

U.S. Department of Education
2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mrs. Sonia Anna Flores M.Ed.
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Dr. T J Owens Gilroy Early College Academy
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 5055 Santa Teresa Boulevard GECA-1
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Gilroy State CA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 95020-9578

County Santa Clara County

Telephone (408) 846-4909 Fax (408) 848-4730

Web site/URL https://geca.gilroyunified.org/ E-mail sonia.flores@gilroyunified.org

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* Dr. Deborah Flores Ph.D. E-mail debbie.flores@gilroyunified.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Gilroy Unified School District Tel. (669) 205-4000

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. Mark Good J.D.
(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, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The electronic signature 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 2021 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 must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
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 current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

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

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 7 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 4 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 14 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

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, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	28	48	76
10	35	37	72
11	28	48	76
12 or higher	36	38	74
Total Students	127	171	298

*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):
- 0.3 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 18 % Asian
 - 0.7 % Black or African American
 - 52 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 5 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 24 % 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 2019 - 2020 school year: 2%

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

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	6
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	6
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	306
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.02
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

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

Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, French, Russian, Arabic, Dutch, Farsi, Tagalog, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Tamil

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %
4 Total number ELL

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

Total number students who qualify: 126

8. Students receiving special education services: 1 %
2 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. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

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

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 6
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. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	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.	0
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 27:1

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

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	98%	98%	98%	99%	97%
High school graduation rate	99%	100%	100%	100%	98%

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 2020.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	68
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	96%
Enrolled in a community college	4%
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.

GECA students will reach their highest personal and academic potential by becoming responsible citizens, fulfilling the school's motto of "Be Someone. Go Somewhere. Seek Excellence."

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

All high school classes have been moved to a distance learning format, where students complete synchronous online classes, with their regular GECA teachers leading instruction. High school instruction takes place from 8:10 AM - 12:45 PM, Monday through Thursday (Friday instruction concludes at 12:40 PM). Teachers hold online office hours from 1:25 - 3:00 PM Monday through Thursdays (some teachers hold office hours only until 2:10 PM, depending on contractual prep time). Our students also take all of their college classes online with our partner college, Gavilan Community College. Some of the college classes are offered online in a synchronous setting, while others are offered asynchronously.

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

The Dr. TJ Owens Gilroy Early College Academy (GECA) is a school of choice. Admittance to the GECA is based on a holistic review of the student's complete, submitted application, which includes two teacher recommendations, a personal essay, a parent statement, previous academic achievement (in the form of report cards and standardized test scores), as well as recommendations from an interview panel. Applicants should have an overall grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 – 4.0, a history of excellent attendance and citizenship with minimal school discipline issues, and the ability to read at or above the ninth grade level. The application review process further evaluates applications to give priority to those students who represent a population of students traditionally underrepresented in a four-year university setting; namely those who meet one or more of the following criteria - (1) Students who are first to attend and graduate from a four-

year college or university; (2) Students from a low income family (who qualify for free/reduced lunch); (3) Students who speak a language at home that is other than English; and (4) Students who face special circumstances that may be obstacles to future academic achievement in a traditional high school.

Admittance to GECA is not limited to students meeting the above-mentioned criteria. Application to the academy is open to all students, regardless of school district of residence. While the program primarily serves students who apply from Gilroy Unified School District (GUSD), GECA also considers students who apply from surrounding school districts that are part of the Gavilan Community College attendance region. GECA does not engage in unlawful discrimination against any student, employee, or applicant for either attendance or employment. All educational programs are available without regard to actual or perceived race, color, ancestry, religion, national origin, nationality, ethnicity, ethnic group identification, marital or parental status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or gender expression, or association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics.

PART III - SUMMARY

The Dr. TJ Owens Gilroy Early college Academy (GECA) is located on the Gavilan College campus, nestled against the foothills of Gilroy, California, with beautiful and finely manicured landscape consisting of mature trees and foliage. GECA seeks to raise high school graduation and postsecondary success rates of underserved youth and provide students the opportunity to graduate with a high school diploma and an Associate's degree or two years of college credit - especially inspiring in Gilroy, where a relatively low number of community members have the education and degrees that make them marketable in the modern economy. GECA presents the ideal learning environment for students to acquire the education and experience necessary to succeed in life and career.

