

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2019 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

---

[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [X] Title I [ ] Charter [ ] Magnet [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Ms. Claudia Yvette Benavides

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

Official School Name Judith Zaffirini Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 5210 Santa Claudia Lane

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

Laredo City                      TX State                      78046-4704 Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County WEBB COUNTY

Telephone (956) 473-2900

Fax (956) 473-2999

Web site/URL https://jzes.uisd.net

E-mail cbenavid@uisd.net

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

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

Name of Superintendent\*Mr. Roberto J. Santos

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail rsantos@uisd.net

District Name United Independent School District Tel. (956) 473-6201

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

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

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mrs. Aliza Oliveros

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

---

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):
  - 29 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 10 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 4 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools

43 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
<b>PreK</b>	47	37	84
<b>K</b>	38	37	75
<b>1</b>	47	32	79
<b>2</b>	40	50	90
<b>3</b>	40	33	73
<b>4</b>	28	52	80
<b>5</b>	29	45	74
<b>6</b>	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	0	0	0
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0
<b>12 or higher</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	269	286	555

\*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.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	37
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	24
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	61
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	549
(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: 47%  
262 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
At SJZES we work with students that are considered English Language Learners whose native language is Spanish.

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 81%  
Total number students who qualify: 452

8. Students receiving special education services: 13 %  
70 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>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness           | <u>26</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay      | <u>23</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance    | <u>43</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment       | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>15</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>2</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 8
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.	28
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.	15
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 20:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014
Daily student attendance	97%	96%	97%	96%	96%
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.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
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.

Senator Judith Zaffirini Elementary School takes pride in delivering the best education possible to all students and is committed to ensuring that students receive the best guidance and support.

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

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

---

Senator Judith Zaffirini Elementary School (SJZES), located in Laredo, Texas is one of 29 elementary schools and is included in the 43 schools that comprise the United Independent School District. The campus has the privilege of being named after the first Hispanic woman elected to the Texas Senate in 1986. Our campus demographics consists of a 99% Hispanic population, with 81% Economically Disadvantaged and 47% English Learners with Spanish being the dominant language spoken at home. It is the philosophy of the SJZES faculty and staff to ensure that these students will contribute positively to their community. This will allow them to continue to make decisions that will allow the community to progress and assist in finding solutions to meet the ever-growing demands the city faces. SJZES has been awarded an "A" Rating from the Texas Education Agency with five distinctions and recently received the honor of being nominated as a National Blue Ribbon School.

The SJZES faculty and staffs' mission is to provide a conducive, effective and motivating learning environment for all students. The staff strives to instill in all students that they can aspire to be anything that they set their minds and hearts on. Students are taught values, integrity, humility, dedication, compassion and the importance of working hard. Students are encouraged to be challenged and to be goal-oriented both inside and outside the classroom. Some recognitions include AR Top Class for the Week, Most Vocabulary Words Learned, Student of the Six Weeks, AR Student of the Six Weeks, Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) Student of the Six Weeks, Presidential Award, National Elementary Honor Society (NEHS), and Advanced Performance Award.

It is the campus's mission to communicate to all students and parents the importance of reaching their overall goals and being self-motivated. SJZES not only teaches students the importance of academics, but also the importance of contributing to their community by volunteering at local food banks, shelters, and community agencies periodically throughout the year.

The relationship that is built between staff and students is valued and is one of the main reasons for the success of the students. Every morning, administrators greet all students by name as they enter the campus. Campus administration and teachers meet with students throughout the school year to review goal completion and to address areas of concern. Daily announcements, reading goals, and weekly activities are broadcast throughout the school, which allows everyone to view student leaders as they review character goals. This activity allows all students to recognize leaders, but most importantly to emulate them. Classrooms and hallways display student's work, which shows mastery of skill acquisition, goals met and campus projects. This practice continuously sparks motivation in students to reach their goals.

SJZES is a Dual Language campus; this practice nurtures the child's home language while developing and perfecting the English language and cultural heritage. Qualified and certified bilingual teachers provide the student population with content area instruction in English and Spanish. The students understand that being bilingual is an asset that will benefit them for future employment and academic endeavors.

