

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Ms. Mardele S. Early  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Lake Forest Elementary Charter School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 11110 Lake Forest Boulevard  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City New Orleans                      State LA                      Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 70128-2705

County Orleans

Telephone (504) 826-7140                      Fax (504) 248-7020

Web site/URL https://www.lakeforestcharter.org/                      E-mail mearly@lakeforestcharter.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. Henderson Lewis Jr.                      E-mail hlewis@nolapublicschools.com  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name NOLA Public School District                      Tel. (504) 304-3520

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

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

Name of School Board  
President/Chairperson Mrs. Gina Dupart  
(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**

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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

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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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 0 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 1 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	41	34	75
1	32	45	77
2	40	36	76
3	31	41	72
4	42	32	74
5	38	32	70
6	27	40	67
7	34	39	73
8	35	33	68
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	320	332	652

\*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):
- 0.1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 13 % Asian
  - 85 % Black or African American
  - 0.1 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 0.7 % White
  - 1.1 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 1%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 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	9
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	9
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	660
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

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

Spanish, Vietnamese, Yoruba

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 72 %

Total number students who qualify: 467

8. Students receiving special education services: 16 %

104 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>5</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>6</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>2</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>30</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>2</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: 20

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.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	4
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	35
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	16
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	4
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

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 19:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	98%	98%	98%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2013

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

Lake Forest Elementary Charter School's mission is to provide a nurturing environment through a rigorous, accelerated academic program that will ultimately enhance each student's ability to become a global, productive citizen.

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.

Except for district-mandated school closures, students in kindergarten through the fourth-grade report to campus five days per week while students in grades fifth through eighth follow a hybrid schedule. Additionally, each quarter, a full-distance learning option is made available to families. It is important to note that students follow their regular daily schedules during the 2020-2021 school term, including direct instruction, lunch, brain breaks, and enrichment classes. Students also follow the schedules during periods of mandatory school closure.

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

Admission into Lake Forest Elementary Charter School (LFECS) is criteria-based. The admissions process is open to all students domiciled in Orleans Parish. A targeted grade-specific admissions matrix, inclusive of various components such as an applicant’s grade point average, attendance record, and parental engagement in required orientations, is used to determine eligibility. In the absence of the grade point average component, kindergarten applicants seeking admission submit a portfolio. Applicants receive points for submission, not content. Additionally, all applicants are administered normed-referenced assessments in mathematics and reading. The assessment component accounts for less than 50% of the total matrix requirements. The summative or overall matrix score is the determining factor for admission. Subsequently, utilizing a tiered placement system, qualifying applicants are accepted into LFECS based on seat availability.



## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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Lake Forest Elementary Charter School (LFECS), a 2013 National Blue Ribbon School, is authorized by New Orleans Public Schools and is independently governed by the Council for Quality Education, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. LFECS is known as the beacon of New Orleans East because it was the first K-8 school to open its doors in Hurricane Katrina's immediate aftermath (2005). The wrath of the hurricane demolished the original school site.

LFECS, a Type III charter school, is a city-wide access school; however, our families are typically residents of eastern New Orleans and the Gentilly area. LFECS's families are as diverse in family structure, economic status, and educational levels as is the city of New Orleans. We have the rich culture of our African American and Vietnamese communities. The New Orleans East community, once totally devastated by Hurricane Katrina, is highly resilient. Although the recovery of the community has been steady and slow, it continues to grow.

This growth led to the third and final relocation of LFECS, returning to our original namesake and roots at 11110 Lake Forest Blvd. Settled in our new home, we have grown significantly with a current student enrollment of 652. The school continues to thrive as the cornerstone of K-8 education in the city. Our families are a huge part of our journey. They provide energy and a cooperative spirit to help us maintain stability. Our Eagle students come to us with open hearts and minds. There is very little mobility in our student body. Students generally stay with us for the entire nine years of elementary learning.

Since receiving the National Blue Ribbon School award in 2013, our instructional program has not undergone drastic alterations. Instead, through hard work, forward-thinking, determination, relationship-building, attention given to learning differences, and an intense focus on teacher development, our program is incrementally evolving and expanding. Responding to changes in national and state learning standards, modifications to accountability requirements, and the evolution of technology, we have made necessary adjustments to meet the varied needs of our group of diverse learners. While doing so, we have maintained our traditional standard of excellence and high student achievement.

