

U.S. Department of Education
2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Ms. Miriam Spiller-Speight
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Vista Academy of Austin-Mueller
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1504 E 51st Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Austin State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 78723-3012

County Travis

Telephone (512) 371-8933 Fax (972) 315-9506

Web site/URL https://austin-classical.responsiveed.com/#utm_source=GMB%20Page&utm_medium=AustinCA&utm_campaign=gmb_page E-mail msspiller@responsiveed.com

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. Jason Bernal E-mail jbernal@responsiveed.com
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Texas College Preparatory Academy Tel. (972) 316-3663

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 Mr. Charles Cook
(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 2020 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 2014 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: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, or 2019.
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 (2019-2020) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 20 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 5 High schools
 - 9 K-12 schools
- 35 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
 Suburban
 Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2019 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	9	8	17
1	16	13	29
2	8	6	14
3	9	14	23
4	5	11	16
5	8	8	16
6	8	8	16
7	4	7	11
8	4	8	12
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	71	83	154

*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
 - 2 % Asian
 - 25 % Black or African American
 - 56 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 12 % White
 - 5 % 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 2018 - 2019 school year: 13%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

The Mobility Rate is 12.7%

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, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	7
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	21
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	165
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.13
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	13

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

Spanish, Arabic, Cantonese, Hungarian, Ibo/Igho

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 18 %
28 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 42 %

Total number students who qualify: 64

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %

15 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>7</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>7</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>4</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>6</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

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

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	11
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	2
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	0

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 14:1

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

Required Information	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015
Daily student attendance	94%	96%	95%	94%	95%
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 2019.

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.

To provide hope for students through educational options that promote a free society and cultivate moral and academic excellence.

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

Vista Academy of Austin-Mueller is a public school of choice operated by the school district Texas College Preparatory Academies, TCPA. Per the Texas Education Code and the school's charter, the school does not discriminate in student admission based on sex, national origin, ethnicity, religion, disability, academics, artistic, or athletic ability, or the district the student would otherwise have attended. TCPA sets limits on the number of students in a classroom based on a variety of factors such as the size of the room, overall facility capacity, certificate of occupancy limit, and the educational model.

Students are chosen to attend the Vista Academy of Austin-Mueller by meeting all of the steps and requirements in the enrollment process. Parents must apply for and then accept a seat. The application process is the first step in the admission and enrollment process. It is available to anyone who wishes to apply for admission. Applications are available on paper at the campus and through an online portal. Parents of students may apply for admission at any time, although the window of opportunity changes depending upon the year for which they are applying. The application only collects essential information for application processing. An application is only valid for the given year. One application form per student is allowed.

As an open-enrollment charter school, no TCPA campus denies admission to an eligible applicant other than for some narrowly defined cases with residency and discipline. A family's decision to apply or attend is purely a matter of their own choice. Applications are accepted at any point during the year.

Upon completion of the open application period, parents are contacted by phone and email. They are given forty-eight hours to respond and affirm that a seat is desired. If a parent does not do so, the next person on the waitlist will be contacted, offered admission, and given the same 48 hours to respond. Applications

received after the open-application period go to the end of the waitlist, or if a seat is available, the place may be awarded. Students may continue to apply and will be awarded seats on a first-come, first-served basis through the end of the given school year for which the application is submitted. Transfers may also be requested outside of the transfer window. In this case, the sending and the receiving directors must approve the transfer.

Enrollment begins only after the campus has determined an open seat is available, and the applicant has met the required criteria, qualifying residency, and disciplinary history. During the enrollment process, parents are required to provide supporting documentation. Starting from the day of the applicant's notification of acceptance, the applicant will have three weeks (21 days) to complete and submit the required registration packet. Parents of students who fail to complete the registration packet, along with all of the necessary documentation, within three weeks of receiving the registration packet will be deemed to have withdrawn their application, and the school will make room for other eligible applicants.

No later than 30 days after enrolling in the school, the parent and previous school district the student was enrolled with shall furnish records that verify the identity of the student. All new students are required to provide a completed enrollment application, the student's birth certificate or passport, the student's social security card, and two proofs of residency (utility bill, lease, or rent receipts). Parents must additionally complete the At-Risk Survey, produce current student immunization records, the parent or guardian's driver's license, the student's previous STAAR records (if applicable), a record release, and a copy of the student's former school's Report Card.

PART III - SUMMARY

Vista Academy of Austin-Mueller, a charter school operated by Responsive Education Solutions, first opened its doors in 2012 to offer a rigorous classical education in the liberal arts and sciences. Initially only serving students K-4, the school expanded for four consecutive years, and currently serves grades K-8. In 2015 the campus added the Charlotte Mason Classical component to an already integrated Core Knowledge program to provide students of the greater Austin area access to an insightful classical curriculum. Despite significant changes to the campus curriculum, the ongoing vision for the school has remained to "provide hope for students through educational options that promote a free society and cultivate moral and academic excellence."