At SJZES, the campus personnel consistently review instructional practices to ensure that areas of weakness are being addressed. By doing this, teachers can refine their teaching strategies to address the areas of concern while continuing to introduce new skills. To enhance instruction, the campus utilizes the following effective practices: professional learning communities, team planning meetings, vertical dialogues, common formative assessments, data analysis, and continuous data analysis. Students and their parents receive feedback as well so that skill development can be reinforced at home.

These activities are spearheaded by the campus instructional team, which is comprised of team grade leaders and administration. At the end of each school year, teachers are provided with their student rosters for the upcoming school year as well as student data, which includes state and local assessment results, Lexile levels, benchmark assessments, etc. for all students. This allows teachers to prepare better to meet the instructional needs of their incoming students on day one of the new school year.

At SJZES, the goal is to provide parents with opportunities to experience and comprehend the rigor that

students are developing. Numerous parental activities and varied parenting sessions are held throughout the course of the school year in conjunction with a varied array of community agencies. Parent recognitions are implemented through the Parent Teacher and Community (PTC) meetings. Teachers are encouraged to nominate parents from their classrooms based on different criteria their children's attendance, school activities participation, etc. As a result, students have demonstrated great success on state assessments in the area of reading (from 65% to 82%), math (from 74% to 90%), writing (from 65% to 79%) and science (from 62% to 91%).

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

---

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

#### **1a. Reading/English language arts:**

SJZES implements the district developed scope & sequence curriculum, based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), which includes a focus video, academic vocabulary, learner-centered activities, resources, and technology for each core subject. Teachers also use the district-developed At-A-Glance/Pacing Guide to plan and prepare lessons and activities. Teachers base their lessons by incorporating strategies that play a vital role in classroom instruction, which includes framing the lesson, staying in the power zone, having students engaged in purposeful dialogue, writing critically, and closing the lesson with a clear focus. Because of the participation of the lesson, the students are able to stay engaged and make relevant real-world connections. Furthermore, EL strategies, academic vocabulary, journals, and D.E.A.R. Time (Drop Everything and Read) are strategies that are used with all students and have proven to be very beneficial with all students', especially English language learners. Above all, vertical dialogue meetings (BOY-Beginning of the Year, MOY-Middle of the Year, and EOY-End of the Year) are conducted among teachers across the grade levels to enhance the alignment of the curriculum and complement teachers' instruction for the benefit of student achievement. These practices have played an essential role in closing the gap and enhancing student achievement.

Reading instruction takes on a fundamental role in the everyday lives of all students and is a foundation for success in all subjects. Students engage in guided instruction, vocabulary building, and fluency and comprehension activities daily. The campus has collaborated with Headstart to offer a full day pre-kinder program that implements phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary building, comprehension, and basic writing skills. Instruction in kindergarten-fifth grade follows the district's scope and sequence to scaffold the reading skills taught. Pre-kindergarten- second-grade teachers monitor students' progress every three weeks through literacy running records and reading centers. Grades third - fifth-grade teachers progress monitor students by administering checkpoints, spiral tests, Content-Based Assessments-(CBAs), and district benchmarks. In addition, school-wide reading initiatives are implemented for all grade levels, and research-based instructional reading programs monitor students' comprehension, fluency, and reading levels. Furthermore, the school library has an extensive array of novels that are checked out as class sets by second-fifth-grade teachers for whole-class reading during D.E.A.R. time. This allows students to build stamina and fluency/comprehension. At the end of each week, teachers recognize a reader of the week for their class. The extension of the reading curriculum is embedded through English language arts, and reflective writing is incorporated in grades kindergarten-fifth by student journaling in all subject areas. Through the district's scope and sequence, students write a composition based on a variety of prompts every six-weeks period. Fourth grade conducts a Writing Olympics to enhance students' writing skills, and teachers provide immediate constructive feedback. The implementation of these instructional initiatives was due to data reflection to address students' areas of non-mastery. In conclusion, ELAR-(English language arts) has an annual school-wide spelling bee in second - fifth grade, where the top winner competes at both the district-wide and citywide level. Our Reading Intervention teacher and literacy assistant provide students that are struggling with fluency and comprehension with direct intervention for 45 minutes in a small-group setting daily.