Often, students, staff and parents describe GECA as a family. This shared belief unites our diverse community of academically-minded and self-driven scholars from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds as well as neighboring counties. Throughout their academic journey, students lean on parents, teachers, and peers for support, guidance, and good-natured fun. The culture of the school stems from the continued efforts from staff to infuse the tenets of character in and out of the classroom. Students embrace the principles of trust, respect, care, integrity, and personal responsibility to develop a school culture where students are accountable for maintaining high academic standards in a productive, safe, and caring learning environment.

Following the framework of Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and Advanced Placement (AP), instructors vertically align curriculum to support student acquisition of skills delineated in Bloom's Taxonomy. GECA uses educational research to provide a meaningful instructional framework that includes Dr. Conley's Four Keys of College and Career Readiness. Additionally, students are guided through higher-order thinking tasks using the Gradual Release of Responsibility model whereby students become independent learners first with teacher guidance and peer support. Teachers regularly infuse proven strategies such as structured collaboration from Kagan Professional Development (PD). These cooperative structures improve student academic achievement, create an engaging classroom climate, enhance social skills, and foster character traits.

A vital element of GECA's success is attributed to the implementation and sustainability of the AcaPrep courses. AcaPrep serves to foster a positive and supportive school climate, build skills, and develop behaviors that lead to college, career, and life success. AcaPrep has been developed as an AVID-like course, also infusing Dr. Conley's Four Keys: Think, Know, Act, Go. Students develop skills and knowledge under the Ownership of Learning: goal setting, persistence, self-awareness, progress monitoring, and self-efficacy, as well as postsecondary awareness, matriculation, character development, and self-advocacy. All levels of AcaPrep revisit critical success skills such as: time management, test taking skills, note taking skills, memorization/recall, strategic reading, collaborative learning, technology proficiency, financial literacy, and digital citizenship/literacy.

Designed as a four-year Scope and Sequence, AcaPrep's curriculum is revisited annually by staff and then monthly during collaboration meetings. GECA's Instructional Specialist also supports course objectives by developing lessons and providing resources. Additionally, much of the curriculum that focuses on stress management through mindfulness, cultural awareness through community circles, and school-wide initiatives on respect, kindness, and anti-bullying have all been developed collaboratively among the teachers, principal, and student leadership.

Scheduling AcaPrep 9-11 during the first period was a strategic move which allowed for vital entities such as Associated Student Body (ASB), Honors Tribunal, and AcaPrep Tutors to be a more integral part of the school culture and success. A first period where students attend AcaPrep allowed for school-wide assemblies to be held without disrupting the bell schedule and allowed for greater participation as well as student voice through ASB/Tribunal-led activities and class meetings. GECA's AcaPrep Tutors program also plays an integral part in supporting student learning. Tutors and tutees work together to master content and deepen learning and metacognition. Underway for 2021-22 is the integration of Link Crew with AcaPrep Tutors to build a stronger community with the incoming freshman class and current freshman class

who have been impacted by the year of remote learning.

Tribunal have served a leadership role to create the culture of the school as well. Tribunal acts similarly to a Restorative Justice Circle, interfacing and mediating with students who may transgress GECA's policies and/or Honor Code. Tribunal helps students reflect on and change behavior so they will make better choices in the future and uphold the Honor Code. Through ASB, AcaPrep Tutors, and Tribunal, students empower others to make healthy choices, live a life of integrity and encourage participation in the GECA community.

Contributing to GECA's unique character are the programs and initiatives (some described later). These include: Senior Project, Seminar support classes, EdOptions online credit recovery courses, dual enrollment with Gavilan Community College, student-led clubs, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and on-site licensed counselors for mental health support.