Located in the city of Austin, Texas, the academy comprises an 88.3% At-Risk student population. The student body faces many obstacles on the path to success, but VAM has continually developed new programs to meet the students' needs. VAM fosters student development through a curriculum focused on critical thought, character values, and inquisitive discovery. The bulk of students' learning comes from interacting with texts and responding to questions of varying levels of complexity. Student-led discussions, student-teacher conferencing, and regular progress monitoring allow the classroom teachers to differentiate their curriculum to each student's needs.

VAM's student body encompasses a unique demographic as enrolled students travel from all over the greater Austin area to attend. While the academy is located in the growing, prosperous neighborhood of Mueller, the majority of the students come from the surrounding areas. The Austin area has experienced a 30% expansion in population over the last decade, causing an increase in the cost of living for residents of the city. In response to the growing unaffordability of the inner city, many of the students' families have been forced into neighboring rural areas. Despite the ever-increasing distance between the school's campus and students' homes, many families choose to continue their children's education at VAM's Austin-Mueller campus.

VAM is a Title I public charter school with 62% of the student body identified as economically disadvantaged. Free meals, school supplies, and uniforms are provided to students. However, the school has struggled financially to provide additional fine arts and sports programs. VAM serves approximately 160 students in kindergarten through 8th grade. The student body is comprised of 56% Hispanic, 25% African American, 12% White, and about 2% Asian. Roughly 20% of the students are English language learners, ELLs, who fluently speak languages such as Spanish, Arabic, Cantonese, Hungarian, and Ibo/Igho.

With a majority At-Risk student body, lengthy travel time from the surrounding rural areas, and a large ELL population, VAM is still meeting students' needs at a more substantial pace than in years prior. VAM saw considerable academic growth across the student body in the 2018-2019 school year, improving its Texas Education Agency report card rating from 75% to 92% in one school year. The 2018-2019 school year is the first year that VAM has been nominated for the National Blue Ribbon Award for Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing Schools. A significant component in the academy's nomination came from the campus score of 100% in the category of Closing the Gaps.

With a majority of the student population labeled as At-Risk for academic failure, VAM has prioritized a competitive growth mindset. That growth mindset has led to the implementation of across campus data-driven practices that transformed the traditional classroom structures into blended classrooms with a focus on individualized instruction in the 2018-2019 school year. The campus' classical curriculum is now individualized to each students' needs and interests, and the teachers are proactive about seeking texts and assignments that encourage creativity and curiosity. Once differentiation was applied in a blended classroom model, the campus began seeing growth in student assessments, and teachers continued to create new opportunities for students to gain access to individualized lessons and tutoring.

On a typical school day, students begin arriving as early as 6:45 AM and leave as late as 5:00 PM. Many students have to commute to school for an hour or longer every morning, and some ride city transit for several hours to have access to an education that may not be provided to them in their neighborhoods. Therefore, it is not unusual to find students napping on makeshift beds in the school office early in the

morning or tardy students eating breakfast before being sent to class. Parents are allowed into the classrooms, are encouraged to participate in the learning process, and it is not uncommon to see grandparents and little siblings tagging along too. The mission, as stated before, is to provide the students with hope, and the campus is triumphant in that endeavor every day that they cultivate a safe and supportive environment for the entire school community.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

1a. Overall approach, which may include overarching philosophy or approaches common across subject areas

VAM's Charlotte Mason classical curriculum is designed to utilize modern and diverse literature, lecture, and classroom discussion aligned to the state TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) to engage students in daily learning. The curriculum implemented in grades K-8 creates a structural foundation for the students to learn by encouraging independent thought, tailoring the messages to their understandings, activating their prior knowledge, and authentically monitoring their daily learning. Utilizing the curriculum, the teachers function in the classroom as the medium through which students reconcile their ideas as they participate in the learning process.

Every course, and grade, have a pacing guide created by the school district to help the teachers design and implement lesson plans. The pacing guide outlines all state-mandated TEKS for each course and grade, sorting them into clusters based on topic and skill, and assigns them to specific days and weeks of the school calendar. The teachers design assignments using the pacing guide and are provided with scheduled time to spiral and revisit the TEKS throughout the school year. The curriculum is designed around novels, short stories, and poetry for social studies, reading, and writing. It is supplemented with art studies, Latin lessons, recitations, and art projects which are aligned to the TEKS as well. Science and mathematics are taught through inquisitive exploration. The science and mathematics teachers follow a pacing guide to ensure that all TEKS are met during the school year. They additionally supplement their classroom lessons with regular field study observations and classroom Socratic seminars.

Daily classroom discussions are guided by established Essential Questions, which are aligned to the curriculum and skills being taught to engage students in curious inquisition and free expression.