#### **1b. Mathematics:**

Pre-kindergarten - second-grade students develop proficiency and expertise in a number of mathematical practices, such as understanding number sense, number operations, pattern relationships, and problem-solving skills integrated into all core subjects. Teachers are encouraged to spiral math skills through a variety of centers using hands-on activities, anchor charts, and manipulatives. In addition, the foundation of multiplication tables begins in first grade and continues in the upper grades. In grades third -fifth, mathematics instruction is based on critical thinking, problem-solving strategies, higher order thinking skills, and the implementation of academic vocabulary. Lessons are introduced to allow students to make connections with the use of math in everyday real-world scenarios. Students begin their learning day with a

daily number sense activity followed by the lesson of the day, journal-writing reflection (how will this skill benefit in the future) and a spiral of TEKS to provide ongoing improvement and mastery of skills. Teachers monitor students' weekly exams, checkpoints, and benchmarks every week in order to improve their lesson and reteach the skill(s) that were not mastered or accelerate instruction by introducing more challenging activities. Math Bees are held weekly in classrooms with winners recognized at school and district levels. SJZES has Math Family Night across all grade levels where students and parents can participate in hands-on activities with the goal that learning continues at home. Students act out real-world scenarios and create hands-on learning giving students a better perspective of skill and the Math Word of the Week is reviewed through the broadcast system and is promoted in all common student areas. Mathematics instruction provided by teachers provides purposeful learning, promotes numeracy and allows students to utilize and retain acquired skills.

### **1c. Science:**

Science encourages students to be innovators by using their prior knowledge to further expand on TEKS supporting and readiness standards. All activities follow the 5E model (five states of sequence for teaching and learning) in which students engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate. Lessons implement the use of graphic organizers, anchor charts, visual learning, reflective journal writing, educational videos, and cooperative learning. For science exploration, students participate in weekly labs that follow the scientific method and integrate technology in order to acquire scientific concepts. Furthermore, science instruction is enriched through Super Outrageous Science (S.O.S.) days, which are conducted throughout the school year. Teachers organize and plan hands-on activities and experiments that incorporate science, technology, engineering, and math, which allows students to develop a better understanding of the science TEKS. These activities are aligned in all grades and concepts are spiraled in all investigations related to their STAAR assessment. In addition, students are provided with real-world experiences through field trips to museums and environmental centers. Students explore and learn with hands-on activities and science presentations by scientific experts. To monitor student progress, students are assessed with district CBAs, checkpoints, and benchmarks and a data analysis program is utilized to identify the strengths and weaknesses after each assessment. A Science Collaborative Teacher and STEM instructor provide students who are demonstrating weakness in a certain skill with small group intervention instruction. This intervention strategy addresses skill and vocabulary acquisition as well as incorporating specific instructional strategies that can meet students' needs. Students are able to monitor their progress and evaluate their performance to set future goals. Teachers are able to use this data to differentiate instruction and adapt lessons to meet the needs of the students.

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

Social Studies educates students on important concepts and generalizations from history, geography, citizenship, and other social sciences. It provides students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help them become competent, informed, thoughtful and responsible citizens who participate in their community and exhibit high moral and civic virtues. Social Studies instruction is integrated through reading with inquiry-based learning, group presentations, and independent research activities. The scope and sequence contain lessons that are aligned to the TEKS and where resources are made available for all students. Each year, a Career Day event is hosted where students can understand and build a relationship with community workers. This event helps students develop their interests, passions, and future career goals. To promote civic responsibility, the students attend a mock trial that exposes them to the intricacies of the judicial system by allowing them to participate in an engaging learning experience while challenging their critical thinking skills.

SJZES has updated technology, which plays a vital role in the curriculum. Classrooms have interactive flat panels that allow teacher to engage and capture the attention of the students. For example, in the area of Social Studies, the use of educational technology applications allows students to "travel" the world without having to leave the classroom. Educational technology applications allow students to virtually experience other countries' infrastructure, transportation, topography, and even their customs.

The campus implements the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) system across the entire  
NBRS 2019

campus. Student behavior expectations are displayed across the campus. In addition, the campus promotes this system through monthly events where students are recognized for excelling academically in all subjects and for their good conduct. The committee in charge of PBIS goes to the extent to create a video to have students visualize what being a PBIS student entails. PBIS embeds social studies skills such as perseverance, acceptance/tolerance, self-discipline, honesty, responsibility, cooperation, respect, and friendship amongst the student body.