GECA's efforts to adapt to a Distance Learning model are discussed in preceding sections and include: modifications to curriculum, instruction, and assessment; modified bell schedule; online synchronous instruction, extra-curricular activities, and peer tutoring via Zoom; teacher office hours; student accommodations to ensure equity; and blended PD.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

GECA’s core curriculum blends high school and college coursework, where students progress through their four years at GECA with each school year opening up more opportunities for a greater college course load. Students have a set schedule of high school classes, where all ninth grade students enroll in AcaPrep 9, Honors English 9, Biology Honors, Physical Education, and Integrated Math (1+ or 2+, depending on the students’ assessed math readiness level). All tenth grade students enroll in AcaPrep 10, Honors English 10, Chemistry Honors, AP World History, and Integrated Math 2+ or 3+; all eleventh graders enroll in AcaPrep 11, AP English Language and Composition, AP United States History, and Math 3+ (or college-level math); and all twelfth grade students enroll in AcaPrep 12, Senior Project, and one semester of AP US Government and one semester of AP Macroeconomics. In addition to the math variance, some students may be elected to serve in GECA’s Associated Student Body (ASB), and others may choose to serve as peer tutors in AcaPrep Tutors, instead of the general grade-level AcaPrep classes; however, students cover (and even contribute to the creation of) the AcaPrep curriculum if they are Tutors or in ASB. The development of GECA’s curricular emphasis has produced both a solid foundation in the depth and breadth of CCSS, and NGSS s. Teachers use district-adopted curriculum aligned with the state standards, and they create learning experiences that lean on best instructional practices to ensure that all students access the content within the curriculum.

GECA utilizes current research and best practices to maintain a viable and meaningful instructional program. Our research and best practices are directly correlated to improving instruction and preparing students for college, career, life, including character development. GECA has selected key instructional lesson features known as “Non-Negotiables” which include: Essential Questions, Activating Strategy, Limited Lecture/Do Something (following the 10-2 rule - implementing cooperative learning structures), Graphic Organizer(s), and Higher Order Thinking Questions which are supported all by educational research. Training to support teachers in implementing these or improving upon these are provided during Inservice days, AcaPrep Collaboration, Department/PLC, and Staff Meetings. GECA encourages students to deepen their learning and critical thinking skills by asking questions. Using Arthur Costa’s Levels of Questions and Bloom’s Taxonomy, teachers increase the rigor in classrooms by asking higher order thinking questions. Students are given the opportunity to ask questions during formal and informal class activities such as think-pair-share, Socratic Seminars, and Math/Number Talks. During distance learning, these practices have been adapted to a virtual format, thanks to Zoom, Google Workspace, and PearDeck. Teachers have adapted cooperative learning techniques and checks for understanding to a digital space by using interactive features on PearDeck, using Zoom breakout rooms, and structuring activities with focused graphic organizers for students to work collaboratively. Teachers have also used Zoom breakout rooms (where students may choose their own breakout rooms) as an opportunity to differentiate the lesson’s objectives, and provide individualized support.

Working with EPIC (now known as Inflexion) and Dr. Conley, GECA developed the KCS model for critical thinking and problem solving. Both Humanities and STEM departments utilize the model in a variety of ways which include the writing process, science labs, and projects. Key Cognitive Strategies include problem solving, research, interpretation, reasoning, precision and accuracy. Students are guided through the process formally by using the “KCS Template.” The final products yielded through the KCS process (which are typically essays, lab reports, or longer math problems) are some of the summative assessments teachers examine in their PLCs. Other summative assessments across all subject areas include standards-based short-answer responses and multiple-choice questions. Assessments during distance learning have primarily shifted toward written performance tasks - whether short answer responses or longer essays; teachers have also allowed for open-book tests and quizzes to prevent academic dishonesty violations while simultaneously challenging students to yield fair and accurate results.

Humanities and STEM departments meet monthly to analyze student work collaboratively in PLCs (and have continued to do so during distance learning via Zoom meetings). Conversations on strengths, areas of improvement, and corresponding changes in data take place, and recommendations are made. Based on feedback from staff, PD for instructional practices to support student learning are scheduled, implemented,

and monitored. As a result, teaching practices are shifted, to adapt to individual student needs, and additional data are collected for future meetings.

Furthermore, at the start and end of each school year, staff meet during PD days to review the scope and sequence documents and curriculum maps for their courses. Several meetings throughout the year set aside time to review school benchmark data and standardized test scores (currently teacher-selected standards-based assessments). These benchmark results are also presented and discussed at the corresponding School Site Council meetings. From this data, discussions occur, and goals are set/modified by each department on how to improve student learning.

