the Houstonville (student) mayor. These “Words of Wisdom” challenge and motivate students to make the day great.

Staff provides students with opportunities for academic, social, and emotional growth, and those accomplishments are celebrated. Students’ work towards success in attendance, academic growth, behavior, and citizenship is celebrated throughout the school year with multiple events. Every six weeks, a school-wide attendance challenge culminates with an attendance party or field trip.

The names of students who have met their reading goal challenge are announced and displayed on the campus marquee. Their academic successes are touted at semester honor roll recognitions and end-of-the-year ceremonies. “Shout outs!” to students and staff members via the school's radio station (KSHE The Growl) are used to salute birthdays, acts of kindness, and accomplishments. School and team successes are rewarded through end-of-the-year grade level field trips, including a third through fifth grade visit to a university outside the city.

Houstonville Minitropolis fosters an environment of citizenship and community among its citizens—its students. All staff contributes to its success by facilitating the many businesses and city departments that make up this Minitropolis. Students’ social and emotional growth is further supported when our teacher and counselor lessons are infused with the emotional intelligences – self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Every child’s success is a personal celebration because the Sam Houston staff really does see students as family.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Approximately twenty different businesses, civic organizations, and city departments are integral partners in Sam Houston’s Minitropolis Program, a city-based model that infuses real-life application into its daily instructional program. It educates students about careers, personal finance management, and specific know-how about the ways in which a community operates.

Through family engagement programs, the school works to create stronger connections with residents, businesses, and government leaders. It offers many parental involvement programs during the day and in the evening to accommodate parents’ busy schedules. One example is a six-weeks reading and nutrition program provided in partnership with a statewide grocery chain. It offers a workshop-style training experience for parents and four-year-old children. Following specific instructional-based reading training, parents are encouraged and, more importantly, equipped to read with their children at least three times a

week in their homes. As part of the program, students receive two free books at the end of every lesson and they are encouraged to begin creating personal libraries at home. By the end of the program, students own a personal collection of twelve books. This ownership factor helps to inspire a deep-rooted love of reading.

Aside from these District community programs, Sam Houston offers many unique and diverse opportunities for family engagement. We begin every year with Meet the Teacher Night, which initiates the communication between parents and teachers. Our campus is open daily to parents and family members who would like to eat lunch with their child. Throughout the school year, family and community members are invited to events such as Traditions Around the World, Minitropolis Open House, Annual Family Picnic, Community Easter Hunt, and City of McAllen Police Department Mother's Day Celebration.

Sam Houston also participates in District initiatives that engage parents such as various parental District committees and evening study center. Furthermore, parents are even invited to improve their own learning by participating in CPR classes, High School Equivalency Certificates, citizenship, sewing, and even welding! Other parental involvement and engagement activities include volunteering opportunities and participation in various parental district committees like the Superintendent's Parent Advisory Group, Evening Study Center, and Parent University Trainings.

Sam Houston takes pride in its efforts to continually and deeply engage families and community members. Every day, Sam Houston students see that the community is fully vested in their success. This is profoundly connected to consistent high student achievement.

3. Professional Development:

Teachers are given an additional campus planning period (in addition to the state-mandated teacher conference period) dedicated to professional growth and the analysis of student data. During this job-embedded professional development, teachers create instructional strategies within core subject areas, implement effective instructional practices, improve student achievement, and build teacher capacity.

Evidence of strong academic standards and school improvement is demonstrated both qualitatively and quantitatively. Mini-observations are conducted by campus administrators walking into classrooms to observe teachers working with their students. They are unannounced and frequent and provide immediate feedback. Feedback primarily centers on pedagogy with specific input on objective effectiveness, level of engagement, and the identification of what worked well and what did not. Content coordinators customize their support, working directly with teachers to observe lessons and provide academic coaching.

An instructional round is a major-systems check, a clinical observation through which a group of principals and teachers from multiple schools observe classrooms while noting examples of effective and ineffective teaching techniques in the way a doctor leads interns on "rounds." This establishes a standard. Administrators serve on a district team, and these rounds are conducted district wide. This "outside" feedback is compared against a framework based on higher order thinking, engagement, authentic learning, and technology on a scale from one to five. The host principal then works with individual teachers to target and monitor plans for improvement.

Our quantitative measure is based on value added progress monitoring, a constant stream of evaluation on student measurement of learning. Immediately after students are formatively assessed, teachers and administrators disaggregate results, color code the different levels of data, and immediately regroup—systematically reteaching students who performed below mastery and enriching the students that achieved mastery and above. The entire accountability system is validating the level of instruction as it was given and simultaneously establishes the mastery level on standardized testing. This guarantees authentic differentiated instruction. The "first teach" is measured and the focus is continuously directed on the improvement of learning for all students at all levels. It really is a system and process—the epitome of effective measurement.