**1e. For secondary schools:**

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

At SJZES, Social Studies begins at pre-kindergarten by introducing the school community to our youngest students. Students in these four classes are exposed to phonemic awareness, fundamental math skills, basic sight word recognition and learner-centered activities that incorporate the development of fine motor skills in compliance with the guidelines set by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Students who qualify for the pre-kindergarten program must meet one of the following requirements: economically disadvantaged, from an active military family, homeless or limited English proficient. Building a strong academic foundation in the pre-kindergarten students has brought about success in state and local assessments, and assists with campus initiatives to prepare students for their primary grades.

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

The goal of the SJZES physical education (PE) department is to keep students physically active for 45 minutes, at a minimum of 3 days a week. Students in grades pre-kindergarten - fifth are constantly rotating through a series of stations in which the use of class time for vigorous physical activity is maximized. The students take part in structured, organized activities that target the TEKS principles and goals. The teaching of basic fundamental sports skills allows students to learn about their strength, flexibility, and endurance. In addition, staff stresses good sportsmanship including being kind, safe, respectful, and cooperative. In order to develop well-rounded students, the campus also exposes students to fine arts and technology.

On days when students are not scheduled to take part in PE, they attend a fine arts class or a technology class. In the fine arts classroom, students are exposed to music, instruments, and composers from other cultures and as well as the basics of music appreciation. Students are also taught music theory, vocabulary terms, and principles of reading musical notes that reflects the states TEKS objectives. Students have the opportunity to take part in the school's choir and are often showcased at school assemblies. Concerning technology, students learn basic keyboarding skills and various types of software programs that they incorporate into their class lessons. At SJZES, technology is designed to enable students to participate in rigorous activities such as creating power points, engaging in cooperative learning, and exploring virtual experiences as required by TEKS objectives. Students in grades pre-kindergarten- fifth have access to computer labs every week. Students utilize mobile learning devices such as iPads, Chromebooks, and Interactive Flat Panels in their classrooms.

The campus offers an extensive array of extra-curricular opportunities for students. In collaboration, with the Laredo Girls and Boys Club, students represent the school with teams in football, basketball, and volleyball. School music clubs include guitar and choir allowing students to perform holiday carols and presentations during school announcements, PTC meetings, and student assemblies. Students also take part performances at various assisted living facilities in the community and local shopping centers. The counselor spearheads clubs such as The National Elementary Honor Society, Leadership Club, Helping Improve Club and Third Grade Honors Program with the goal of helping students create opportunities for growth in the areas of academic, personal, social, and emotional well-being.

All students attend bi-weekly library classes that focus on the five components of reading. The library media specialist meets with all teachers at the beginning of the year to review instruction that will be covered through the library classes, such as dictionary, literacy and research skills. At the beginning of each school

year, individual reading goals are set for all students every six weeks. Students are expected to read and familiarize themselves with their Lexile levels and are motivated by rewards such as point ribbons and necklace charms. Students' names are displayed on a banner every six weeks, and students are acknowledged during PTC meetings, morning announcements, and end of the year celebrations. Top classes are also recognized with a banner outside their classroom. The school invites a renowned author to talk to students about the writing process and to promote literacy. In addition, the school promotes monthly reading nights for parents and students. These extraordinary activities are planned to inspire the love of reading as well as supporting students' goals on state assessments.

SJZES is one of the schools selected by the district to participate in the Dual Language Program. Students in grades kindergarten-fifth are given an opportunity to learn a second language while they continue to build on their native language. Approximately 174 students were enrolled in this program last year, and the campus continues to maintain the enrollment each school year.

At SJZES, one of the goals is to ensure that students are prepared for their post-secondary endeavors. Through our counseling program, the intellectual, social and emotional well-being of all students is developed. With this in mind, the school counselor incorporates character building and career life skills through many campus activities such as visiting state and local universities. The local recycling and environmental agencies hold presentations on how to keep the city clean and how to protect the local habitats. During Red Ribbon Week, local firefighters instruct students on how to be better prepared if an emergency should arise at home. The Laredo Animal Care Center department explains to students the requirements of caring for a pet.

### **3. Special Populations:**

At SJZES, pride is taken in delivering the best educational opportunities possible to all students. The intent is to utilize instructional methods and interventions that are tailored to pave the way for student success beyond the classroom doors. All teachers deliver rigorous and effective instruction to achieve academic goals to close any achievement gap that exists within the student population.

The alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is crucial to prepare students for life-long success. Various types of assessments are administered, and results are carefully analyzed to improve student performance. Formative and summative assessments such as Curriculum-Based Assessments, District Benchmarks, TELPAS (Texas English language Proficiency System), TELPAS-Alternate, STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) and STAAR Alternate are used to form groupings and to decide which resources benefit the learning style of each student. The campus addresses the learning style through differentiated instruction with methods such as classroom discussions, collaborative groups, literacy centers, scaffolding, weekly student conferencing, think-pair-share, journal writing. Students utilize reference story maps, critical writing, vocabulary word walls, and anchor charts posted in classrooms to support high levels of learning and learning differences. If students' performance is not demonstrating mastery and their scores on informal and diagnostic assessments are low, the school initiates a tiered response to monitoring student progress. The Response to Intervention (Rti) team includes, but is not limited to, principal, counselor, classroom teachers, reading intervention teacher, and special education teacher. The team meets regularly to review student data and determine if further assistance, such as tutorials, small group instruction, targeted technology programs, and prescriptive interventions is needed in the classroom setting. In an effort to ensure that all struggling learners are given due process and Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), teachers are required to exhaust all resources and instructional strategies available for students to be academically successful. In the case of evident academic difficulties, a referral to 504/Special Education is considered. All student progress is monitored, and any student at risk of failing any subject must be presented to the Rti team. Teachers provide documentation of parent conferences, counselor referrals, reteaching/retesting of difficult concepts and monitoring of student attendance. The Rti team also decides whether to exit a student or request a Full Individual Evaluation (FIE) to determine any eligibility for services.

If a student meets eligibility criteria and academic need for services under IDEA, a team of specialists in collaboration with the child's parent develops the student's individual education plan so that all are accountable for the success of the student. At the campus, a continuum of services and supports are

provided, such as specialized classroom settings, resource classrooms, speech, occupational, physical therapies, in-class support, and co-teaching support to ensure academic achievement for the entire student population. In addition, the campus has adopted a Meet in the Middle program, which allows students with disabilities to feel part of the school system and teaches general education students to respect people for their differences and abilities.

Initially designed to close performance gaps, the success of SJZES students can be attributed to the campus-based initiative plan. Data is disaggregated and analyzed to tier students based on academic needs in reading and math. Each day, students are provided with prescriptive interventions/ enrichment opportunities. All human resources are assigned a group to target specific skills or to challenge high-achieving and gifted and talented students. Student assessment results are continuously monitored to ensure that no achievement gaps larger than 10% exist in any content areas. All subpopulations are serviced with tailored instructional methods to fit their needs including special education students, ELs, Hispanic students, and economically disadvantaged students. Data is continuously analyzed, and groupings are organized to ensure optimal benefits of intervention; this also assists in recognizing academic gains. Some of the interventions/activities that are provided range from the following: a pull-out program that works with Gifted and Talented students on the development of yearly research project which encompasses: literary research, project development, and school community presentation to classroom interventions being provided to English Language Learners, in combination with a specialized program that provides the correct modeling of language and the development of academic vocabulary. All services that are provided to subpopulations include the following: specialized instruction to meet the academic needs of every student, continuous monitoring to check students acquisition of skills or the need to revamp the instructional strategies being utilized by the teacher and informal and formal assessments to ensure that students have met their individual goals.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

---

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

SJZES takes pride in engaging students with a positive environment by providing opportunities to practice leadership and allowing students to take ownership of their school. These roles are nurtured by participating in clubs, such as The National Elementary Honor Society, Meet in the Middle, Positive Behavior Intervention Program (PBIS), Helping Improve Club (HIP), The Lynx News Team, Recycling Club, and Teachers of Tomorrow. At SJZES, the students are engaged in extracurricular activities that allow them to foster social and emotional skills. These skills are put into practice through clubs that promote peer tutoring and inclusion programs. The school is committed to ensuring that students are fully exposed to leadership opportunities and activities that foster the love of learning.

The school takes pride in delivering the best educational opportunities possible for students. The campus personnel commits to ensuring that students receive the best guidance and support. The campus principal and administrative team make it a daily habit to greet students in the morning so they feel welcomed and ready to learn. In addition, administration and student leaders take part in daily morning announcements that focus on starting the day with a positive outlook.