Academically, improving learning outcomes for individual students and subgroups of students through accelerated robust curricula, differentiation, arts integration, and other research-aligned practices falls within LFECS's wheelhouse. Our continued academic attainment evidences this in state-administered assessments and recognition given for high achievement and school growth. LFECS is recognized as the top K-8 school in Louisiana. More impressive is the caliber and quality of students that have matriculated through the school. Their accomplishments are linked directly to the stellar foundation that LFECS provided.

Key strategies that have challenged and supported our students' growth academically include Eagle Extended Day, Saturday mathematics and writing camps, research projects, and high school course offerings of Algebra I and English I to eighth-grade students. There is a growing initiative to prepare our students for careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). To help achieve this goal, students participate in our annual school-level science fair, the Greater New Orleans Science and Engineering Fair (GNOSEF), and the Louisiana State Science Fair. We have participated in these ventures for the last ten years. Each year, LFECS has had a dominating presence winning at both the local and state level. As recent as 2019, one of our Eagles earned 1st place at the national competition. Recognizing the growing demand and magnitude of STEM led us to install a new leadership role. The new curriculum facilitator supports the vertical alignment of STEM instruction.

We build our Eagles' confidence and courage so that they know their dreams are attainable. LFECS's Eagles are actively engaged in many extracurricular activities, clubs, and organizations. Our school offers student council, strings, band, cheerleading, athletics, visual arts, drama, chess, and debate, among many programs. Eighth-grade students transition to high schools with some of the most robust academic programs in the city.

Our traditions, such as Student of the Month, Eagles with Etiquette, and our Eagle Student Council, help support our students' emotional well-being. Witnessing our morning assembly, reading about our academic



accomplishments in the newspapers, or walking through the corridors of our campus, which are adorned with student masterpieces, provide a peek into the enthusiasm, creativity, and talent of our student body. Our students are authors, artists, athletes, musicians, mathematicians, scientists, dreamers, and so much more.

Throughout time, LFECS has continued to grow and excel consistently—leading the pack, meeting the mark, setting the pace, and soaring to new heights. Taken together, having an understanding of the relationship between the rudiments of learning, high expectations, differentiated support, and student outcomes have driven and guided the school as each day, we strive to live out our school creed, “Providing a Strong Academic Foundation for Life”.

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

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

Providing a contemporary education guided by commonsense decision-making and cloaked with old-fashioned values regarding the relevance of learning and the importance of viable, evidence-based curricula and “tried-and-true” teaching methods has positioned LFECS in being a well sought after institution of learning. The school’s core curriculum is aligned with Louisiana State Standards. In addition to various differentiated digital learning platforms, each adopted curriculum program has embedded online resources.

LFECS addresses English Language Arts (ELA) standards using a gumbo of resources, best practices, and methods. Novels at every grade level, literacy circles, student-centered activities, combined with writing conferences are our key priorities. We give additional attention to explicit teaching methods centered on the components of effective reading instruction.

Although taught as a separate subject, social studies (S.S.) resources and strategies align with ELA performance expectations. The S.S. curriculum primarily focuses on getting our students prepared to be fully engaged and productive global citizens. Students explore complex historical documents and sources to gain meaning behind them and to make supported claims that are logical and cohesive.

Our primary focus is on striking the appropriate balance between students’ procedural skills and conceptual understanding concerning mathematics. We do not believe in “one size fits all”; therefore, we use an eclectic approach to math instruction which affords our teachers autonomy and creativity.

Aligned to the 5E Model of Science, state standards, and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), the science curriculum incorporates engineering practices at each grade level. Eliminating unrealistic outcomes, students test their hypotheses by collecting and analyzing data, constructing inferences, and synthesizing findings. During instruction, the teacher’s role is to facilitate discovery and learning through problem-solving, critical thinking, student discussion, scientific design, and evaluation.

Any curriculum program is only as valuable or effective as its execution and the manner in which teachers adapt it to assess and meet students’ needs. At the beginning of each school year, teachers create pacing guides based on the state’s scope and sequence to ensure that they address all learning standards. K-2 standards are divided amongst four quarters, while teachers condense 3-8 standards into three quarters. This curriculum compacting approach has been adopted in the upper grades to ensure that all standards are taught with fidelity, assessed, and retaught before the state-mandated standardized assessments.