Differentiation is an essential component of the curriculum's success. VAM acknowledges different learning styles and identifies students' mental self-governing preferences early in the school year to respectfully reflect those needs in the classroom setting. Every day students evaluate their learning after lessons and ask for feedback, which is responded to on an individual basis.

1b. Reading/English language arts

VAM's English language arts and reading, ELAR, program teaches students to connect with their reading and writing to improve their ability to communicate. Through unit lessons that center around novels or informational texts, students interact with grade-level vocabulary and TEKS aligned reading and writing skills in their ELAR classrooms. The ELAR curriculum was designed for the student body to build up their foundational reading and writing skills so that they can become successful members of society and effective change agents in their local communities.

A 3rd-8th grade ELAR unit begins with introducing students to the Essential Question that they will be expected to answer through a narrative or expository essay at the completion of the unit. The Essential Questions ask students to grapple with real-world questions such as "How does one overcome fear?" as they progress through weekly readings. Students in the K-2nd ELAR program respond orally to the Essential Questions during collaborative class discussions and through creative works. All grade level students work in reading and writing units that are built around texts that supplement and reinforce the unit's lessons. The unit's assignments and activities are organized around fiction and nonfiction texts and have a cross-curricular connection to the STEM and social studies programs. Each unit is outfitted with mini-lessons and activities that address specific reading and writing skills outlined in the TEKS. The TEKS taught in every unit are tracked through the ELAR pacing guide.

Students engage with their assigned texts individually and in teacher constructed peer groups. At the completion of daily reading, students verbalize the author's purpose, idea units, and text-to-self observations. Students track their comprehension of those concepts through text annotation and paraphrasing, which is a

skill that is taught starting in kindergarten. After completing the reading portion of their assignments, students must be able to communicate their learning within peer groups, individually in teacher conferencing, and expressively through effective writing. Students write about their reading daily in observational logs and journals. Rather than teaching language separate from the reading curriculum, the teachers design their grammar and language lessons into their reading assignments. Students are taught grammar through diagramming and hands-on activities. Their grammar lessons are supplemented with computer and board games, and at intervals, in the school year, students teach grammar lessons to their peers.

The ELAR program uses a blended model from K-8. The teachers select texts that are relevant to students' prior knowledge, cultural understandings, and interests. At the beginning of a reading assignment, the teacher introduces a critical skill or subject discussed in the class reading. Students who need further direct instruction can access pre-recorded lessons on foundational skills through their online classrooms or can have their learning gaps addressed through teacher conferencing. Using a blended classroom model, where some students work independently, and others work in small groups, the teacher can provide individualized instruction with specific students or student groups. Individualized instruction has helped VAM's teachers to be successful in monitoring and guiding their At-Risk students in reaching their ongoing learning goals.

Student learning is evaluated through unit assessments, designed with passages and questions modeled after the state-mandated assessment, STAAR, in addition to teacher-designed tests, weekly progress-monitoring, and collaborative classroom discussion. After each unit assessment, the ELAR teachers utilize small purposeful groups to help target reading and language gaps using their classroom literacy centers. The literacy centers provide the teachers leveled readers with accompanying summative and formative assessments.

1c. Mathematics

The math curriculum is an investigative small group program that has blended kinesthetic activities and daily teacher conferencing. The curriculum extends equitable access to advanced mathematical and foundational STEM skills to all students enrolled. The rigorous, curiosity-driven curriculum was designed to meet the needs of VAM's 88.3% At-Risk student population, but the program also provides ample individualized opportunities to students of all backgrounds.

Students engage in mini-lessons that address specific TEKS for 20 minutes 1-3 times per week. The units are broken into weekly structures that involve new concepts through activity and problem-solving. Before direct teaching, the students are expected to try and solve new concept math problems on their own first and then communicate their learning, or questions, about the new concept with their class and teacher through Socratic discussion. Once the teacher has assessed the students' depth of understanding, the teacher reaches them at the level of their learning and then models the new skills and asks the students to practice with a peer. Instructors supplement their weekly units with grouped and individual hands-on activities, learning games, and interactive notebooks.

Peer groups are provided strategically and are rotated to help students work on specific standards. The goal of this rotating peer structure is to allow the students to see how others, with different levels of skills, investigate and implement their problem-solving tools. The teacher meanwhile focuses on traversing the classroom, working within small groups, on helping students use and connect mathematical concepts and procedures, supporting productive struggle, and eliciting evidence of the students' comprehension.

A significant component of the math curriculum is mathematical language. Students are expected to be able to apply their mathematical knowledge to real-world calculations that are presented through word problems. The teachers communicate the authentic application of each TEK objective and reinforce those skills with the relevant language structure that would accompany specific word problems. Once students can effectively solve grade-level math computations, they are provided with above grade level opportunities to utilize those skills with puzzles, learning games, and classroom discussions that challenge students to understand practical applications of their learning.