The SJZES family feels appreciated, valued, and supported through acknowledgment and recognition, which brings out the best in every individual. Every six weeks, teachers, staff, auxiliary, and grade levels are celebrated and praised for their efforts and accomplishments. Teacher Appreciation Week is highly anticipated by the staff because this is a time when gratitude is amplified by students, parents, and administration. The school administrators provide a nurturing environment by establishing a supportive, structured environment conducive to learning. Administrators are approachable not only by faculty and staff but by parents as well. Administration ensures that the faculty has all the tools and supplies needed to support the instructional program. The school offers a computer-based incentive program where staff members accumulate points and are rewarded with extra teaching supplies, preferred parking, and extra planning time. Team leaders meet in the summer to discuss activities that will take place throughout the year. Activities to motivate both teachers and students include the yearly school theme, vertical alignment and ways to promote school spirit among students, parents, and teachers. At the beginning of each year, the administration organizes team-building activities that help cultivate a bond amongst new and existing staff.

Every year SJZES personnel choose a school-wide theme that incorporates the goal for the upcoming school year. The theme is displayed throughout the building. This provides our school-wide community with a sense of connection that brings the common goal of student achievement.

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

At SJZES, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is an important part of the campus goal is to increase parental engagement. Parental involvement is a major component of the success of SJZES. The campus focuses on having open communication with parents through various modes. The school is fortunate to count on bilingual certified teachers to connect with parents in both English and Spanish. The school calendars, parent sessions, teacher conferences, and educational parent meetings are held in both languages to enhance communication with the community stakeholders. Monthly parent sessions are presented on a series of topics with the intention of educating parents and understanding the school culture and continuing an alignment at home. Teachers disseminate information through a parent portal that provides student academic development and growth. The school website is available for parents to search for homework, school activities, and educational websites. Not only is communication accessible to parents, but a daily insight of what is happening in the classroom is delivered through videos and pictures sent via social media sites.

SJZES staff appreciates families and understand the great benefits of strengthening the foundation through creating strong relationships not only with campus stakeholders but also with the community. We celebrate a variety of events that the school community looks forward to participating in. The most impactful

activities have been those that highlight the community's heritage and traditions in turn, instilling respect and pride for the school and each other.

Community volunteers visit the school to present on a variety of topics such as bullying, fire prevention, and gang and drug awareness. Students are educated about the importance of safety and how the community agencies are available for them. The goal of the campus is to introduce and expose students to a variety of careers to help students make a connection between their studies and the real world. Other types of events include academic nights which target the core subjects where students can explore through hands-on-activities and cooperative learning.

The campus collaborates with community organizations such as the Laredo Animal Protective Society (LAPS), by holding a yearly donation drive. This donation drive builds compassion and kindness, which helps bring in much-needed supplies. The campus's goal is to provide students and parents with a sense of awareness of the different needs in the community and that working together benefits the community.

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

At SJZES, the professional development (PD) program prioritizes the professional learning opportunities based on data review, results on state assessments (STAAR & TELPAS), effective instructional strategies and academic needs of the students.

In preparation for each new school year, the campus instructional team meets to plan the commencement activities that will be provided for teachers. These are based on the needs that have been established based on an extensive disaggregation of student data. Vertical dialogue is one activity that brings about the ability for teachers to collaborate and share ideas. This allows teachers the opportunity to modify their instructional practices to meet the needs of their student population. Weekly professional learning community days are designated so that each grade level meets every week to discuss student concerns and lesson delivery. Team leaders provide clear instructions on how to effectively introduce a skill along with the activities that will facilitate instruction. This allows all teachers a clear understanding of the expectations for every core subject area.

The professional learning opportunities that are provided to teachers are aligned to the state's standards and the district's scope and sequence. Professional development training provides teachers with materials to enhance small center instruction as well as technology implementation. Administrators, staff, and teachers attend webinars, in-house and district-wide PD, and conferences; however, what sets SJZES apart is that teachers come back to the campus to dialogue and share what they have learned with their peers. This discussion of best practices allows the more experienced teachers to develop teachers with less experience. In addition, it allows new teachers to expand on innovative classroom strategies with their peers. Administrators conduct informal and formal classroom visits regularly and then meet with teachers on an individual basis to discuss instructional delivery, student participation, and lesson preparedness. The overall goal is for students to meet their grade level objectives and to show growth in all academic areas.