All lesson plans include learning goals for whole and small group instruction to address students’ varied learning styles and academic levels. Teachers use small group instruction to target specific skills that either support or enhance learning. After providing direct instruction and practice, teachers administer formative and summative assessments using paper-based documents and digital platforms. At the end of the quarter, all standards taught are formally assessed on a benchmark exam. The disaggregation of the exam data determines our next steps of action.

Every school year has its obstacles. However, this school year’s expected circumstances seeded by the compounding COVID-related challenges provided LFECS with the opportunity for accelerated growth in a different direction—the use of technology as the primary instrument for learning. In March of 2020, the governor closed all schools. LFECS immediately transitioned to a distance learning format for the remainder of the school term. Utilizing the curriculum programs that were already in use which supported technology-based learning, teachers developed very detailed asynchronous lessons, gave feedback and grades for assignments, and constantly communicated with families. Additionally, support services for students with exceptionalities, including gifted and talented, continued to be provided. During the summer of 2020, teachers and staff members participated in intensive training on student engagement and virtual instructional delivery.

started the 2020-2021 school term in the distance learning format. LFECS provided a school-issued laptop for each student. Internet access was made available for families with connectivity challenges. Additionally, as an extra layer of support and security, software was purchased that assists with monitoring devices in real-time and interacting with students.

In mid-September, LFECS implemented a staggered approach to welcoming students back to the campus. Each quarter, parents can elect to have students remain in the distance learning setting. For on-campus learning, students in kindergarten through fourth attend school five days each week. Middle school grade levels follow a hybrid model. Students needing additional support are permitted to report to campus multiple days outside of their grade-specific schedule.

To address safety concerns and matters related to equity, opportunity, and access to quality instruction, on-campus learning mirrors at-home distance learning. With an integrated approach to using technology as an instructional tool, students follow their regular school schedule while receiving real-time direct instruction from teachers in all subjects, including enrichment classes. This format is adhered to whether students report to the building or participate in at-home virtual learning; thus, providing much-needed consistency with respect to educational routines. When warranted, following this structure has allowed for seamless transitions during periods of school closure. Moreover, our daily attendance rate has remained constant at or above 98%. Our proactive response to safety guidance and detailed academic planning coupled with a wealth of parental support contributes to this high level of student engagement.

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

LFECS promotes and stimulates leadership in our middle schoolers through a litany of programs that readies them for college and primes them for future leadership roles. For example, solidifying our Algebra I and English I course offerings was an essential course of action necessary to enrich our highest-performing learners' learning. We want our students to be competitive global thinkers and to have every opportunity to seek out and succeed at the most prestigious colleges and universities in the country and beyond.

The student council allows our Eagles to spread their wings and fly. The students take charge of their own initiatives promoting leadership and the understanding of teamwork. They also gain exposure in the operations of democracy as they lead bids for elected offices. The council leads our school in various monthly awareness campaigns (e.g., breast cancer, Black History, autism, sickle cell, and March of Dimes). Additionally, the members give different facts regarding these causes during morning assembly.

All seventh and eighth-grade students are required to develop research projects to participate in the annual school science competition. Students typically investigate environmental and engineering issues that plague our city. These topics include levee/flood protection, drain design, housing construction, composting, and energy efficiency. Our students' research projects are consistently successful, winning at the local, state, and national levels.

Eagles with Etiquette is a program that teaches our students grace, patience, the importance of listening, empathy, and respect in interactions with others. Students initiate and design activities that enhance their interpersonal and social competence. They learn skills that help them become poised in any situation, including social graces, self-confidence, and assertiveness. Members also review table etiquette, rules for taking pride, respecting property, and anti-bullying. High self-esteem, self-satisfaction, and confidence are benefits for all club members.

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

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

Exposure to varied cultural and social experiences enhances learning in core content areas. It also provides an avenue for students to have outlets where natural gifts and talents can be nurtured and cultivated.