1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):

GECA's mission is devoted to college and career readiness, as all students must complete 40 units of transferable college coursework in four years, while simultaneously fulfilling high school graduation requirements. As an early college high school, GECA is a dual enrollment program. Students take college classes and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Students fulfill their CTE requirements through college coursework - primarily in the fields of Computer Science, Administration of Justice, and Child Development. Roughly 75% of graduates have been attaining their Associates degrees simultaneously with their high school diplomas. All GECA students are required to fulfill 80 hours of community service as part of their graduation requirement (except during COVID, since hours have been waived).

GECA utilizes family, local business, industry, and community resources to support student learning and provide opportunities for all students. Numerous, planned activities involve all stakeholders in the learning/teaching process - specifically Senior Project, Career Day, and Rock The Mock. Members of Gilroy's business community take an active role in the Senior Project presentations (a graduation requirement for seniors). These community members sit on evaluation panels during seniors' presentations, and many of them act as students' mentors. Mentors provide shadowing opportunities and hands-on experiences in their career fields, guiding student research to further their knowledge of and readiness for the featured career. GECA is also supported by Gilroy's Sunrise Rotary Club; Rotarians include local business owners who seek to support GECA students through community service opportunities, internships, and scholarships. Rotarians, local business owners, and family members support GECA's annual Career Day (which has been suspended during school closures).

Rock the Mock is an annual event sponsored by the Business-Education Committee, which includes the superintendent, college administrators, all GUSD high school principals, Gilroy Chamber of Commerce CEO, and local business owners. The event allows students to experience a series of workshops about professionalism, followed by a 30-minute mock interview with a local professional, and actual job-application opportunities.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

GECA relies heavily on its partnership with Gavilan College to support students' acquisition of essential skills and knowledge in the arts, physical education (PE), health, nutrition, world language, and technology. Students must take college classes in these subject areas, since GECA does not offer high school classes to fulfill these subject-specific GECA diploma requirements. Some requirements, such as PE and health, are partially satisfied through the ninth grade curriculum in PE 9 and Honors Biology, which all students must take. Because students are dually enrolled, they can take advantage of the college's numerous elective course offerings in these areas, and students can explore one area of interest more deeply by taking more college classes in a specific subject. Students have taken college classes ranging from Sculpture to Human Anatomy, Business Fundamentals, Financial Accounting, Mexican American Cultural History, Physical Anthropology, Ethics, American Cinema, Sociology of Race, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity, C++ Programming, and Digital Media, to name a few. The GECA counselor collaborates with students and their

families to devise four-year plans that lead students to attain their Associates degrees (while students are simultaneously fulfilling their high school graduation requirements). Most students attain their Associates degrees in Liberal Arts, Multiple Subjects, Spanish, Computer Science, Natural Science, or Communications. Some students complete pre-nursing requirements, and upon graduating from GECA, enter Gavilan's Nursing program. Completed college courses transfer to most four-year universities, and students are able to bypass general education requirements, focusing primarily on their upper division Bachelor degree requirements. GECA students acquire skills navigating two sets of requirements within two separate (but related) systems: those of the high school (and school district), and those of the community college.

Students take advanced technology courses at Gavilan through the Computer Science department; some take basic technology courses such as typing and webpage authoring. They acquire research skills, taking advantage of Gavilan College's library resources. Gavilan College librarians partner with freshmen AcaPrep teachers to orient students to the resources available. The librarians also collaborate with GECA teachers, supporting students with research papers, Senior Project, and navigating the library's numerous databases. Further, Gavilan College counseling services and career resources are also available to GECA students including Gavilan's annual Career Fairs and separate College Fairs.

Because students select their Associates degree pathways while in high school, career exploration is a critical component included in the AcaPrep curriculum. Through AcaPrep, students research colleges majors and careers affiliated with those majors, based on their interests. Life skills such as self-advocacy and financial literacy through Everfi are also included in AcaPrep's curriculum. AcaPrep further focuses on character building, as the school district formally adopted Character Counts!; through monthly AcaPrep team-building activities, students focus on the six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.