Student communication in a small group setting is vital to the math curriculum. The teachers steer clear of the worksheet centered programs that have become traditional in math classrooms. At VAM, worksheets are not used to teach or frame new objectives. Students are taught the methods of math problem solving that are considered best practice, utilizing manipulatives and real-world concepts. They are also encouraged to come to the solution in any way that is logical for them as individuals. However, a student must always be prepared to defend their answer and to verbalize their thought process. Communicating learning can be challenging for students to do if they have been in an environment where passive rote memorization was utilized. However, the math teachers carefully guide the students in the process of learning how to verbalize their problem-solving.

Furthermore, the teachers use traditional and verbal assessments to take into account identified learning errors in their student body to help steer students down the correct route of thought during conferencing. After conferencing with individual students, the teacher returns to their facilitating role and allows students ample time to practice and make mistakes through tangible, rigorous assignments that help students to deepen the connections between their classroom learning and the application of learned skills.

1d. Science

The science curriculum utilizes a blended online STEM program that has kinesthetic activities embedded into it. The program has a pacing guide that accounts for direct teaching in the classroom and also provides supplemental assessments and tutorial opportunities for students as they deviate into differentiated activities that involve the subject being taught in class. During each unit, students are first introduced to new materials as a whole class through TEK aligned videos, then have their lessons expounded upon through direct instruction from their teacher. The program helps students to learn scientific language through vocabulary journals, interactive literacy workbooks, weekly digital quizzes, and concept review games.

Hands-on learning labs accompany all units in the STEM program. The labs ask students to apply their learning by working in small groups to conduct curiosity-driven investigations. The labs are high interest-based and involve creating hypotheses and writing lab reports. The program utilizes the 5e method of Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate to cycle through every unit covered. Students are taught to write about their observations through interactive notebooks, observation logs, and formal reports.

Weekly formative assessments review concepts. Students are summatively assessed through project-based learning, which offers the opportunity to display individual perspectives. The students are evaluated using rubrics and are expected to deliver a prepared presentation for every project reflecting real-world challenges and problems. The science program also conducts a science fair in the spring for the 3-8th grades that encourage students to create experiments that are driven by their interests.

STEM academic language and topics are reinforced across the individual curricular subjects. In ELAR, their readings are a mixture of nonfiction, and even fiction, passages that involve scientific and mathematical topics. Students receive STEM vocabulary from their science teachers but are expected to interact with those words in their language classrooms as well. Additionally, the science teacher reinforces reading, writing, and mathematical skills in their daily lessons.

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

Social studies are taught using a TEKS aligned textbook program that gives students access to digital activities, passages, and assessments. The students have class workbooks and vocabulary journals that supplement their learning. Students work on the same chronological event together as a whole group, utilizing a timeline as a reference. However, their education is still differentiated through a variety of activities and assessments.

The curriculum is designed to teach history and civic engagement through action and interaction. Students make history tangible every day in class by creating living museums, written reports, art pieces, and even 3-D dioramas. Students read about the events being taught during each unit both in their history and ELAR classes because historical knowledge deepens students' contextual understandings, therefore, increasing their

ability to understand history's influence on their reading texts. Additionally, students engage with Essential Questions in both classrooms that ask them to develop solutions for real-world dilemmas. Once a year, during a cross-curricular research project, students work in groups to come up with solutions to community problems, which help them to fortify their identities as future change agents.

Discussion and debate are critical components of the social studies curriculum. Students are encouraged daily to deepen their understanding of learned material through teacher-facilitated peer paired think-share activities. Students receive hands-on work like creating timeline comparisons, writing fictional diary entries, and even acting out historical events. Then, students engage as a whole class in Socratic seminars and fishbowl discussions. Students are encouraged to create multi-level questions of their own, to debate topics, and to create their ideas as individuals. After a unit, students are assessed to determine their level of knowledge in regards to the historical events, the events' historical value, and their understanding of academic vocabulary.

A formative component of the history curriculum is the teaching of historical material through art and music study in conjunction with the TEK aligned historical events. The social studies program embeds an understanding of cultural context by teaching students to evaluate art from not only a modern perspective, but a historical perspective. Students keep daily art logs to analyze famous paintings and compositions, varying from the baroque, to Hip-Hop. Students complete art-based projects in every unit to represent their learning. The projects must exhibit an understanding of the historical events discussed in their classroom lessons.

1f. For secondary schools:

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The fine arts program is integrated into all grade levels' daily schedules. Students have a total of 90 minutes of Electives every school day. Students in all grade levels must attend a physical education (PE) class a minimum of 140 minutes a week. In order to meet that requirement, students must attend PE for 35 minutes 4 days of the school week. The remaining 55 minutes are utilized by students to participate in the fine arts and electives programs. All of the fine arts curriculums are aligned to the state TEKS and taught by the classroom teachers.