Therefore, we offer several programs to support and encourage students' overall development and provide opportunities for students to explore and expand their interests. LFECS's athletic programs, annual drama productions, strings concerts, band performances, visual art exhibits, and competitive debating are just a sample of enrichment opportunities that nourish our students physically, socially, and culturally. All students are exposed to the basics of each and can join extracurricular programs to further their curiosity and development.

All students participate in health and physical education. Aligned with the science curriculum, students have the opportunity to learn about their physical bodies and nutrition to acquire skills that will assist them in committing to living a healthy lifestyle. The athletic program offers flag football, track, basketball, volleyball, golf, and tennis. Our teams compete locally and have been very successful, often placing number one in their divisions. The cheerleading squad is present at these events supporting and leading our teams to victory. The school pride and athleticism they exhibit in campus activities and at events demonstrate their commitment to their craft.

Annual drama productions have included "The Wiz," "The Chocolate Factory," "Hairspray," and "Persephone," just to name a few. Our productions involve student artistry and talent at all levels: set design, costumes, staging, lighting, sound, music, and performance. The school holds visual art exhibits, band performances, and strings concerts annually. Students also participate in local and state performances, festivals, and competitions earning many awards and accolades. Each year, spectators from near and far are mesmerized by our jazz band at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. This school year, school-based concerts showcasing students playing various instruments continued virtually. The virtual showcases are a testament to the level of dedication, tenacity, and excellence of our families, students, and teachers. All students take Spanish as a foreign language. As a culminating activity, kindergartners highlight their language skills during their promotional program. Technology class is another course we offer. All students take technology weekly to increase their proficiency in computer usage in general.

The school social worker facilitates character-building initiatives. In response to social-emotional concerns connected with the pandemic, all grade levels participate in an evidence-based program to address and support students' emotional development. The social worker also conducts routine wellness check-ins to keep a pulse on the increased isolation and anxiety our students are currently experiencing, especially our teens.

### **3. Academic Supports:**

All students, regardless of aptitude and capacity, need some level of support to be successful in school and life. Using multiple forms of data to determine appropriate levels and types of support, LFECS employs a multidisciplinary approach to identifying, gauging, and addressing learning differences. Our Student Assistance Team (SAT), which consists of support personnel and school leaders, coordinates all aspects of assistance, support, and services for students through a streamlined process. The SAT serves as a conduit for creating solutions to various issues and concerns. In consultation with the student support services department, SAT members, teachers, and parents, carefully analyze the data presented to develop a prescriptive plan of action for individual students. The team may proffer an umbrella of services, decisions, and recommendations as solutions or next steps.

At the beginning of the school year, we initiate support processes for students. During the first two weeks of school, students take a learning styles inventory. Additionally, a set of universal screeners is administered to all students to identify students' grade-level and readiness skills. LFECS utilizes the Response to Intervention Model (RTI) to improve student outcomes. Learning deficits and differences are initially addressed in the classroom through Tier I instruction. Based on the results of the universal screenings and teacher or SAT recommendations, students who perform significantly below grade-level standards are placed in either Tier II or Tier III to receive additional support using a researched-based intervention program. Interventionists consistently monitor

students' progress and make adjustments accordingly.

Following the inclusion model, students eligible for special education services, including students with Individual Education Plans (IEP) for giftedness and talent, receive more than 80% of their instructional support in the general education class with their peers. The special education teacher provides IEP services by pushing into classrooms and pulling students for direct individualized resource support. The same framework is used to assist English Language Learners (ELL) with improving language acquisition and academic skills.

Several other practices and initiatives are implemented to support students as well as give them an academic advantage. Our Eagle Extended Day program, differing from after-school tutoring, was initially designed to address skill support for two pivotal points in learning, grades fourth and eighth. This highly targeted program allows us to shore up the foundational skills, close potential gaps, and monitor skill practice within a smaller setting. Eagle Extended Day is held twice a week after school. Teachers monitor the standard-specific mastery and progress of students. This program's success led to including other grade levels to strengthen and maintain their academic skill sets. Additional programs include our Saturday Writing and Math Problem Solving Camps, which focus on elevating various skills: unraveling informational text, writing argumentative essays, citing text evidence, and solving mathematical multi-step problems.

During school closures connected to the pandemic and for optional at-home distance learning, support services and additional tiered assistance are consistently provided to students through virtual platforms and/or in person. Ultimately, our goal is to be more responsive in meeting the needs of all students. Students with diverse learning needs and learning challenges succeed in our rigorous instructional program because of the multiple layers of specialized support provided for them at LFECS.

## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

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### **1. Engaging Students:**

Embodying a holistic child-centered perspective towards the teaching and learning process, LFECS believes that supporting students in every child development area will ensure that our students are college and career-ready. When healthy, safe, supported, engaged, and challenged, schools can optimize students' abilities and gifts for their educational benefit. Establishing a positive environment each day begins with a healthy breakfast and morning assembly. Morning assembly is when our students recite daily affirmations, meditate, and set goals for the daily tasks ahead. Students lead morning assembly accompanied by our CEO and principal, inspiring our students and staff with motivating songs, messages, and chants.

Our Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) program improves school safety and peer interactions and promotes positive behavior. PBIS uses positive reinforcement to limit undesirable behaviors. To help manage and track PBIS, the school utilizes a digital tool that all staff members can use to give students and parents immediate feedback regarding behavior choices. At the end of each quarter, students are rewarded with a PBIS celebration.

The school social worker is an integral part of developing our students' social and emotional growth. In addition to providing counseling support, monitoring truancy, and attending to crises, she facilitates seminars on various topics such as character development, bullying intervention, conflict resolution, and stress management. New students receive a one-on-one meeting to discuss how they are acclimating to the new school environment and the support services that are available to them. In October, the social worker coordinates the school-wide bully prevention/Red Ribbon Week campaign. Before state testing, the social worker holds a test relaxation and anxiety seminar.

For the past five years, our seventh-grade Eagles have participated in the Duke University Talent Identification Program (TIP), which provides enrichment services for academically gifted and talented students. Candidates are invited to take college entrance exams as seventh-graders. They also gain access to valuable and unique resources for high-potential learners.

Eighth-grade students traditionally attend the local high school fair with other students from across the metropolitan New Orleans area. In the fall of 2020, we hosted our own virtual fair to connect and acquaint our 8th-grade students and parents with solid high school options. Each invited school presented an overview of their academic program and critical components of their school culture.

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

It is well-documented that parental support and involvement are root causes and determining predictors of student achievement and progress. According to experts, family engagement is parents and teachers sharing responsibility with helping children meet their educational goals. This happens when the school engages parents in various ways where they can share their suggestions, ideas, questions, and concerns (e.g., conferences, events, workshops, and volunteer service). Moreover, our families and community members look forward to attending our spectacular annual family night and Grandparents Day.

LFECS is intentional in its approach to the importance of connecting with its family units. One way we accomplish this is through our dynamic parent teacher organization (PTO). There is devotion to and enthusiasm about the working connection between home and school. As key stakeholders, parents' commitment to supporting our school is not only highly encouraged, it is required. Keeping parents involved ensures that engagement remains high, allowing parents to retain a voice in their children's academic success.

Traditionally, PTO holds quarterly meetings on campus. However, we use digital forms of collaboration and communication such as virtual meetings and emails to engage our families because of the pandemic. In the "Eagle Weekly" and monthly "Eagle Headlines", parents are given reminders, upcoming events, important

dates, photos highlighting students' accomplishments, information for academic support, and community resources. LFECS also has an automated phone system in place for sending out communications to families immediately. Our parent coordinator is also available to parents for any additional questions and concerns.

With the onset of the pandemic, LFECS pivoted to virtual learning. To ensure that parents remain actively engaged, we immediately put several support mechanisms into place. Most notably, LFECS facilitated school-based parent technology workshops, orientations, and town hall meetings to establish or increase understanding and use of Google Suites and other digital platforms. School leaders also provided information concerning the school's response to the pandemic and the safeguards being implemented.

LFECS understands the importance of establishing a welcoming environment and building trust between school, family, and community. During our annual Open House, a community outreach exhibition is held where families visit different booths to learn about various local businesses, industries, services, and programs available within our community. We have long-standing partnerships with community organizations that have a vested interest in seeing all LFECS students succeed. Some of the participating organizations include Liberty Bank, Global Parking System, Gulf Coast Bank, New Orleans East Hospital, Thomas Consulting Group, St. Bernard Drugs, Tulane University, Oschner Hospital, STEM NOLA, NASA, and New Schools for New Orleans.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

For students to progress academically, student learning and the professional growth of leaders and teachers can not be viewed as mutually exclusive. At LFECS, it is universally accepted that student achievement is predicated on the adults' learning and growth and the cultivation of a supportive and professional work environment.