Finally, the school connects students to opportunities such as student-led STEM and Robotics clubs, Gavilan College cybersecurity camps, and county-level engineering and poetry competitions. All of these activities have been adapted in a virtual environment through Zoom.

3. Academic Supports:

All GECA students are enrolled in rigorous coursework during their four years. Each course promotes college-readiness and is explicitly intended to prepare students for entrance into Gavilan College and beyond to a four-year university. All courses demonstrate key instructional practices such as activating strategies, Kagan cooperative learning, evaluating sources for bias, appropriate technology use, writing with emphasis on developing and supporting ideas. English Language Development (ELD) instruction is integrated with lessons as many of the strategies are ideal for literacy, language and cognitive demands of the curriculum, per California's adopted ELD Framework. Furthermore, most students are enrolled in a Seminar course, a study hall period with individualized academic support for high school and college courses, thereby helping students maintain the required 2.5 GPA to qualify for college courses at Gavilan College. Student enrollment in AcaPrep, which teaches time management and study skills, also ensures students have the tools necessary to be successful in their classes.

Teachers differentiate instruction in all core classes, using multiple grouping strategies, Kagan Cooperative Structures. Teachers use varying engagement strategies, including anticipation guides, journals, Google Forms, KWL charts, etc. They provide scaffolded work and readings at multiple levels, as appropriate, to support students in accessing the content. Teachers meet regularly as PLCs and in grade-level meetings, examining student work, identifying students in need of additional support, collaborating to ensure culturally relevant pedagogy, and evaluating appropriate strategies to implement for individual and group instruction.

When AP scores demonstrated that Hispanic students were not passing at the same levels as their

peers, GECA teachers intentionally infused more diverse readings in core subjects across grade levels, and focused interventions to include more structured scaffolds: chunking larger writing assignments into shorter responses, allowing students to focus on developing their line of reasoning; including sentence frames for collaborative discussions, planning more frequent checks for understanding throughout a given lesson, following a strict Understanding by Design approach to unit- and lesson-planning. Duely noted in data analysis, due to the small size of each testing group from year to year, 10 or more percentage points between test scores of all students and test scores of any subgroups could mean one to two students. As a result, ongoing supports are targeted based on individual student needs. Students with 504s, IEPs, and SSTs are generally supported with specific accommodations generated when meeting with staff, parents, and the individual students.

The Principal and Counselor monitor student academic progress six times per year, at each grading period. Students in danger of academic probation meet with staff to identify support students may need. Students also have access to teacher office hours, and weekly Peer Support Tutoring during Distance Learning. Gavilan College offers further support through their Science and Math, Writing and Language Labs where tutors are available to assist students. Students performing above grade level are often asked to serve as peer tutors, both for GECA's program as well as in the Gavilan labs. Finally, all GECA students craft their individual four-year plans to meet their individual needs; students exceeding grade-level expectations challenge themselves by enrolling in very challenging college coursework, while students needing remediation are able to fulfill their 40-unit college coursework requirement with Gavilan's general education classes, with added tutoring supports and some EdOptions credit recovery classes, as needed.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

GECA’s small school environment fosters opportunity for academic, social and emotional growth, and allows staff and students to be engaged with one another, motivate each other, and maintain a positive school culture. The organizational structure of the school capitalizes on its small size where (1) each core subject course per grade level is taught by one teacher, and (2) all students are enrolled in an AcaPrep class that advances the school’s mission while promoting a “family” environment.

With each teacher responsible for only his/her core subject per grade level, students build relationships with all teachers, (every student will take a class from all faculty during their time at GECA). These established relationships allow teachers to monitor students academically and social-emotionally throughout the students’ four years at GECA. Further, teachers understand their interdependence in advancing students’ academic success, as they build upon students’ foundational knowledge established by their own colleagues’ work from the previous years. Teachers can identify and intervene with struggling or disengaged students quickly due to their collaboration with one another in PLCs, GECA’s small grade levels (of up to 83 students per grade), and the caring relationships established between students and staff, especially through GECA’s AcaPrep course.