VAM does not receive additional funding to supplement a fine arts or electives program. However, school donations and community volunteers help to cover costs for equipment and program fees. As a Title I school, VAM tries to avoid shifting the costs of these programs onto students' families, so access to certain options is limited. The school helps families to locate free and low-cost fine arts and sports programs within the community whenever possible. During the school day, the teachers provide access to state-mandated fine arts programs that are supplemented by school traditions such as the Winter and Spring fine arts showcases and field day.

In grades K-8th, the fine arts programs are prepared by the classroom teachers. Students participate in art, music, theater, computer lab, and unstructured playtime is offered on Fridays. The Computer Lab program teaches students necessary computer skills like keyboarding and how to use modern operating systems such as Windows 10 and Chrome OS. The 5th-8th fine arts program also allows students to choose from rotating electives every nine weeks. Some of the programs offered to students include Latin studies, art, music, theater, coding, chess mastery, yearbook, intramural sports, yoga, book study, gardening, and agriculture. Students can participate in two electives, for roughly 55 minutes each, two days a week.

The Latin, art, music, theater, and computer lab electives are extensions of the already integrated programs that students have built into their daily classes. Latin and Theater Study TEKS are taught in conjunction with the ELAR TEKS. Art Study TEKS are taught in the social studies program, and Computer/Technology TEKS are taught across the subjects thanks to the blended classroom models that involve students engaging in a wide variety of computer skills every school day. All grades monitor taught TEKS through the fine arts

pacing guides both in the subject-based classes and the fine arts/electives programs.

The physical education class requires a minimum attendance of 140 minutes a week from all grade level students. The PE teacher follows a curriculum aligned to the state TEKS designed for each grade level to prepare students for the state assessment at the end of the school year. The PE teacher works closely with students to help them to create personalized fitness goals and to discuss healthy eating and living habits. Outside of the application of the TEKS, the PE teacher also helps facilitate the intramural sports electives. Depending on the season, students compete against each other in volleyball, soccer, basketball, baseball, and football.

The scheduled 90 minutes for PE and fine arts every school day is more than is state-mandated, but the students tend to perform better in the classroom and experience fewer symptoms of attention-deficit when given ample opportunities to play and move during the school day. Additionally, giving older students the ability to choose electives helps them to feel more enthusiastic about their place in the school community and know that their needs are valid.

During the school year, all students in attendance participate in several fine arts and sports programs across campus. 5th-8th grade students document the school's elective activities through a digital yearbook and also the school Facebook. At the end of the fall semester, K-8th host a fine arts show for the community in the form of the Winter Showcase. Each grade performs two songs as a choir, prepares a short handwritten play, displays student art, and much more. The Winter Showcase celebrates student cultural diversity and talent. In the spring, students also have their Talent Showcase where an art gallery walk is set up, and students perform a variety of dances, songs, skits, and gymnastics for the community.

3. Academic Supports:

3a. Students performing below grade level

The school has a Response To Intervention, RTI, program to address the diverse learning needs of the At-Risk student population. The RTI program is monitored by a collaborative committee and led by a campus intervention specialist. Students performing below grade level receive supplemental activities and lessons provided by a specialist who helps to track and aid in overcoming learning gaps. Learning gaps are identified through assessment and targeted through the implementation of best practice interventions and regular RTI meetings to discuss student progress.

The teachers utilize computer-generated data, personal observations, small group instruction, and tutorials to help students performing below grade level to create achievable individualized learning goals. Student success breeds success; building upon each academic success and meeting goals allows students to develop intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, and a desire to achieve. Therefore, special attention is given to help students who are struggling to meet achievable goals on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis.

Students receiving interventions work toward meeting grade-level curriculum standards through a variety of instructional techniques and supports, including one-on-one and small group instruction. Teachers are also provided tutorials before and after school as needed, including availability for Saturday School.

Tier 1 and Tier 2 RTI programs are embedded in the classroom. Tier 2 programs are put into place to target the needs of students who are one or more years below grade level. The campus intervention specialist provides Tier 2 students with learning gap specific activities and in-class assistance. Students who are assessed for ten or more percentage point gaps in math, reading, or language have their learning supplemented two times a week for 45 minutes with the intervention specialist in the classroom. Students who do not make growth within a 3-week window are pulled further by specialists during study hall periods and receive additional short term direct tutoring through intense targeted instruction in the deficient area.

Students who continue to struggle after a 9-week observation cycle are moved to a Tier 3 Intervention plan and have their learning supplemented three times a week for 45 minutes with a small group, specialist-led, intervention. Tier 3 RTI students receive help in the general education class from instructional aides.