The students at SJZES benefit directly in many aspects when teachers, staff, and administrators are actively engaged in learning opportunities. The campus encourages and promotes that all teachers, staff, and administrators stay up to date and maintain awareness of cutting-edge methods that can assist in meeting the educational goals of all students. By providing teachers with continued PD, the campus is ensuring that students are getting the best education with researched based strategies that promote a culture of learning that will assist with the achievement of student success.

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

The leadership philosophy practiced at SJZES is to build strong leadership traits that empower, motivate and cultivate the love of continuous education. A key factor in campus leadership is the integrity, respect, and fairness that the administrators practice. They serve as facilitators in creating learning opportunities for students and model the expected leadership traits. School-wide expectations are an essential component in ensuring that the school reinforces leadership traits by modeling them.

The school leadership team is comprised of grade-level leaders, nurse, counselor, librarian, assistant principal, and school principal. SJZES nurtures the intellectual, social, and emotional well-being of students and inspires them to become self-motivated, lifelong learners, and leaders. The team of administrators ensures that best practices are utilized in and out of the classroom to maximize student potential.

The students at SJZES are encouraged to take part in leadership activities like being involved in various school clubs. The campus was successful in closing the achievement gap by establishing goals, developing a plan of action, and remaining focused on the commitment to the success of the students even thru the school's obstacles and challenges. At SJZES, perseverance and risk-taking have been achieved through great leadership initiatives. These goals have been reached because of a shared passion and strive for excellence.

Administrators follow the transformational leadership style and make decisions guided by the following beliefs: The uniqueness, worth, and dignity of each must be acknowledged and nurtured.; the rights and property of every person must be respected; the ability to learn is intrinsic and deserves to be continually developed; Education is a shared responsibility involving students, families, school and community agencies; and education must be led by committed individuals who encouraged student-centered leadership, in a safe environment. Administrators are actively involved in ensuring that student needs are met in all aspects by conducting needs assessments and analyzing data to improve student's outcomes. The administrative team works collaboratively to ensure the safety of the school community by monitoring and being visible. The leadership team ensures that students are provided with great teaching strategies and rigorous learning. The team of administrators plan extensively for each school year and are flexible in tweaking the plan based on circumstances and data analysis.

At SJZES, leadership mission is geared toward the best interest of all students. The campus leadership team strongly believes that everybody is accountable for the success of all students. Leadership is practiced by all the staff members with the goal that students will also adopt the transformational leadership style in their lives.

At SJZES, it is imperative that all stakeholders remain committed to the school's annual goals that are crucial for continued academic progress to end the year with improved academic gains.

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

---

It has been said, “If you build it, they will come.” At Senator Judith Zaffirini Elementary, an environment has been built that focuses on developing the whole child. The school acts on the belief that students are capable of achieving all that they put their optimal effort in. The campus personnel help instill in all students a sense of giftedness in all aspects. Throughout the school year, students’ accomplishments are celebrated not only in academics but also in all extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. During campus celebrations, students are honored for having earned Honor Roll, Perfect Attendance, Accelerated Reader Goals, and Model Behavior. During the celebrations, the recognition of parents has also been incorporated. It is the belief of the campus that the home and school work in unity and that a campus’s overall success is due to this collaboration. At SJZES, it is recognized that greater levels of success are more likely to be achieved when all stakeholders are involved.

The recognition of students' accomplishments allows students to be held accountable across all areas. Teachers are asked to create a data wall in their classrooms where students can chart and track their goals/growth continuously through the school year. Students can verbalize the goals they have set for themselves, how they are progressing, and what they have to do to achieve their set goals. These goals and expectations are reviewed daily in each classroom. The campus leadership team also communicates with all students the pride of being an “A-rated campus” and acknowledges that it is because of their academic performance.

By creating an environment in which everyone is held accountable, all stakeholders have risen to the high expectations that have been set for them. SJZES classroom teachers work diligently to provide multiple opportunities for students to master objectives and to assist with the development of well-rounded students. The teachers utilize effective lesson delivery of concepts and interventions as well as encouraging students to do their best. The campus has narrowed the achievement gap over the years because an environment of consistent efforts and endless possibilities for all students has been created. This philosophy is practiced throughout the campus whether it be in the classrooms, gymnasium, or cafeteria and with all stakeholders.

The sense of pride that the teachers and staff hold about the success of all students is immeasurable. It is through this pride in conjunction with the development of positive relationships that the students, parents and the community are united in the effort for continuous academic improvement. At Senator Judith Zaffirini Elementary School, no child will ever be left behind.