Teachers naturally act in a coaching and motivational capacity for their students in AcaPrep, as they guide students through AcaPrep’s four-year scope and sequence, which is organized around the school’s motto to “Go Somewhere. Be Someone. Seek Excellence.” Freshmen explore multiple college and career pathways, and learn about how GECA can help them complete that pathway. Sophomores explore their identity and life goals and Juniors focus on their leadership capacity. Seniors apply knowledge from previous years, focusing on applying for colleges, defining their career pathway, and exploring life beyond GECA. Further, GECA administration and student leadership organize different school-wide assemblies during AcaPrep to promote messages about mindfulness, mental health, kindness, community, diversity and respect.

During school closures, GECA took these practices online, leveraging its small-school environment and established relationships. During monthly PLCs and staff meetings, teachers continued identifying struggling or disengaged students, and office staff would follow-up (after teachers’ contact attempts). All AcaPrep classes were held online, though included more social-emotional support and collective mindfulness activities. School-wide assemblies and grade-level check-ins occurred during AcaPrep, in 300-person Zoom meetings, with PearDeck interactive assemblies and opportunities for Zoom breakout-room discussions. Collective experiences such as movie viewings, online gaming, and online club meetings, all made possible through the school’s Student Leadership, have also connected students and maintained engagement during remote learning.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

GECA’s strong communication, collaboration and partnership with its families, its host college Gavilan College, local businesses and community-based organizations (CBOs) has always contributed to the students’ and school’s overall success.

The school frequently communicates with families to provide information and solicit involvement, utilizing ParentSquare. The principal emails monthly newsletters to families (also translated into Spanish) with important information. Annually, the school hosts a Back to School Night in the fall, and a New Student Orientation in the spring. GECA’s active Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) hosts monthly meetings that include guest speakers and provide translation. Each year, the school seeks parent chaperones for field trips to local universities or museums. Further, the school holds GECA Advisory Board (GAB) meetings to attain stakeholder input regarding school planning, budgeting, and improvement. During school closures, all of these events have occurred in an online, virtual format via Zoom.

All GECA students can utilize Gavilan College campus resources, such as Gavilan Counselors, Gavilan

Student Mental Health Programs, Computer Labs, Library, Tutoring Center, Gavilan Gym, Food Pantry, etc. to support their own academic and personal well-being. Some of these resources (tutoring, counseling, and health fairs) have remained available for our students and their families online during school closures as the college has also transitioned to remote learning. Frequent communication and collaborative problem-solving between GECA and Gavilan administration has been especially critical during school closures, contributing to creative solutions for GECA students: the college checked out laptops (to replace GECA-issued Chromebooks) to support those students taking college-level digital media classes; paper-and-pencil contracts were moved to a digital format to ensure safety and efficacy; and, some GECA students benefited from Gavilan's "Excused Withdrawal" (EW) policy due to challenges with distance learning. The college has continued its food distribution with the Food Pantry, and GUSD has established its own food distribution locations - all of which is available for GECA families.

As a GUSD school, GECA is connected with numerous local organizations. Mental health resources are available for GECA students through School Linked Services, and students participate in an annual mock interview event through the Gilroy Chamber of Commerce. During COVID-19, GECA has especially utilized its district-based partnerships to engage parent participation and communication. Specifically, GECA utilized GUSD's involvement with the South County Youth Task Force (SCYTF), a multi-agency local government and law enforcement collaborative that is focused on helping the youth in the community to thrive. As a result, representatives from SCYTF participated in the school's Chromebook distribution to teach parents about Chromebooks, hotspots, and Google Classroom features. SCYTF has also helped connect GECA families in crisis with local CBOs with specific support.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

GECA strives to create a welcoming environment among students and among staff. The principal intentionally plans team-building exercises throughout monthly meetings, promoting a positive environment among teachers and modeling instructional practices for teachers to implement in their own classes. Activities built into the meetings, along with established meeting norms, create a mutual sense of trust and respect among all staff members, and ensure that the staff works cohesively as a team. GECA's staff knows that they will collectively grow and learn together as a team, through individual PD opportunities and through collective, formal opportunities. Overall, GECA's PD is focused on curriculum development, instructional practices, and Dr. Conley's Keys of College and Career Readiness.