3b. Students performing above grade level

VAM capitalizes on natural curiosity and varying interests to extend learning for students performing above grade level. Navigating within the differentiated curriculum, the teachers develop specialized plans for above grade level students that implement project-based learning and student teaching opportunities. Above grade level students are not removed or isolated from their grade-level peers; instead, they are taught to apply the mastery of their learning within their already established grade level environment whenever possible.

VAM utilizes a tiered approach to teaching above grade level. Students who perform above their peers will learn the same concepts as their peers for the most part, but they are asked to work on higher-level assignments that display mastery, rather than spending time working on lower-level material designed to fill learning gaps for the general education population. Once students show mastery of concepts, the teacher works with the student in conferencing to discuss and design personalized project opportunities complete with writing and speaking components.

It is a common practice on campus to have students interacting with different peer groups based on needs. The teacher has the option to ask a student to work on above grade level concepts in the appropriate grade level classroom if it is seen to be of benefit to the student. An example would be a 5th grader who is very advanced in mathematics sitting in on an early level Algebra lesson with 7th graders and then bringing that learning back to their regularly assigned classroom. Then, the student can work with the teacher in conferencing to discuss ways that they can apply that lesson in their current grade level or to a social project.

The campus policy is that above grade level students need to be engaged, not just challenged. Hard tasks are not merely assigned to occupy students' time. Teachers use the same assessments and monitoring of individual goals applied to other levels of students to determine individual learning plans for all of the students to ensure mastery at the level they are working within and then mastery at the logically preceding level. Rather than merely teaching up a grade level, teachers engage their students at the grade levels they are already working within to help them aim for curiosity-driven application of their learning to real-world projects.

3c. Special education

VAM's Special Education Department provides services to 10% of the student body. The SPED program coordinates with its students, their guardians, and the classroom teachers to ensure that all needs outlined in the students' Individualized Education Programs, IEPS, are implemented fairly and discreetly in the least restrictive environment.

Students in the SPED program engage in differentiated school work, teacher conferencing, and project-based learning in the classroom with their peers. Individual needs are taken into account, and specialized services are contracted when considered best practice, or requested during IEP committee meetings. Students are supported by paraprofessionals and the SPED teacher in and out of the classroom environment. The SPED teacher monitors their progress and helps the classroom teacher to apply accommodations and modifications successfully to foster students' growth in the regular classroom. Extra instruction opportunities and tutoring are provided regularly to students in the program. Additionally, the SPED program works closely with its students to create personalized goals to help students to meet objectives outlined in their IEPS through weekly conferencing.

The SPED teacher, classroom teacher, and paraprofessionals work together daily to monitor student progress through strategic assessments and keep logs of daily student progress and comprehension. When students fall behind, they are provided with reteaching of material and are encouraged to redo work with proper supports in place. Students who continue to struggle with classroom material after reteaching opportunities can have additional instruction prepared by the school intervention specialist or the SPED teacher. The school has computer programs and rewards programs that SPED students have access to as well. When agreed upon in an IEP meeting, students can also receive pullout instruction for short intervals to work on

individualized learning goals to address personal learning gaps.

The integration of the SPED program into the general education environment ensures that students are not isolated or set apart from their peers and that they are appropriately supported so that they have the ability to be successful in the regular classroom. The SPED program and classroom teachers regularly connect with students' guardians to discuss student IEPS during the Admission, Review and Dismissal Committee, ARD, meetings.

3d. ELLs, if a special program or intervention is offered

VAM adheres to all state standards and best practices for ELLs, as well as implementing the ELPS in all subject lesson plans. Students receive additional ESL services through the ESL program outside of the general education classroom for thirty minutes 3 days a week. Students who are placed into a beginning or intermediate proficiency descriptor also have access to an individual specialized program created in conjunction with the ESL teacher and Reading Interventionist.

ELL students experience limitations in language and vocabulary development, so their needs are supplemented by the implementation of the English language proficiency standards that are applied during every lesson. Using online platforms in addition to supplemental language lessons, ELLs are provided with specialty literacy programs that target phonemic errors and language acquisition. Students receive tiered instruction before and after class that helps to develop their academic language so that they can engage in academic discussions. The ELAR embedded Latin program provides them with knowledge of root words, prefixes, and suffixes to help them develop the ability to break down longer academic terms and the history and context of each word. ELLs have their learning further supported with prior knowledge activation and vocabulary introduction before new material is taught. After the completion of learning new material, ELLs are pulled into small peer groups so that they can communicate in think-pair-share groups with teacher guidance.

ELLs are provided with supports such as small group testing, oral test administration, anchor charts, visual aids, and graphic organizers. 56% of the student population is Hispanic and hear Spanish spoken at home, and 20% of the population qualify as English language learners.