Concerning the needs of children, the profession of education is all-encompassing. We believe that each employee has been called to serve and educate our Eagles regardless of their professional title. Therefore, all staff members are responsible for participating in professional learning opportunities, but more urgently, using the strategies and skills garnered as a means to assist and support students.

Each year, but particularly during this school year of adapting to various modes of learning due to COVID-19, targeted and focused professional development (PD) plans are designed based on multiple data sources. The triangulated data is used to pinpoint areas of strength as well as opportunities for enhancement and improvement. Additionally, at various touchpoints throughout the school term, the professional learning plans' utility is assessed.

Job-embedded PD is utilized as a vehicle for developing and improving instructional practices. In addition to coaching and feedback, weekly planning meetings and our weekly dedicated after-school PD day are conducted by the curriculum team. Within our master school calendar, several days are earmarked as professional learning days allowing for cross-curricular and multi-grade collaboration. Moreover, when seeking further development externally, funds are made readily available to assist teachers in pursuing these endeavors.

Teachers traditionally attend school-based summer workshops geared towards acquiring new knowledge, techniques, and strategies and the maintenance and refinement of practices and programs that are already in place. During the summer of 2020, through purposeful planning, LFECS prioritized improving teachers' digital dexterity along with their capacity to plan technology-rich lessons and engage students at high levels. Partnering with a local educational tech consultant, teachers participated in several days of PD. Additionally, follow-up sessions are conducted throughout the year to support teachers in sharpening their skill sets while helping students feel comfortable and successful in the virtual learning setting.

By employing varying streams of support, LFECS is striving daily to demonstrate that all team members are valued and treated as professionals. Opportunity, necessary resources, in tandem with our staff's willingness to grow professionally, ensure that our students' desired outcomes and goals are consistently realized.

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

Guided by a clear and focused mission, LFECS organizes its leadership structure in a manner that establishes effectual processes and practices relevant to regulatory oversight, logistics, and most profoundly, academic excellence and scholastic achievement. The founding chief executive officer (CEO) leads the school and reports directly to the governing board. Through a “sleeves up, hands-on” approach to leadership, she oversees all aspects of school operations, academics, and management. The executive leadership team consists of the principal, the executive director of curriculum and instruction (C&I), the director of C&I, and key leaders for operational departments. Additionally, a uniquely skillful group of curriculum facilitators and student services coordinators lead and manage systems for direct instructional support and assistance for teachers, students, and families.

There are specific professional roles and duties; however, the rejection of silo-centered work practices is commonplace. Each internal department works collaboratively across the organization in executing all policies and programs for the direct benefit of our students. What’s more, the CEO and principal bridge all teams through frequent opportunities for coordination and communication.

In the spring of 2020, as concerns of COVID-19 crescendoed throughout the nation, and respectively, the world, having high expectations ingrained into how we traditionally function as a school community equipped us with the wherewithal and energy that was essential in keeping learning a priority for our students. Moreover, it is not lost upon us as leaders that the pandemic will have prolonged effects on our black and brown community of learners. Armed with this understanding, we developed a detailed strategic plan that addressed every aspect of schooling within the context of the global emergency. The nexus of the plan centers on safety protocols, academics, teacher development, technology integration, operations, and communication. This process has compelled us to become better problem solvers, be more persistent, and gain a deeper resolve to persevere during this extraordinary moment in time.

The core business of LFECS, and by extension, its leadership, is to provide an exceptional education that our students can leverage as a way forward in life. Leadership is not isolated to the uppermost tiers of our organizational structure. Effective leadership—we believe—builds capacity in teacher-leaders, develops and promotes students’ leadership skills, and empowers parents in taking a lead role in their children’s education. On a grander scale, our collective obligation is to ensure that our Eagles are prepared to soar to their next level of excellence when leaving the Eagles’ Nest.