During the initial transition to distance learning, teachers shared best instructional practices with one another for synchronous and asynchronous learning during weekly meetings. In preparation for the 2020-21 school year, GECA staff participated in Eduscape's Remote SchoolWorks Virtual Summit in May 2020, where GECA teachers learned how to adapt their in-person engagement strategies into a virtual setting. During the August 2020 staff development prior to the start of the year, the principal also led staff in PD, using Zoom, PearDeck, and other Google Apps For Education, modeling the platforms' uses and providing teachers opportunities to share their own expertise. All staff also participated in informal training through Kagan PD, adapting cooperative learning techniques in a virtual setting. Elements of these trainings were revisited in staff meetings and mentioned in weekly staff newsletters. GECA staff feels supported through the PD offered and are encouraged to seek and take advantage of PD individually to meet their own personal growth goals. Staff feel supported and appreciated because of the collaborative effort with administration to connect them with the best PD they need individually, even if the PD is unconventional.

Teachers further feel valued and supported knowing the administration weighs their input in the decision-making process. For example, staff met weekly immediately after school closures to discuss feasible schedules for students; at the end of the Spring 2020 semester and again in the Spring 2021 semester, they were included in the development of the various hybrid plan and remote learning schedules, and were free to generate pros/cons regarding all the plans. The principal facilitates how voices are heard, allows consideration for differing viewpoints, and creates an environment where all staff feel free to indicate their support, concerns, frustrations, and comments without fear of retribution. Teachers feel valued and supported as they are always given opportunities to contribute to school governance, and are involved with greater schoolwide decision-making.

4. School Leadership:

GECA's leadership philosophy and structure revolve around shared governance and decision-making, with frequent communication and opportunities for input. Change has been constant throughout school closures, and direct and frequent communication with all stakeholders has been imperative to ensure GECA's safety and operations. During COVID, the principal intentionally calendared numerous, regular stakeholder meetings to ensure the flow of information between all stakeholders and to ensure efficient communication and problem-solving.

During COVID, GECA's administrative staff worked diligently and collaboratively with district officials to ensure all GECA families had access to its communication platforms; actions included updating GECA's website, regularly calling families who had limited internet access, arranging home visits when necessary, and issuing district-provided hotspots and Chromebooks.

Through monthly PTSA meetings, parents are encouraged to voice ideas regarding GECA's events and plans. Meetings have been moved to Zoom during COVID, increasing family participation. All PTSA meetings are translated (with simultaneous interpretation), and parents discuss fundraisers, ways to allocate monies raised, and student activities such as graduation. The principal and PTSA Board work together to invite guest speakers (now virtually) to address topics that promote student success, including diploma requirements, mental health resources, and financial aid workshops. Parents may also attend GAB meetings involving decision-making. Students, parents, and staff participate equally in GAB, directly affecting decisions made at GECA. Meetings occur on a monthly basis, to review budgets, SPSA, and school events. GAB meeting minutes and agendas are posted online and included in GECA's monthly newsletter.

GECA students play an important role in school governance. Student Leadership supports a positive and encouraging school community by sponsoring various activities and events. Students have the opportunity to develop/lead various clubs, which continue during distance learning via Zoom. Additionally, senior leaders assembled a graduation committee to provide the principal input on graduation celebration options offered during COVID for the Class of 2021.

School-based decisions further rely on staff input. The Humanities and STEM department chairs (DC) collaborate weekly with the principal to plan PD, set agendas for meetings, and discuss instructional pedagogy. DCs share responsibilities to visit teachers' classrooms, meet with college officials, and support colleagues. All teachers have great input into schoolwide decisions. Office staff (including secretaries, counselor, and campus supervisor) meet weekly with the principal to help make decisions about the registration processes, graduation ceremony, and overall operations.

Collaboration with Gavilan especially ensures GECA's success: the principal meets monthly with Gavilan administration; GECA DCs meet with Gavilan College DCs and faculty for articulation between GECA and Gavilan courses; and the school counselor meets with Gavilan counselors to ensure the established processes provide students with a smooth registration experience. GECA and Gavilan's ongoing collaboration has creatively addressed student needs throughout COVID.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

GECA serves a very diverse population of students with regard to race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, and when also considering the college's population, age and life experience. GECA emphasizes strong academic accomplishment and character development. GECA's Honor Code, enforced by the school's student-run peer justice court (Honors Tribunal), specifically promotes honesty, personal integrity, accountability, and respect for diversity and equity. Should a student violate the Honor Code and/or Gavilan Student Conduct Code, that student may be referred to Tribunal. Tribunal seeks to address underlying causes of Honor Code violations during the hearing process and makes recommendations to the principal in student disciplinary matters. Oftentimes, these restorative circles bring awareness and solutions among classmates about inequities, cultural differences, or other issues on campus.