3e. Other populations (e.g., migrant), if a special program or intervention is offered

Student social and emotional developments are taken into account through the implementation of conscious discipline by administration into all of the school's classroom settings. Students communicate needs with their teachers through regular conferencing, and that feedback is utilized to create individualized learning plans for students. Teachers scaffold and sequence instruction in a manner that takes into account students' prior learning and interest. Migrant students, and students with severe social and emotional needs, have access to programs provided by the appropriate specialist to address their specific needs. When necessary, the school contracts interpreters and therapists to facilitate an equitable learning environment further.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

VAM adheres to Charlotte Mason's philosophy that children need to play and make choices in order to thrive in the learning environment. Therefore, the campus reinforces student engagement with unstructured playtime earned through token economies established in their classrooms. Students are engaged in the right to make choices every day, and the teachers and administrators acknowledge their right to choose. Students make choices that align with the campus character education values, which are integrity, honor, gratefulness, wisdom, and justice, creating an atmosphere of extensive freedom during the school day to make decisions. Minimal discipline is used with the student body. Instead, expectations are communicated consciously with students, and student points of view are taken into account. When discipline is necessary, the teachers and administration employ conscious discipline techniques that promote age-appropriate self-regulation.

Because the school reinforces choices and free will, the school environment has become highly adaptable, advocating for schedules that change depending on student needs. Classes can be extended to allow students time to complete hands-on activities, and schedules can be adjusted to shorten classroom instruction to make time for play. Additionally, students have 120 minutes of weekly study hall time that they can utilize and organize at their discretion, with teacher approval. The campus well exceeds the state expectation set for gym time, allowing students daily play in the gymnasium or outside in the fresh air. Teachers are encouraged to use playtime to reinforce lessons and engage students in high-interest learning activities. Teachers are also hands-on during playtime. It is not uncommon to find teachers forgoing planning periods to play basketball, chess, teach drawing, encourage theatrical activity, or organize school clubs.

High-Interest project-based learning also increases student engagement. Students are involved in their learning environment and take on roles and responsibilities in their classrooms. Their learning is not passive; instead, it is highly captivating. Students apply their learning and engage in critical thinking by expressing their thoughts and opinions by leading their peers in academic material. Each year, students are taught character values and expectations. Then, they are guided in the process of taking responsibility for their learning environment. Students are taught to facilitate learning in the classroom through project-based learning self-designed assignments. Students express that they enjoy coming to school. Every day an effort is made to support their wellbeing and success both in and out of the classroom.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Parental and community involvement is of paramount importance in creating school-wide success. Teachers regularly communicate with parents and guardians through the use of social media, e-mail, access to grades and discipline through an online grade portal, face to face meetings, and traditional "note home" methods. Parents are welcomed on campus and are encouraged to visit their students' classes and to participate in school activities. Families are considered to be integral to the operation of the school, and VAM strives to make all families feel welcomed and supported when they become a part of the school community.

VAM attempts to meet the needs of the students and their families because the student body cannot be successful when their real-life needs are not taken into consideration. Parent engagement is pivotal to unlocking success for student development. During parent meetings and community events, the staff is expected to maintain a supportive and accommodating attitude. The teachers do not refuse parents who want to shadow their students during the school day; they make a point to know the parents, to use their names, and to incorporate their opinions and ideas into changes made on the campus.

Many of the student parents have limited English skills, so the campus employs ample staff who can communicate in other languages, such as Spanish, French, and American Sign Language. During the school year, the school hosts community events like Coffee With The Principal, Meet The Teacher Night, Open House, Literacy Nights, STEM Nights, Field Trips, and Kinder and 8th-grade graduations. The school celebrates the diverse community with a Holiday Program in December and a Heritage Showcases in the Spring. Students work diligently with their classroom teachers and administration to put together a wide

variety of presentations, dances, art displays, and drama sketches to keep the framework of the community personalized and creative. Families attend these events every year, with no admittance fee, and are served refreshments and entertainment as a reward for the community's ongoing efforts to see the students become successful.

VAM's community is made up of hard-working lower to middle-class families who may not have time to attend lengthy parent conferences seen at other campuses. Teachers and administrators meet with parents when they are available, even if that means speaking with them in the carpool lane early in the morning, late afternoon parent conferences, or weekend phone calls. VAM supports its students and their families because it has shown to improve student involvement and development. When the students and their families are safe and cared for, then there is space in the students' minds and hearts for learning and dreaming.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

VAM's instructional and non-instructional staff are supported and uplifted in numerous ways throughout the school year. The administration aims to retain successful team members for the long term. They are supported routinely through professional development opportunities, community support, and monetary incentives in the form of bonuses.

The school director is the direct link between the campus staff and district administration. The director works as an advocate for the staff and has a responsibility to maintain a close relationship with all employees and to keep morale high. The school environment can be stressful, but administration alleviates some of that stress through annual staff recognition events such as the fall and spring potlucks and the annual holiday party. Communication and satisfaction amongst the school community are important to the administration, so staff needs are evaluated through anonymous surveys multiple times a year.