#### **5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

LFECS looks upon differences, whether educational, racial, cultural, or class-based, as enhancements instead of hindrances and challenges. Universally, inequity within education continues to be a persisting issue. Going beyond acknowledging that this problem exists, we aim to limit disparities and gaps by focusing on excellence in all aspects of our instructional program. LFECS achieves this by employing and implementing a spectrum of culturally affirming practices and initiatives.

Representation matters. With this insight, LFECS makes it a priority to recruit and retain teachers and leaders who are highly skilled and reflect our students and our community’s diversity. Moreover, we acknowledge the need to supplement curriculum programs to spotlight our students’ educational and cultural differences.

Inclusiveness, acceptance, tolerance, and respect for oneself, others, and the learning process are entrenched into the “LFECS way”. Operating within our PBIS program, the Student of the Month initiative highlights students who embody the LFECS Eagle’s traits: perseverance, determination, pride, courage, honor, and grace. This incentive program reinforces our behavior expectations while spotlighting excellence in character.



We consistently message to our Eagles that excellence, aspirations, and bold moves are a part of their unique culture and heritage and thereby are strongly linked to who we are as a school. In particular, morning assembly, which sets the tone for learning each day, is filled with positive affirmations, inspiring melodies, student accolades, and sharing ideas, personal reflections, and highlights of cultural celebrations. During this time, our students and teachers are celebrated, energized, and empowered to conquer the hurdles of the day.

We strive to take advantage of every opportunity to connect cultural awareness to meaningful academic learning experiences. Through writing assignments, class discussions, projects, and extracurricular activities, students have various opportunities to express their viewpoints concerning the world around them. For example, LFECS's Outspoken Debate Team, supported by Tulane University Law School, meets weekly to research and formulate debate strategies. The topics center on local and national current events (e.g., politics, social justice, environmental issues, and international relationships). College Day, a school-wide endeavor, includes a month of activities in which K-8 students conduct research and presentations on the college or university of their choice. We set the expectation that higher learning is an attainable goal for all of our students.

Our school community is rich in diversity; therefore, we must educate our children with equity, inclusion, and diversity in mind. At the heart of everything that we do, all efforts are intended to produce learners that think globally, crave knowledge, and strive to do good. In partnership with families, LFECS is grounding our Eagles in becoming productive thinkers and doers within their communities and the world.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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Decades of educational scholarship recognize a panoply of factors that undergird the efficacy of schools at various organizational levels (e.g., positive school culture, effective teachers, strong leadership, robust curricula, and supportive family partnerships). As with any school of excellence, several noted strategies run parallel to distinguishing characteristics of LFECS.

In highlighting one specific impactful practice, having high expectations is the bedrock of our school community. The notion that student achievement is consequentially influenced by what educators and parents expect of students is a widely-held belief and practice at LFECS. High expectations permeate throughout our mission, espoused beliefs, policies, and daily actions.

Expectations for academic achievement, behavior, and work ethic are established and consistently communicated to all students. Students are held to high standards regarding their personal contributions to the learning process. Furthermore, the mandate for excellence in creating conditions where our students can succeed extends to the governing board, school leaders, teachers, parents, and the community at large. Accompanying our high expectations for all stakeholders are support systems, structure, accountability, and chiefly, an unyielding determination and commitment by all.

When assessing the impact and reach of one's leadership or organizational capacity, leaders are urged to "Start with WHY": Why do we, as an institution of learning, exist? What are our long-term aims? What belief systems ground our work? When faced with challenges, how do we stay the course and inspire others to do the same? The 2020-2021 school term has been a year deeply rooted in reflecting on and revisiting this line of inquiry.

In the face of pandemic-plagued adversities, our leaders, teachers, staff members, and families are collectively doing yeoman's work in keeping academic progress and health-conscious safety protocols at the forefront of all thoughts, decisions, and actions. During this unprecedented global crisis, high expectations are paired in equal measure with empathy, circumstantial awareness, and various systems of support. In turn, our Eagles are not only surviving this global calamity, but they are continuing to thrive and soar just as we expect and have prepared them to do.

In closing, successful schools are not successful by accident or by happenstance. By comparison, the opposite is true. The lists of research-informed practices and characteristics of excellent schools are exhaustive. However, intricately interwoven throughout each are the accompanying elements of being purposeful and deliberate. Above and beyond, we are intentional in having high expectations. Consequently, our students benefit in positive ways that influence their future trajectory.