The Honor Code is examined in AcaPrep, and Tribunal members visit classes to inform students of their role in promoting a positive school climate. Tribunal serves as an advisory board to the principal, generating ways to celebrate student diversity and promote an atmosphere of respect. Tribunal has been instrumental in developing and implementing Restorative Community Circles when issues regarding insensitive social media posts arose; they helped continue Community Circles immediately after the Garlic Festival shootings, and, each semester, they organize lessons and assemblies, during Week of Kindness in the Fall and Spring semesters. Students are also encouraged to participate in student-led clubs that celebrate heritage and ethnicity, and participate in Gavilan clubs.

The school addresses current events and/or social movements that directly impact students and the learning environment through grade-level and/or school-wide assemblies with Tribunal and other community organizations. Often, Humanities and AcaPrep courses take on current issues by providing a safe environment for students to discuss sensitive topics. Instructors provide materials from multiple points of view and encourage students to participate in a respectful discourse where multiple perspectives can be heard.

Gavilan College President also regularly addresses current events in her weekly addresses to the community; and, the principal refers families to the college and/or school district community-based resources, as appropriate. At the classroom level, all GECA teachers intentionally select readings written by authors of various backgrounds and with varying viewpoints, focusing not only on the traditional canonical literature, but also on current events and present-day authors, thereby encouraging students to explore and demonstrate pride in their own cultural heritage. Finally, college classes in which GECA students are enrolled explore current events, providing students opportunities to learn from and respect varying viewpoints of their adult classmates.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Implementing AcaPrep Curriculum school-wide for all students has been instrumental in ensuring GECA students' success in-person and during distance learning. It is a time built into students' schedules to (1) provide targeted tutorial support, (2) introduce and practice researched-based strategies, including organizational and study skills, proven successful for college-bound students, and (3) check-in socially and emotionally with students to maintain a positive school culture.

Prior to March 2020's school closures, AcaPrep was offered daily as a first period class for all ninth through eleventh grade students. Seniors attended AcaPrep three times per week, but for an extended time block. When school closures began, the same daily schedule continued; however, teachers posted AcaPrep lessons online for asynchronous learning with some time built-in for live instruction. AcaPrep periods allowed teams of teachers to conduct live, whole-grade-level check-in meetings. While students were not required to login for live instruction during the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester, a majority of students attended these grade-level online AcaPrep meetings, and students generally turned to their AcaPrep teachers for information and support. AcaPrep allowed the school to maintain its "family" environment, keeping most students connected. The school contacted students who were not connecting, determining if their families needed Chromebooks and troubleshooting ways to provide access to the curriculum.

During the 2020-2021 school year, all classes, including AcaPrep, were held synchronously online, and attendance was mandatory. However, due to the altered bell schedule, AcaPrep classes met twice per week (not daily). Peer tutoring support previously offered in-person was eliminated from the course requirements due to logistical challenges, and AcaPrep emphasized other elements of its curriculum: time-management, mindfulness, community-building, and goal-setting. Filling the need for peer tutoring, a group of former AcaPrep Tutors mobilized to establish an after-school virtual Peer Support Group, creating a space for peer tutoring and social-emotional support. The Peer Support Group now meets weekly for one hour, providing support under the supervision of the principal and two teachers.

To implement AcaPrep effectively, staff meets monthly (and continues to do so during distance learning) for planning and progress-monitoring purposes. Monthly AcaPrep collaboration meetings allow staff to check in with the school's Student Government teacher, coordinate peer tutoring efforts, and review lessons to be implemented in the classrooms. Staff discuss supports for struggling students and strategize implementation of schoolwide initiatives. Monthly meetings provide excellent PD and community-building opportunities for staff as well.