Professional development is offered once a month in campus-wide meetings after school. During professional development, staff and teacher interests and ideas are given time for discussion and are justly considered. Presentations are organized by contracted outside professionals, specialists from the district, and campus staff. The topics of each presentation are selected to help the teachers to stay up to date with current laws and regulations as well as to keep teachers current in best instructional practices. The staff are encouraged to ask for specific training and can even request to be sent to professional development events out of town if it will help grow their skillset to the benefit of the campus. The staff begin and end the school year with professional development that often involves certification opportunities and CPU hours towards their recertification.

VAM wants to create a professional culture where the team is consistently working to make strides in their knowledge and contributions to the total learning environment. All employees are given opportunities to seek certifications and to move into new positions as they become available. The administration does not want to pigeonhole teachers or staff into particular jobs when they creatively desire new frontiers. The team is encouraged to try out new strategies and to implement ideas that can help the entire community thrive. If needed, the district and administration work together with team members to help them to get access to education opportunities.

When the entire team feels supported, there is an establishment of trust and respect. Through that system of trust, the entire team can directly assess their growths and weaknesses and come up with plans to address those areas. Thanks to the ongoing efforts of the school director to maintain a positive campus culture that supports growth, the majority of VAM's employees remain with the school for several years. Through retaining and fostering the growth of the campus staff, the school has been able to make logical changes to school culture to the benefit of the entire school's operation.

4. School Leadership:

Administration's philosophy reflects that of the school, "to provide hope through educational options that promote a free society and cultivate moral and academic excellence." Administration applies the same principle of choice and freedom to the classroom teachers and staff that are applied to the school's students.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt and modify curriculum as needed to meet the needs of their classroom environments and students. The campus has a director who is responsible for the operations of the schools' campus. The campus also has administration provided through Responsive Education Solutions. The district administration provides guidance and training to all staff and supports the school in its implementation of curriculum and school programs. The district administration is always available to troubleshoot and accommodate teacher needs whenever necessary.

The campus director also maintains an open-door policy that encourages democratic thought and discussion towards campus improvement. Teachers work within cross-curricular teams that allow them to self manage and assess during ATM meetings held after school for an hour one day a week. Administration monitors and facilitates leadership amongst the teachers to create a hospitable and productive environment. Lead teachers and administration also engage in a weekly whole-group, or small-group, professional development to keep everyone accountable to the continuing needs of the campus.

Lead teachers are selected to guide vertical meetings that encourage the campus teachers to implement new strategies and skills to stimulate the learning environment when it grows stagnant. The lead teachers are also involved in an ongoing evaluation process that emphasizes verbal communication and feedback between classroom teachers and administration. The classroom teachers are the primary leaders in their teaching environment. However, the director, and periodically district administration, are present in the classroom environment to monitor and guide teachers towards meeting their goals. At the same time, the district administration allows the teachers and the campus director to have the freedom to implement policies and techniques that are considered a best practice as long as they are validating that their programs are making adequate progress towards reaching the campus' goals. Intervention Specialists, SPED Administration, and 504 Coordinators are also employed on campus to aid the school team in fostering a healthy environment.^[1]

The campus has a positive, productive environment that thrives through an open door relationship between all of the school's leaders and staff members. Students, teachers, and staff are treated fairly, and all are aware that they are a part of a greater system of family and friendship. While the school operates in a professional manner, VAM adheres to its Charlotte Mason roots of education by taking part in the life process of the staff and students, creating an environment that is not merely an academic or career setting.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The Vista Academy of Mueller accredits its success to the implementation of a democratic choice based society on campus. Barriers are removed from the campus by allowing students to have the freedom to make choices and develop opinions during the learning process. Students are engaged in an open discussion about the importance of their education, and they are provided with ample opportunities to express themselves. As a result, students develop robust self esteems that create confidence in their capabilities.

Lessons are highly engaging and individualized to reinforce students' confidence in the school's ability to meet their needs. To create trust between the school and the students, the staff earns students' respect by respecting their rights in the learning process. If a student has an opinion about a lesson, that opinion is taken into consideration. Students return that respect equally to their teachers with minimal classroom management necessary. Students and staff feel free to verbalize what they know and want to know. Their assessment is personalized, and individual growth is rewarded. Students are not picked apart by state-mandated test scores. Instead, VAM adapts and tailors curriculums to meet their ongoing efforts to better themselves as human beings.

Students, administration, and staff, are all equally liberated and considered. All needs are equal, and as a result, there is peace on campus. Students are not pushed to the breaking point or dehumanized by failure. They are uplifted and reinvigorated daily by words of affirmation. Every day the entire campus recites the following motto "I am somebody! I was somebody when I came, and I will be a better somebody when I leave this school. I am powerful, and I am strong! I deserve the education that I am receiving here. I have things to do, people to impress, and places to go! Look out world! Here I come!" (Rita Pierson).