At the same time, climate and culture is respected. Sam Houston teachers are now veterans in analyzing

their class rosters by color codes and quintiles, seeing the value of this viable measurement of real learning. This model of professional development is at the root of our high performance.

4. School Leadership:

Sam Houston builds and empowers, inviting everyone to take a stake in each child's progress and growth. This leadership style is service-minded and transformational.

Staff follows the District's Leadership Model—high-level content, strong teacher skill, and student engagement. It emphasizes synergistic relationships, continuous improvement, self-evaluation, systems, processes, leadership, emotional intelligence, high-level content, teacher skill, student engagement, culture, and climate.

The mission is student achievement, and the aim is united and focused. The Executive Leadership Team (ELT)—which includes the principal, assistant principal, academic coach, master reading teacher, and counselor—meets weekly to plan and follow through on instruction, professional development, policies, procedures, and activities. ELT examines a “Problem of Practice” during classroom walkthroughs, visits fifteen-plus classrooms daily, ensures teachers bring their “A” game, and provides immediate feedback or support. ELT is constantly examining if teachers are implementing strategies they were taught. Are students speaking in complete sentences? Are they offered structured reading and writing activities? Leadership is constantly analyzing gaps and aligning the work.

Campus Instructional Leadership Team (CILT) includes ELT and Grade Level Leaders. CILT discuss budget, resources, upcoming professional development activities, and any concerns or items raised by staff or members of the community. All employee groups have representation in CILT—building trust, mutual respect, and understanding. This constant communication among all stakeholders has led to the most positive campus employee climate surveys in the District. Teachers can voice their concerns and their perspectives. Everything is open for discussion because even leadership is about constant growth.

Sam Houston's principal and assistant principal participate in District-level Instructional Leadership Seminars, addressing topics and training in a Professional Learning Community (100 or more administrators). The principal serves on the District's Instructional Leadership Team and the Executive Technology Advisory Team. All levels of staff participate in District-wide online classrooms on many topics. Every year, one person is selected by his or her colleagues to represent the school in a District-wide decision-making team, a sounding board on instructional issues.

Parents join the Superintendent's Parent Advisory Group, discussing all operations and sharing knowledge with others. Sam Houston has drastically improved parent participation in PTO. Parents are encouraged to attend educational service sessions, seminars, workshops, parent engagement conferences, parent university sessions, and Workforce Ready Program parent classes—some leading to professional licenses/certifications.

Students' many leadership roles include mayor, city council, business managers, classroom ambassadors, television news anchors, and even IRS agents. Campus leadership opportunities are correlated to the leadership model for all stakeholders and the school is infinitely stronger because of it.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The sounds are familiar. The hustle and bustle of people standing in line, being helped, then going about their business as they move on to the next item on their “to do” list.

What catches the eye is that these people are not adults. They are young children. Yet, they know their way around a bank, a store, a post office, and other amenities found in a typical city. There is even a mayor and a city council.

Welcome to Houstonville. That’s the affectionate name for a Minitropolis at Sam Houston. This program has been instrumental in producing well-rounded students for 22 years now.

A Minitropolis program is a visionary program that mirrors a fully functioning, real-life community to create an academic learning experience for elementary school students.

Students have the opportunity to learn real-life lessons and are introduced to experiences that are going to help them become productive citizens as adults. In fact, students cultivate skill sets many others do not learn until high school or college.

In a Minitropolis program, the students are in charge. This means students run a mini-bank, sell inventory in mini-stores, and a student postman delivers mail to each classroom.

This mini-city is now home to institutions and organizations that are vital for the survival and progress of a real-world community. “Real” businesses sponsor the program and even provide their own employees for valuable feedback. In fact, in several instances, students who participated in the Houstonville Minitropolis have grown up and now are active in Houstonville as business managers, bringing the program full circle.

Sam Houston works with the community to create authentic environments for students, as they master business, economics, and emotional intelligence. State education requirements now want a greater emphasis on financial literacy for students – further solidifying the need for students to understand how business works.

The motivation behind this program is to provide students with the social, academic, and real-life skills they need to be successful and responsible citizens while introducing them to different careers. At the same time, the incentives embedded into the program are designed to increase student attendance and improve student attitudes towards learning. This program has become a shining example of what can be accomplished when a community comes together.